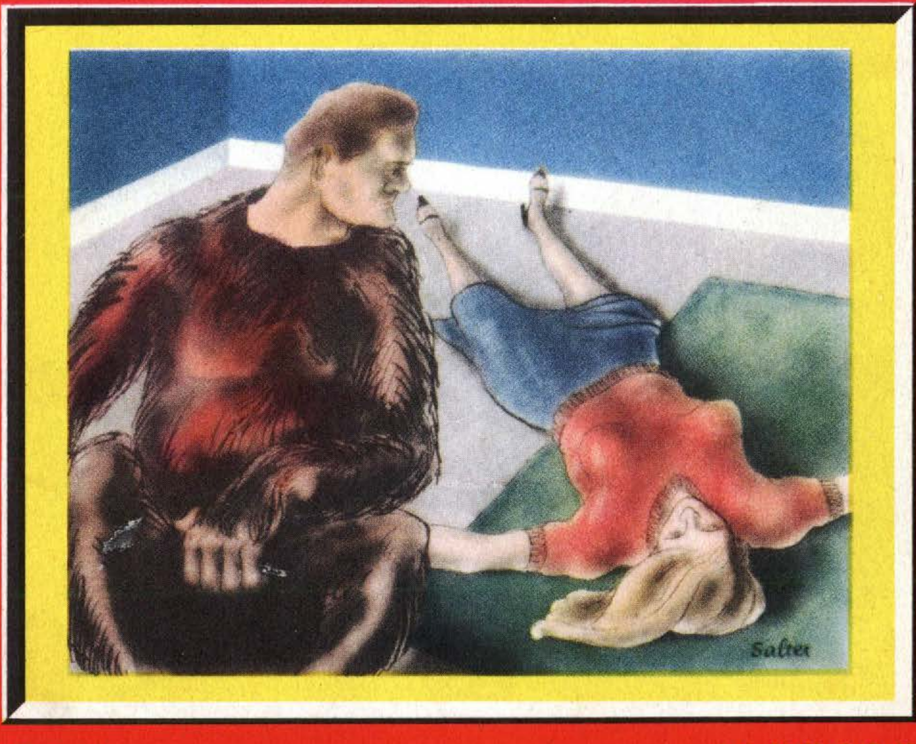
ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE



20

25 Cents

JANUARY

Death on Pine Street *Dashiell Hammett*
A Matter of Form *Margery Allingham*
Rumor, Inc. *Anthony Boucher*
The Chobham Affair *Edgar Wallace*
The Ace of Spades *"Pat Hand"*
Case of the Drug Peddler *Agatha Christie*
A Victim of Amnesia *Arthur Somers Roche*
Just An Old-Fashioned Murder *Ben Wilson*
Testimony of Dr. Farnsworth *Francis Leo Golden*
The Finger Man *J. and H. Prince*

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

P

CHILLS... THRILLS... KILLS...!

FREE This Big 400-Page Book of MYSTERY STORIES Selected by Ellery Queen

Rascals, Murders, Spies—All In This One Magnificent Detective Volume!

YES, YOURS FREE—a glorious feast of reading for detective story fans. Twenty-three of the cleverest stories ever written—SELECTED FOR YOU BY ELLERY QUEEN, from the very best of ALL the stories ever picked for *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. And you can imagine what *this* means when you realize that the Ellery Queen library of detective stories, from which each was chosen, is *the largest and finest collection in the world!*

No wonder the stories in this great book are the cream of the cream. Masterpieces by Dashiell Hammett, Craig Rice, Agatha Christie—and twenty others, each a master of the gentle art of making your brain burn with curiosity and your blood run cold with fear!

This book is brand new, just published. But we want to give you a copy

(continued on next page)

Best Stories from Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
Best Stories from Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
ECTIVE
K CLUB
THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

FIRST CLASS
Permit No. 7
(Sec. 510 P. L. & R.)
New York, N. Y.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD
No Postage Stamp Necessary if Mailed in the United States

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
ONE PARK AVENUE
NEW YORK 16, N. Y.

MAIL THIS CARD NOW

•

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

VOL. 6 NO. 20 *JANUARY 1945*

DETECTIVE STORIES

The Continental Op in
Death on Pine Steet *Dashiell Hammett* 13

Hercule Poirot in
The Case of the Drug Peddler *Agatha Christie* 33

Nick Noble in
Rumor, Inc. *Anthony Boucher* 46

Sheriff Jeremy Dodd in
Just an Old-Fashioned Murder *Ben Wilson* 69

Inspector Magruder in
The Finger Man *Jerome & Harold Prince* 77

Dr. Mark A. Farnsworth in
The Testimony of Dr. Farnsworth *Francis Leo Golden* 98

Albert Campion in
A Matter of Form *Margery Allingham* 111

CROOK STORY

Careful Jones in
The Ace of Spades *"Pat Hand"* 92

CRIME STORIES

The Chobham Affair *Edgar Wallace* 3

A Victim of Amnesia *Arthur Somers Roche* 57

PUBLISHER: *Lawrence E. Spivak* **EDITOR:** *Ellery Queen*

Published every other month by The American Mercury, Inc. at 25¢ a copy. Annual subscription $1.50 in U. S. and possessions and in the countries of the Pan-American Union; $1.75 in Canada; $2.00 in foreign countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. *Copyright 1944, by The American Mercury, Inc.* *Entered as second class matter August 28, 1941 at the post office at Concord, N. H., under the act of March 3, 1879. Manufactured in the United States of America.*

Joseph W. Ferman, *Business Manager*
Mildred Falk, *Managing Editor* ▪ Charlotte R. Spivak, *Associate Editor*

S.O.S. from the Editor

Dear Reader: If you have any of the following books, will you please write to Ellery Queen, 91 Old Mill Road, Great Neck, New York.

Grant Allen's Strange Stories
Grant Allen's Twelve Tales
Anonyma's Experiences of a Lady Detective
Anonymous's Strange Stories of a Detective
Anonymous's Experiences of an American Detective
Ashdown's Adventures of Romney Pringle
Atkey's Smiler Bunn — Manhunter
Atkey's Smiler Bunn, Byewayman
Arnold Bennett's Loot of Cities
Algernon Blackwood's John Silence
Campbell's Exploits of a Private Detective
Campbell's On the Trail of Big Finger
Campbell's Felix Boyd's Revelations
Campbell's Felix Boyd's Final Problems
Christie's The Listerdale Mystery
Irvin S. Cobb's Escape of Mr. Trimm
G. D. H. & M. I. Coles' A Lesson in Crime
Corbett's Adventures of a Lady Detective
Curtis's The Irish Police Officer
Delannoy's The Missing Cyclist
Denison's Tales of the Strong Room
Donovan's The Man-Hunter
Donovan's Caught at Last!
Doyle's One Crowded Hour
Fairlie's That Man Returns
Fletcher's Death That Lurks Unseen
Fletcher's Fear of the Night
Fletcher's The Ravenswood Mystery
Fletcher's The Marrendon Mystery
Fletcher's The Man in the Fur Coat
Fletcher's The Carrismore Ruby
Forrester's Revelations of a Private Detective
Forrester's Secret Service
Forrester's The Female Detective
Frankau's Wine, Women and Waiters
Frankish's Dr. Cunliffe, Investigator
Gribble's Case-Book of Anthony Slade
Hamilton's Four Tragedies of Memworth
Hill's Clues from a Detective's Camera
Hill's Cabinet Secrets
Hering's The Burglars' Club
Hillyard's Recollections of a Physician
Horler's Beauty and the Policeman
Horler's The Worst Man in the World
Horler's The Screaming Skull
Horler's Dying to Live
Jepson's Garden at 19
Jepson's Tragedies of Mr. Pip
Jepson's Barradine Detects
Leblanc's The Seven of Hearts
Leblanc's The Fair-Haired Lady
Leblanc's Jim Barnett Intervenes
LeQueux's The Death Doctor
Lermina's Three Exploits of M. Parent
Sinclair Lewis's Selected Short Stories
Lloyd's A Lawyer's Secrets
McGovan's Brought to Bay
McGovan's Solved Mysteries
Martel's Diary of an Ex-Detective
Martyn's Christopher Bond, Adventurer
Van Wyck Mason's Seven Seas Murders
Murray's Investigations of John Pym
Oppenheim's The Amazing Partnership
Oppenheim's Chronicles of Melhampton
Oppenheim's The Human Chase
Oppenheim's Inspector Dickins Retires
Prescott's The Bauer Murder
Quiller-Couch's I Saw Three Ships
Rees's Investigations of Colwin Grey
Roberts's A.B.C. Investigates
Rohmer's Egyptian Nights
Damon Runyon's Blue Plate Special
Damon Runyon's Money From Home
Damon Runyon's Take It Easy
Vachell's Experiences of a Bond St. Jeweler
W. W.'s The Detective Album
Wallace's Law of the Four Just Men
Wallace's The Cat Burglar
Wallace's Circumstantial Evidence
Wallace's The Little Green Man
Wallace's The Last Adventure
Marriott Watson's The High Toby
"Waters's" Skeleton in Every House
"Waters's" Undiscovered Crimes
"Waters's" Mrs. Waldegrave's Will
Wheatley's Gunmen, Gallants and Ghosts
Whitechurch's Thrilling Stories of the Railway
Whitechurch's Adventures of Capt. Ivan Koravitch
Black Mask *Magazine — early issues, especially* 1923

The following stories are reprinted with permission of the owners for which acknowledgment is here gratefully made: DEATH ON PINE STREET *by Dashiell Hammett, which originally appeared under the title of* WOMEN, POLITICS AND MURDER *in Black Mask, copyright, 1924, by Pro-Distributors Publishing Company, reprinted by permission of Dashiell Hammett;* A MATTER OF FORM *by Margery Allingham, from The Outspan, copyright, 1941, by Margery Allingham;* THE CHOBHAM AFFAIR *by Edgar Wallace, which originally appeared under the title of* A CHRISTMAS PRESENT FOR HIS WIFE *in Physical Culture Magazine, copyright, 1930, by Physical Culture Publishing Corporation;* A VICTIM OF AMNESIA *by Arthur Somers Roche, from The Elks Magazine, copyright, 1923, The Elks Magazine.*

HORTICULTURAL NOTE: *There is a curious potted plant that stands on the ledge of the south window in your Editor's study. It blossoms only once a year — a few months before Christmas. And it bears a most unusual flower. For this plant, like something rich and strange out of* ALICE IN WONDERLAND, *grows Christmas stories. The proverbial identification tag, in your Editor's homegrown Latin, reads:* litterae Noelus detectivus.[1]

Ever since EQMM was "flung like a bombshell into the field of detective fiction" (to borrow a quotation from Dorothy L. Sayers about something else entirely), our unique and fabulous plant has not failed us. In 1942 it gave flower to Anthony Boucher's "Mystery for Christmas." In 1943 it bloomed with Steve Fisher's "If Christmas Comes." Now for Christmas 1944 we find, peeping from behind the green-leather leaves that resemble those of the rhododendron — we find "The Chobham Affair" by Edgar Wallace. It is an old tale as Xmas detective stories go — fourteen years old this Yuletide; but isn't the best Christmas story ever told much, much older than that — nearly twenty centuries old, in fact?

THE CHOBHAM AFFAIR

by EDGAR WALLACE

THERE was a man who had a way with women, especially women who had not graduated in the more worldly school of experience. His name was Alphonse Riebiera, and he described himself as a Spaniard, though his passport was issued by a South American republic. Sometimes he presented visiting cards which were inscribed: —

LE MARQUIS DE RIEBIERA

but that was only on very special occasions.

He was young, with an olive complexion, faultless features, and showed his two rows of dazzling white teeth when he smiled. He found it convenient to change his appearance. For example: when he was a hired dancer attached to the personnel of an Egyptian hotel he wore little side-whiskers, which oddly enough exaggerated his youthfulness; in the casino at Enghien, where by some means he secured the position of croupier, he was decorated with a little black moustache. Staid, sober, and unimaginative spectators of his many adventures were irritably amazed that women said anything to him, but then it is notoriously difficult for any man, even an unimaginative man, to discover attractive qualities in successful lovers.

And yet the most unlikely women came under his spell and had to regret it. There arrived a time when he became a patron of the gambling establishments where he had been the most humble and the least trusted of servants, when he lived royally in hotels where he once was hired at so many piastres per dance. Diamonds came to his spotless shirt front, pretty manicurists tended his nails and received fees larger than his one-time dancing partners had slipped shyly into his hand.

---

[1] An impossible phrase even in homegrown Latin. When your Editor communicated it to our favorite linguist, Mr. Anthony Boucher, we could almost hear his gasp of horror all the way from California. Mr. Boucher finally worked out an authentic rendering, to wit: *fabulae inquisitorum in diem Christi natalem* — English literal translation: tales of investigators for Christ's birthday.

There are certain gross men who play interminable dominoes in the cheaper *cafés* that abound on the unfashionable side of the Seine who are amazing news centres. They know how the oddest people live, and they were very plain spoken when they discussed Alphonse. They could tell you, though Heaven knows how the information came to them, of fat registered letters that came to him in his flat in the Boulevard Haussmann. Registered letters stuffed with money and despairing letters that said in effect (and in various languages): "I can send you no more — this is the last." But they did send more.

Alphonse had developed a well-organized business. He would leave for London, or Rome, or Amsterdam, or Vienna, or even Athens, arriving at his destination by sleeping-car, drive to the best hotel, hire a luxurious suite — and telephone. Usually the unhappy lady met him by appointment, tearful, hysterically furious, bitter, insulting, but always remunerative.

For when Alphonse read extracts from the letters they had sent to him in the day of the Great Glamour and told them what their husbands' income was almost to a pound, lira, franc, or guilder, they reconsidered their decision to tell their husbands everything, and Alphonse went back to Paris with his allowance.

This was his method with the bigger game; sometimes he announced his coming visit with a letter discreetly worded, which made personal application unnecessary. He was not very much afraid of husbands or brothers; the philosophy which had germinated from his experience made him contemptuous of human nature. He believed that most people were cowards and lived in fear of their lives, and greater fear of their reputations. He carried two silver-plated revolvers, one in each hip-pocket. They had prettily damascened barrels and ivory handles carved in the likeness of nymphs. He bought them in Cairo from a man who smuggled cocaine from Vienna.

Alphonse had some twenty "clients" on his books, and added to them as opportunity arose. Of the twenty, five were gold mines (he thought of them as such), the remainder were silver mines.

There was a silver mine living in England, a very lovely, rather sad-looking girl, who was happily married except when she thought of Alphonse. She loved her husband and hated herself, and hated Alphonse intensely and impotently. Having a fortune of her own she could pay — therefore she paid.

Then in a fit of desperate revolt she wrote saying, "This is the last, etc." Alphonse was amused. He waited until September, when the next allowance was due, and it did not come. Nor in October, nor November. In December he wrote to her; he did not wish to go to England in December, for England is very gloomy and foggy, and it was so much nicer in Egypt. But business was business.

His letter reached its address when the woman to whom it was addressed was on a visit to her aunt in Long Island. She had been born an American. Alphonse had not written in answer to her letter; she had sailed for New York feeling safe.

Her husband, whose initial was the same as his wife's, opened the letter by accident and read it through very carefully. He was no fool. He did not regard the wife he wooed as an outcast; what happened before his marriage was her business — what happened now was his.

And he understood these wild dreams of hers, and her wild uncontrollable weeping for no reason at all, and he knew what the future held for her. He went to Paris and made inquiries: he sought the company of the gross men who play dominoes and heard much that was interesting.

Alphonse arrived in London and telephoned from a call-box. Madam was not at home. A typewritten letter came to him, making an appointment for the Wednesday. It was, of course, for a secret rendezvous. The affair ran normally.

He passed his time pleasantly in the days of waiting. Bought a new Spanza car of the latest model, arranged for its transportation to Paris, and in the meantime amused himself driving it.

At the appointed hour he arrived, knocked at the door of the house, and was admitted. . . .

Riebiera, green of face, shaking at the knees, surrendered his two ornamented pistols without a fight ——

At eight o'clock on Christmas morning Superintendent Oakington was called from his warm bed by telephone, and was told the news.

A milkman, driving across Chobham Common, had seen a car standing a little off the road. It was apparently a new car, and must have been standing in its position all night. There were three inches of snow on its roof; beneath the body of the car the bracken was green.

An arresting sight even for a milkman, who at seven o'clock on a wintry morning had no other thought than to supply the needs of his customers as quickly as possible and return at the earliest moment to his own home and the festivities and feastings proper to the day.

He got out of the Ford he was driving and stamped through the snow. He saw a man lying face downwards, and in his grey hand a silver-barrelled revolver. He was dead. And then the startled milkman saw the second man. His face was invisible. It lay under a thick white mask of snow that made his pinched features grotesque and hideous.

The milkman ran back to his car and drove towards a police-station.

Mr. Oakington was on the spot within an hour of being called. There were a dozen policemen grouped around the car and the shapes in the snow: the reporters, thank God, had not arrived.

Late in the afternoon the Superintendent put a call through to one man who might help in a moment of profound bewilderment.

Archibald Lenton was the most promising of Treasury Juniors that the Bar had known for years. The Common Law Bar lifts its delicate nose at lawyers who are interested in criminal cases to the exclusion of other practice. But Archie Lenton survived the unspoken disapproval of his brethren, and concentrating on this unsavoury aspect of the Law was both a successful advocate and an authority on certain types of crime, for he had written a text-book which was accepted as authoritative.

An hour later he was in the Superintendent's room at Scotland Yard, listening to the story.

"We've identified both men. One is a foreigner, a man from the Argentine, so far as I can discover from his passport, named Alphonse or Alphonso Riebiera. He lives in Paris and has been in this country for about a week."

"Well off?"

"Very, I should say. We found about two hundred pounds in his pocket. He was staying at the Nederland Hotel, and bought a car for twelve hundred pounds only last Friday, paying cash. That is the car we found near the body. I've been on the 'phone to Paris and he is suspected there of being a blackmailer. The police have searched and sealed his flat, but found no documents of any kind. He is evidently the sort of man who keeps his business under his hat."

"He was shot, you say? How many times?"

"Once, through the head. The other man was killed in exactly the same way. There was a trace of blood in the car, but nothing else."

Mr. Lenton jotted down a note on a pad of paper.

"Who was the other man?" he asked.

"That's the queerest thing of all — an old acquaintance of yours."

"Mine? Who on earth ——?"

"Do you remember a fellow you defended on a murder charge — Joe Stackett?"

"At Exeter, good Lord, yes! Was that the man?"

"We've identified him from his fingerprints. As a matter of fact, we were after Joe — he's an expert car thief who only came out of prison last week. He got away with a car yesterday morning, but abandoned it after a chase and slipped through the fingers of the Flying Squad. Last night he pinched an old car from a second-hand dealer and was spotted and chased. We found the car abandoned in Tooting. He was never seen again until he was picked up on Chobham Common."

Archie Lenton leant back in his chair and stared thoughtfully at the ceiling.

"He stole the Spanza — the owner jumped on the running board and there was a fight ——" he began, but the Superintendent shook his head.

"Where did he get his gun? English criminals do not carry guns. And they weren't ordinary revolvers. Silver-plated, ivory butts carved with girls' figures — both identical. There were fifty pounds in Joe's pocket; they are consecutive numbers to those found in Riebiera's pocket-book. If he'd stolen them he'd have taken the lot. Joe wouldn't stop at murder, you know that, Mr. Lenton. He killed that old woman in Exeter, although he was acquitted. Riebiera must have given him the fifty ——"

A telephone bell rang; the Superintendent drew the instrument towards him and listened. After ten minutes of a conversation which was confined, so far as Oakington was concerned, to a dozen brief questions, he put down the receiver.

"One of my officers has traced the movements of the car: it was seen standing outside a house in Tooting. It was there at nine-forty-five, and was seen by a postman. If you feel like spending Christmas night doing a little bit of detective work, we'll go down and see the place."

They arrived half an hour later at a house in a very respectable neighbourhood. The two detectives who waited their coming had obtained the keys but had not gone inside. The house was for sale and was standing empty. It was the property of two old maiden ladies, who had placed the premises in an agent's hands when they had moved into the country.

The appearance of the car before an empty house had aroused the interest of the postman. He had seen no lights in the windows and decided that the car was owned by one of the guests at the next-door house.

Oakington opened the door and switched on the light. Strangely enough, the old ladies had not had the current disconnected, though they were notoriously mean. The passage was bare, except for a pair of bead curtains which hung from an arched support to the ceiling.

The front room drew blank. It was in one of the back rooms on the ground floor that they found evidence of the crime. There was blood on the bare planks of the floor and in the grate a litter of ashes.

"Somebody has burnt papers — I smelt it when I came into the room," said Lenton.

He knelt before the grate and lifted a handful of fine ashes carefully.

"And these have been stirrred up until there isn't an ash big enough to hold a word," he said.

He examined the blood prints and made a careful scrutiny of the walls. The window was covered with a shutter.

"That kept the light from getting out," he said, "and the sound of the shot getting out. There is nothing else here."

The detective sergeant who was inspecting the other rooms returned with the news that a kitchen window had been forced. There was one muddy print on the kitchen table which was under the window and a rough attempt had been made to obliterate this. Behind the house was a large garden, and behind that an allotment. It would be easy to reach and enter the house without exciting attention.

"But if Stackett was being chased by the police why should he come here?" he asked.

"His car was found abandoned not more than two hundred yards from here," explained Oakington. "He may have entered the house in the hope of finding something valuable and have been surprised by Riebiera."

Archie Lenton laughed softly.

"I can give you a better theory than that," he said, and for the greater part of the night he wrote carefully and convincingly, reconstructing the crime, giving the most minute details.

That account is still preserved at Scotland Yard, and there are many highly placed officials who swear by it.

And yet something altogether different happened on the night of that 24th of December. . . .

The streets were greasy. The car-lines abominably so. Stackett's mean little car slithered and skidded alarmingly. He had been in a bad temper when he started out on his hungry quest; he grew sour and savage with the evening passing on with nothing to show for his discomfort.

The suburban high street was crowded too; tram-cars moved at a crawl, their bells clanging pathetically; street vendors had their stalls jammed end to end on either side of the thoroughfare; stalls green and red with holly wreaths and untidy bunches of mistletoe; there were butcher stalls, raucous auctioneers holding masses of raw beef and roaring their offers; vegetable stalls; stalls piled high with plates, and cups and saucers, gaudy dishes and glassware, shining in the rays of the powerful acetylene lamps.

The car skidded. There was a crash and a scream. Breaking crockery has an alarming sound. A yell from the stall-owner; Stackett straightened his machine and darted between a tram-car and a trolley.

"Hi, you!"

He twisted his wheel, almost knocked down the policeman who came to intercept him, and swung into a dark side street, his foot clamped on the accelerator. He turned to the right and the left, to the right again. Here was a long suburban road; houses monotonously alike on either side, terribly dreary brick boxes where men and women and children lived, were born, paid rent, and died. A mile farther on he passed the gateway of the cemetery where they found the rest which was their supreme reward for living at all.

The police whistle had followed him for less than a quarter of a mile. He had passed a policeman running towards the sound — anyway, flatties never worried Stackett. Some of his ill-humour passed in the amusement which the sight of the running copper brought.

Bringing the noisy little car to a standstill by the side of the road, he got down and, relighting the cigarette he had so carefully extinguished, gazed glumly at the stained and battered mudguard which was shivering and shaking under the pulsations of the engine. . . .

Through that same greasy street came a motor-cyclist, muffled to the chin, his goggles dangling about his neck. He pulled up his shining wheel near the policeman on point duty and, supporting his balance with one foot in the muddy road, asked questions.

"Yes, sergeant," said the policeman. "I saw him. He went down there. As a matter of fact, I was going to pinch him for driving to the common danger, but he hopped it."

"That's Joe Stackett," nodded Sergeant Kenton, of the C.I.D. "A thin-faced man with a pointed nose?"

The point-duty policeman had not seen the face behind the wind-screen, but he had seen the car, and that he described accurately.

"Stolen from Elmer's garage. At least, Elmer will say so, but he probably provided it. Dumped stuff. Which way did you say?"

The policeman indicated, and the sergeant kicked his engine to life and went chug-chugging down the dark street.

He missed Mr. Stackett by a piece of bad luck — bad luck for everybody, including Mr. Stackett, who was at the beginning of his amazing adventure.

Switching off the engine, he had continued on foot. About fifty yards away was the wide opening of a road superior in class to any he had traversed. Even the dreariest suburb has its West-end, and here were villas standing on their own acres; very sedate villas, with porches and porch lamps in wrought-iron and oddly-coloured glass, and shaven lawns, and rose gardens swathed in matting, and no two villas were alike. At the far end he saw a red light, and his heart leapt with joy: Christmas — it was to be Christmas after all, with good food and lashings of drink and other manifestations of happiness and comfort peculiarly attractive to Joe Stackett.

Even in the darkness it looked like a car worth stealing. He saw somebody near the machine, and stopped. It was difficult to tell in the gloom whether the person near the car had got in or had come out. He listened. There came to him neither the slam of the driver's door nor the whine of the self-starter. He came a little closer, walked boldly on, his restless eyes moving left and right for danger. All the houses were occupied. Bright lights illuminated the casement cloth which covered the windows. He heard the sound of respectable revelry and two gramophones playing dance tunes. But his eyes always came back to the polished limousine at the door of the end house. There was no light there. It was completely dark, from the gabled attic to the ground floor.

He quickened his pace. It was a Spanza. His heart leapt at the recognition. For a Spanza is a car for which there is a ready sale. You can get as much as a hundred pounds for a new one. They are popular amongst Eurasians and wealthy Hindus. Binky Jones, who was the best car fence in London, would pay him cash, not less than sixty. In a week's time that car would be crated and on its way to India, there to be resold at a handsome profit.

The driver's door was wide open. He heard the soft purr of the engine. He slid into the driver's seat, closed the door noiselessly, and almost without as much as a whine the Spanza moved on.

It was a new one, brand new. . . . A hundred at least.

Gathering speed, he passed to the end of the road, come to a wide common, and skirted it. Presently he was in another shopping street, but he knew too much to turn back towards London. He would take the open country for it, work around through Esher and come into London by the Portsmouth Road. The art of car stealing is to move as quickly as possible from the police division where the machine is stolen, and may be instantly reported, to a "foreign" division, which will not know of the theft until hours after.

There might be all sorts of extra pickings. There was a big luggage trunk behind, and possibly a few knick-knacks in the body of the car itself. At a suitable moment he would make a leisurely search. At the moment he headed for Epsom, turning back to hit the Kingston by-pass. Sleet fell — snow and rain together. He set the screen-wiper working, and began to hum a little tune. The Kingston by-pass was deserted. It was too unpleasant a night for much traffic.

Mr. Stackett was debating what would be the best place to make his search when he felt an unpleasant draught behind him. He had noticed there was a sliding window separating the interior of the car from the driver's seat, which had possibly worked loose. He put up his hand to push it close.

"Drive on! Don't turn round, or I'll blow your head off!"

Involuntarily he half-turned to see the gaping muzzle of an automatic, and in his agitation put his foot on the brake. The car skidded from one side of the road to the other, half-turned, and recovered.

"Drive on, I am telling you," said a metallic voice. "When you reach the Portsmouth Road turn and bear towards Weybridge. If you attempt to stop I will shoot you. Is that clear?"

Joe Stackett's teeth were chattering. He could not articulate the "yes." All that he could do was to nod. He went on nodding for half a mile before he realized what he was doing.

No further word came from the interior of the car until they passed the racecourse; then unexpectedly the voice gave a new direction: —

"Turn left towards Leatherhead."

The driver obeyed.

They came to a stretch of common. Stackett, who knew the country well, realized the complete isolation of the spot.

"Slow down, pull in to the left. . . . There is no dip there. You can switch on your lights."

The car slid and bumped over the uneven ground, the wheels crunched through beds of bracken. . . .

"Stop."

The door behind him opened. The man got out. He jerked open the driver's door.

"Step down," he said. "Turn out your lights first. Have you got a gun?"

"Gun? Why the hell should I have a gun?" stammered the car thief.

He was focused all the time in a ring of light from a very bright electric torch which the passenger had turned upon him.

"You are an act of Providence."

Stackett could not see the face of the speaker. He saw only the gun in the hand, for the stranger kept this well in the light.

"Look inside the car."

Stackett looked and almost collapsed: there was a figure huddled in one corner of the seat — the figure of a man. He saw something else — a bicycle jammed into the car, one wheel touching the roof, the other on the floor. He saw the man's white face. . . . Dead! A slim, rather short man, with dark hair and a dark moustache, a foreigner. There was a little red hole in his temple.

"Pull him out," commanded the voice sharply.

Stackett shrank back, but a powerful hand pushed him towards the car.

"Pull him out!"

With his face moist with cold perspiration, the car thief obeyed; put his hands under the armpits of the inanimate figure, dragged him out, and laid him on the bracken.

"He's dead," he whimpered.

"Completely," said the other.

Suddenly he switched off his electric torch. Far away came a gleam of light on the road, coming swiftly towards them. It was a car moving towards Esher. It passed.

"I saw you coming just after I had got the body into the car. There wasn't time to get back to the house. I'd hoped you were just an ordinary pedestrian. When I saw you get into the car I guessed pretty well your vocation. What is your name?"

"Joseph Stackett."

"Stackett?" The light flashed on his face again. "How wonderful! Do you remember the Exeter Assizes? The old woman you killed with a hammer? I defended you!"

Joe's eyes were wide open. He stared past the light at the dim grey thing that was a face.

"Mr. Lenton?" he said, hoarsely. "Good God, sir!"

"You murdered her in cold blood for a few paltry shillings, and you would have been dead now, Stackett, if I hadn't found a flaw in the evidence. You expected to die, didn't you? You remember how we used to talk in Exeter Jail about the trap that would not work when they tried to hang a murderer and the ghoulish satisfaction you had that you would stand on the same trap?"

Joe Stackett grinned uncomfortably.

"And I meant it, sir," he said, "but you can't try a man twice — " Then his eyes dropped to the figure at his feet — the dapper little man with a black moustache, with a red hole in his temple.

Lenton leant over the dead man, took out a pocket-case from the inside of the jacket, and at his leisure detached ten five-pound notes from the fat packet of them.

"Put those in your pocket."

He obeyed, wondering what service would be required of him, wondered more why the pocket-book with its precious notes was returned to the dead man's pocket.

Lenton looked back along the road. Snow was falling now, real snow. It came down in small particles, falling so thickly that it seemed that a fog lay on the land.

"You fit into this perfectly — a man unfit to live. There is fate in this meeting."

"I don't know what you mean by fate."

Joe Stackett grew bold; he had to deal with a lawyer and a gentleman who, in a criminal sense, was his inferior. The money obviously had been given to him to keep his mouth shut.

"What have you been doing, Mr. Lenton? That's bad, ain't it? This fellow's dead and —"

Then in a flash he realized the monetary value of the situation and he grew immediately bold.

"This job's going to cost you something, guv'nor," he said, and he dropped his hand suddenly to his hip.

He must have seen the pencil of flame that came from the other's hand. He could have felt nothing, for he was dead before he sprawled over the body on the ground.

Mr. Archibald Lenton examined the revolver by the light of his lamp, opened the breech and closed it again. Stooping, he laid it near the hand of the little man with the black moustache and, lifting the body of Joe Stackett, dragged it towards the car and let it drop. Bending down, he clasped the still warm hands about the butt of another pistol. Then, at his leisure, he took the bicycle from the interior of the car and carried it back to the road. It was already white and fine snow was falling in sheets.

Mr. Lenton went on and reached his home two hours later, when the bells of the local church were ringing musically.

There was a cable waiting for him from his wife.

A Happy Christmas to you, darling.

He was ridiculously pleased that she had remembered to send the wire — he was very fond of his wife.

The life of a bibliographer in the field of the detective story is full of surprises — and some of them are quite amusing. There was that time, for example, when your Editor fought an epistolary duel with an eminent bookseller about R. Austin Freeman's THE UTTERMOST FARTHING *and* A SAVANT'S VENDETTA. *The bookman insisted that he had once seen* both books *in a Freeman omnibus. This is a curious instance of biblioduality when you consider that* THE UTTERMOST FARTHING *and* A SAVANT'S VENDETTA *are one and the same book, the former being the American title, the latter the English!*

A similar occasion for biblio-bon-mot occurred a short time ago when your Editor engaged in a verbal duel on the subject of Dashiell Hammett's short stories. At one point in the exchange of thrusts, we made the innocent (but provocative) comment that EQMM would soon offer its readers a Hammett short story titled "Death on Pine Street." Our adversary remarked knowingly that he remembered that story and rated it a very good one indeed. Your Editor heartily agreed with our opponent's critical opinion, but refrained from asking how it was possible for him to remember a title that did not exist! "Death on Pine Street" had never appeared in print as the title of a Hammett story; in fact, Mr. Hammett himself could not recognize, identify, or even remember such a title among his work. You see, that title was your Editor's own invention — a replacement for Mr. Hammett's original title which was, believe it or not, "Women, Politics and Murder."

The life of a bibliographer is full of surprises . . . as is "Death on Pine Street," another riproaring adventure of the fat, nameless Continental Op, one of Hammett's wild men from Frisco.

DEATH ON PINE STREET

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

A PLUMP maid with bold green eyes and a loose, full-lipped mouth led me up two flights of steps and into an elaborately furnished boudoir, where a woman in black sat at a window. She was a thin woman of a little more than thirty, this murdered man's widow, and her face was white and haggard.

"You are from the Continental Detective Agency?" she asked before I was two steps inside the room.

"Yes."

"I want you to find my husband's murderer." Her voice was shrill, and her dark eyes had wild lights in them. "The police have done nothing. Four days, and they have done nothing!"

"But, Mrs. Gilmore," I began, not exactly tickled to death with this explosion, "you must —"

"I know! I know!" she broke in. "But I don't believe they've made the slightest effort. I don't believe they want to find h-him!"

"Him?" I asked, because she had started to say *her*. "You think it was a man?"

She bit her lip and looked away from me, out of the window.

"I don't know," she said hesitantly; "it might have —"

Her face spun toward me — a twitching face — and it seemed impossible that anyone could talk so fast, hurl words out so rapidly.

"I'll tell you. You can judge for yourself. Bernard wasn't faithful to me. There was a woman who calls herself Cara Kenbrook. She wasn't the first. But I learned about her last month. We quarreled. Bernard promised to give her up. Maybe he didn't. But if he did, I wouldn't put it past her — A woman like that would do anything — anything. And down in my heart I really believe she did it!"

"And you think the police don't want to arrest her?"

"I didn't mean exactly that. I'm all unstrung, and likely to say anything. Bernard was mixed up in politics, you know; and if the police found, or thought, that politics had anything to do with his death, they might — I don't know just what I mean. I'm a nervous, broken woman, and full of crazy notions." She stretched a thin hand out to me. "Straighten this tangle out for me! Find the person who killed Bernard!"

I nodded with empty assurance, still not any too pleased with my client.

"Do you know this Kenbrook woman?" I asked.

"I've seen her on the street, and that's enough to know what sort of person she is!"

"Did you tell the police about her?"

"No-o." She looked out of the window again, and then added, defensively: "The police detectives who came to see me acted as if they thought I might have killed Bernard. I was afraid to tell them that I had cause for jealousy. Maybe I shouldn't have kept quiet about that woman, but I didn't think she had done it until afterward, when the police failed to find the murderer. Then I began to think she had done it; but I couldn't make myself go to the police and tell them that I had withheld information. I knew what they'd think. So I — You can twist it around so it'll look as if I hadn't known about the woman, can't you?"

"Possibly. Now as I understand it, your husband was shot on Pine Street, between Leavenworth and Jones, at about three o'clock Tuesday morning."

"Yes."

"Where was he going?"

"Coming home, I suppose; but I don't know where he had been. Nobody knows. The police haven't found out, if they have tried. He told me Monday evening that he had a business engagement. He was a building contractor, you know. He went out at about half-past eleven, saying he would be gone four or five hours."

"Wasn't that an unusual hour to be keeping a business engagement?"

"Not for Bernard. He often had men come to the house at midnight."

"Can you make any guess at all where he was going that night?"

She shook her head with emphasis.

"No. I knew nothing at all about his business affairs, and even the men in his office don't seem to know where he went that night."

That wasn't unlikely. Most of the B. F. Gilmore Construction Company's work had been on city and state contracts, and it isn't altogether unheard-of for secret conferences to go with that kind of work. Your politician-contractor doesn't always move in the open.

"How about enemies?" I asked.

"I don't know anybody that hated him enough to kill him."

"Where does this Kenbrook woman live, do you know?"

"Yes — in the Garford Apartments on Bush Street."

"Nothing you've forgotten to tell me, is there?" I asked, stressing the *me* a little.

"No, I've told you everything I know — every single thing."

Walking over to California Street, I shook down my memory for what I had heard here and there of Bernard Gilmore. I could remember a few things — the opposition papers had been in the habit of exposing him every election year — but none of them got me anywhere. I had known him by sight: a boisterous, red-faced man who had hammered his way up from hod-carrier to the ownership of a half-a-million-dollar business and a pretty place in local politics. "A roughneck with a manicure," somebody had called him; a man with a lot of enemies and more friends; a big, good-natured, hard-hitting rowdy.

Odds and ends of a dozen graft scandals in which he had been mixed up, without anybody ever really getting anything on him, flitted through my head as I rode downtown on the too-small outside seat of a cable-car.

I left the car at Kearny Street and walked over to the Hall of Justice. In the detectives' assembly-room I found O'Gar, the detective-sergeant in charge of the Homicide Detail: a squat man of fifty who goes in for wide-brimmed hats of the movie-sheriff sort, but whose little blue eyes and bullet head aren't handicapped by the trick headgear.

"I want some dope on the Gilmore killing," I told him.

"So do I," he came back. "But if you'll come along I'll tell you what little I know while I'm eating. I ain't had lunch yet."

Safe from eavesdroppers in the clatter of a Sutter Street lunchroom, the detective-sergeant leaned over his clam chowder and told me what he knew about the murder, which wasn't much.

"One of the boys, Kelly, was walking his beat early Tuesday morning, coming down the Jones Street hill from California Street to Pine. It was about three o'clock — no fog or nothing — a clear night. Kelly's within maybe twenty feet of Pine Street when he hears a shot. He whisks around the corner, and there's a man dying on the north sidewalk of Pine Street, halfway between Jones and Leavenworth. Nobody else is in sight. Kelly runs up to the man and finds it's Gilmore. Gilmore dies before he can say a word. The doctors say he was knocked down and then shot; because there's a bruise on his forehead, and the bullet slanted upward in his chest. See what I mean? He was lying on his back when the bullet hit him, with his feet pointing toward the gun it came from. It was a .38."

"Any money on him?"

"Six hundred smacks, a coupla diamonds and a watch. Nothing touched."

"What was he doing on Pine Street at that time in the morning?"

"Damned if I know, brother. Chances are he was going home, but we can't find out where he'd been. Don't even know what direction he was walking in when he was knocked over. He was lying across the sidewalk with his feet to the curb; but that don't mean nothing — he could of turned around three or four times after he was hit."

"All apartment buildings in that block, aren't there?"

"Uh-huh. There's an alley or two running off from the south side; but Kelly says he could see the mouths of both alleys when the shot was fired — before he turned the corner — and nobody got away through them."

"Reckon somebody who lives in that block did the shooting?" I asked.

"Maybe. But we got nothing to show that Gilmore knew anybody in that block."

"Many people gather around afterward?"

"A few. There's always people on the street to come running if anything happens. But Kelly says there wasn't anybody that looked wrong — just the ordinary night crowd. The boys gave the neighborhood a combing, but didn't turn up anything."

"Any cars around?"

"Kelly says there wasn't, that he didn't see any, and couldn't of missed seeing it if there'd been one."

"I have a line on a woman," I told him. "Want to come along and talk to her with me?"

"I want to," he growled, "but I can't. I got to be in court this afternoon."

In the vestibule of the Garford Apartments, I pressed the button tagged Miss Cara Kenbrook several times before the door clicked open. Then I mounted a flight of stairs and walked down a hall to her door. It was opened presently by a tall girl of twenty-three or -four in a black and white crepe dress.

"Miss Cara Kenbrook?"

"Yes."

I gave her a card — one of those that tell the truth about me.

"I'd like to ask you a few questions; may I come in?"

"Do."

Languidly she stepped aside for me to enter, closed the door behind me, and led me back into a living-room that was littered with newspapers, cigarettes in all stages of consumption from unlighted freshness to cold ash, and miscellaneous articles of feminine clothing.

"I'm interested in Bernard Gilmore's death," I said, watching her face.

It wasn't a beautiful face, although

it should have been. Everything was there — perfect features; smooth, white skin; big, almost enormous, brown eyes — but the eyes were dead-dull, and the face was as empty of expression as a china door-knob, and what I said didn't change it.

"Bernard Gilmore," she said without interest. "Oh, yes."

"You and he were pretty close friends, weren't you?" I asked, puzzled by her blankness.

"We had been — yes."

"What do you mean by *had been?*"

"I gave him the air last week," she said casually.

"When was the last time you saw him?"

"Last week — Monday, I think — a week before he was killed."

"Was that the time when you broke off with him?"

"Yes."

"Have a row, or part friends?"

"Not exactly either. I just told him that I was through with him."

"How did he take it?"

"It didn't break his heart. I guess he'd heard the same thing before."

"Where were you the night he was killed?"

"At the Coffee Cup, eating and dancing with friends until about one o'clock. Then I came home to bed."

"Why did you split with Gilmore?"

"Couldn't stand his wife."

"Huh?"

"She was a nuisance." This without the faintest glint of either annoyance or humor. "She came here one night and raised a racket; so I told Bernie that if he couldn't keep her away from me he'd have to find another playmate."

"Have you any idea who might have killed him?" I asked.

"Not unless it was his wife — excitable women always do silly things."

"If you had given her husband up, what reason would she have for killing him, do you think?"

"I'm sure I don't know," she replied with complete indifference. "But I'm not the only girl that Bernie ever looked at."

I let that go at that and switched back to Mrs. Gilmore, wondering if this girl could be full of dope.

"What happened the night his wife came here?"

"Nothing but that. She followed Bernie here, rang the bell, rushed past me when I opened the door, and began to cry and call Bernie names. Then she started on me, and I told him that if he didn't take her away I'd hurt her, so he took her home."

Admitting I was licked for the time, I got up and moved to the door. I couldn't do anything with this baby just now. I didn't think she was telling the whole truth, but on the other hand it wasn't reasonable to believe that anybody would lie so woodenly — with so little effort to be plausible.

From this unsatisfactory interview I went to the scene of the killing, only a few blocks away, to get a look at the neighborhood. I found the block just as I had remembered it and as O'Gar had described it: lined on both sides by apartment buildings, with two blind alleys — one of which was dignified with a name, Touchard Street — running from the south side.

The murder was four days old; I didn't waste any time snooping around the vicinity; but, after strolling the length of the block, boarded a Hyde Street car, transferred at California Street, and went up to see Mrs. Gilmore again. I was curious to know why she hadn't told me about her call on Cara Kenbrook.

The same plump maid who had admitted me earlier in the afternoon opened the door.

"Mrs. Gilmore is not at home," she said. "But I think she'll be back in half an hour or so."

"I'll wait," I decided.

The maid took me into the library, crossed to the door, stopped, moved over to straighten some books on a shelf and looked at me with a half-questioning, half-inviting look in her green eyes.

By that time I knew she wanted to say something, and needed encouragement. I leaned back in my chair and grinned at her, and decided I had made a mistake — the smile into which her slack lips curved held more coquetry than anything else. She came over to me, walking with an exaggerated swing of the hips, and stood close in front of me.

"What's on your mind?" I asked.

"Suppose — suppose a person knew something that nobody else knew; what would it be worth to them?"

"That," I stalled, "would depend on how valuable it was."

"Suppose I knew who killed the boss? What would that be worth?"

"The newspapers say that one of Gilmore's clubs has offered a thousand-dollar reward. You'd get that."

Her green eyes went greedy, and then suspicious.

"If *you* didn't."

I shrugged. I knew she'd go through with it — whatever it was — now; so I didn't even explain to her that the Continental doesn't touch rewards, and doesn't let its hired men touch them.

"I'll give you my word," I said; "but you'll have to use your own judgment about trusting me."

She licked her lips.

"You're a good fellow, I guess. I wouldn't tell the police, because I know they'd beat me out of the money. But you look like I can trust you." She leered into my face. "I used to have a gentleman friend who was the very image of you, and he was the grandest —"

"Better speak your piece before somebody comes in," I suggested.

She shot a look at the door, cleared her throat, licked her loose mouth again, and dropped on one knee beside my chair.

"I was coming home late Monday night — the night the boss was killed — and was standing in the shadows saying good night to my friend, when the boss came out of the house and walked down the street. And he had hardly got to the corner, when she — Mrs. Gilmore — came out, and went down the street after him. Not trying to catch up with him, you understand; but following him. What do you think of that?"

"What do *you* think of it?"

"*I* think that she finally woke up to the fact that all of her Bernie's dates didn't have anything to do with the building business."

"Do you know that they didn't?"

"Do I know it? I knew that man! He liked 'em — liked 'em all." She smiled into my face, a smile that suggested all evil. "I found *that* out soon after I first came here."

"Do you know when Mrs. Gilmore came back that night — what time?"

"Yes," she said; "at half-past three."

"Sure?"

"Absolutely! After I got undressed I got a blanket and sat at the head of the front stairs. My room's in the rear of the top floor. I wanted to see if they came home together, and if there was a fight. After she came in alone I went back to my room, and it was just twenty-five minutes to four then. I looked at my alarm clock."

"Did you see her when she came in?"

"Just the top of her head and shoulders when she turned toward her room at the landing."

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Lina Best."

"All right, Lina," I told her. "If this is the goods I'll see that you collect on it. Keep your eyes open, and if anything else turns up you can get in touch with me at the Continental office. Now you'd better beat it, so nobody will know we've had our heads together."

Alone in the library, I cocked an eye at the ceiling and considered the information Lina Best had given me. But I soon gave that up — no use trying to guess at things that will work out for themselves in a while. I found a book, and spent the next half-hour reading about a sweet young she-chump and a big strong he-chump and all their troubles.

Then Mrs. Gilmore came in, apparently straight from the street.

I got up and closed the doors behind her, while she watched me with wide eyes.

"Mrs. Gilmore," I said, when I faced her again, "why didn't you tell me that you followed your husband the night he was killed?"

"That's a lie!" she cried; but there was no truth in her voice. "A lie!"

"Don't you think you're making a mistake?" I urged. "Don't you think you'd better tell me the whole thing?"

She opened her mouth, but only a dry sobbing sound came out; and she began to sway with a hysterical rocking motion, the fingers of one black-gloved hand plucking at her lower lip, twisting and pulling it.

I stepped to her side and set her down in the chair I had been sitting in, making foolish clucking sounds — meant to soothe her — with my tongue. A disagreeable ten minutes — and gradually she pulled herself together; her eyes lost their glassiness, and she stopped clawing at her mouth.

"I did follow him." It was a hoarse

whisper, barely audible.

Then she was out of the chair, kneeling, with arms held up to me, and her voice was a thin scream.

"But I didn't kill him! I didn't! Please believe that I didn't!"

I picked her up and put her back in the chair.

"I didn't say you did. Just tell me what did happen."

"I didn't believe him when he said he had a business engagement," she moaned. "I didn't trust him. He had lied to me before. I followed him to see if he went to that woman's rooms."

"Did he?"

"No. He went into an apartment house on Pine Street, in the block where he was killed. I don't know exactly which house it was — I was too far behind him to make sure. But I saw him go up the steps and into one — near the middle of the block."

"And then what did you do?"

"I waited, hiding in a dark doorway across the street. I knew the woman's apartment was on Bush Street, but I thought she might have moved, or be meeting him here. I waited a long time, shivering and trembling. It was chilly and I was frightened — afraid somebody would come into the vestibule where I was. But I made myself stay. I wanted to see if he came out alone, or if that woman came out. I had a right to do it — he had deceived me before.

"It was terrible, horrible — crouching there in the dark — cold and scared. Then — it must have been about half-past two — I couldn't stand it any longer. I decided to telephone the woman's apartment and find out if she were home. I went down to an all-night lunchroom on Ellis Street and called her up."

"Was she home?"

"No! I tried for fifteen minutes, or maybe longer, but nobody answered the phone. So I *knew* she was in that Pine Street building."

"And what did you do then?"

"I went back there, determined to wait until he came out. I walked up Jones Street. When I was between Bush and Pine I heard a shot. I thought it was a noise made by an automobile then, but now I know that it was the shot that killed Bernie.

"When I reached the corner of Pine and Jones, I could see a policeman bending over Bernie on the sidewalk, and I saw people gathering around. I didn't know then that it was Bernie lying on the sidewalk. In the dark and at that distance I couldn't even see whether it was a man or a woman.

"I was afraid that Bernard would come out to see what was going on, or look out of a window, and discover me; so I didn't go down that way. I was afraid to stay in the neighborhood now, for fear the police would ask me what I was doing loitering in the street at three in the morning — and have it come out that I had been following my husband. So I kept on walking up Jones Street, to California, and then straight home."

"And then what?" I led her on.

"Then I went to bed. I didn't go to sleep — lay there worrying over Bernie; but still not thinking it was he I had seen lying in the street. At nine o'clock that morning two police detectives came and told me Bernie had been killed. They questioned me so sharply that I was afraid to tell them the whole truth. If they had known I had reason for being jealous, and had followed my husband that night, they would have accused me of shooting him. And what could I have done? Everybody would have thought me guilty.

"So I didn't say anything about the woman. I thought they'd find the murderer, and then everything would be all right. I didn't think *she* had done it then, or I would have told you the whole thing the first time you were here. But four days went by without the police finding the murderer, and I began to think they suspected *me!* It was terrible! I couldn't go to them and confess that I had lied to them, and I was sure that the woman had killed him and that the police had failed to suspect her because I hadn't told them about her.

"So I employed you. But I was afraid to tell even you the whole truth. I thought that if I just told you there had been another woman and who she was, you could do the rest without having to know that I had followed Bernie that night. I was afraid *you* would think I had killed him, and would turn me over to the police if I told you everything. And now you *do* believe it! And you'll have me arrested! And they'll hang me! I know it! I know it!"

She began to rock crazily from side to side in her chair.

"Sh-h-h," I soothed her. "You're not arrested yet. Sh-h-h."

I didn't know what to make of her story. The trouble with these nervous, hysterical women is that you can't possibly tell when they're lying and when telling the truth unless you have outside evidence — half of the time they themselves don't know.

"When you heard the shot," I went on when she had quieted down a bit, "you were walking north on Jones, between Bush and Pine? You could see the corner of Pine and Jones?"

"Yes — clearly."

"See anybody?"

"No — not until I reached the corner and looked down Pine Street. Then I saw a policeman bending over Bernie, and two men walking toward them."

"Where were the two men?"

"On Pine Street east of Jones. They didn't have hats on — as if they had come out of a house when they heard the shot."

"Any automobiles in sight either before or after you heard the shot?"

"I didn't see or hear any."

"I have some more questions, Mrs. Gilmore," I said; "but I'm in a hurry now. Please don't go out until you hear from me again."

"I won't," she promised, "but —"

I didn't have any answers for anybody's questions, so I ducked my head and left the library.

I returned then to the Garford Apartments, walking, because I had a lot things to arrange in my mind before I faced Cara Kenbrook again. And, even though I walked slowly, they weren't all exactly filed in alphabetical order when I got there. She had changed the black and white dress for a plush-like gown of bright green, but her empty doll's face hadn't changed.

"Some more questions," I explained when she opened her door.

She admitted me without word or gesture, and led me back into the room where we had talked before.

"Miss Kenbrook," I asked, standing beside the chair she had offered me, "why did you tell me you were home in bed when Gilmore was killed?"

"Because it's so." Without the flicker of a lash.

"And you wouldn't answer the doorbell?"

I had to twist the facts to make my point. Mrs. Gilmore had phoned, but I couldn't afford to give this girl a chance to shunt the blame for her failure to answer off on central.

She hesitated for a split second.

"No — because I didn't hear it."

One cool article, this baby! I couldn't figure her. I didn't know then, and I don't know now, whether she was the owner of the world's best poker face or was just naturally stupid. But whichever she was, she was thoroughly and completely it!

I stopped trying to guess and got on with my probing.

"And you wouldn't answer the phone either?"

"It didn't ring — or not enough to awaken me."

I chuckled — an artificial chuckle — because central could have been ringing the wrong number. However . . .

"Miss Kenbrook," I lied, "your phone rang at 2:30 and at 2:40 that morning. And your doorbell rang almost continually from about 2:50 until after 3:00."

"Perhaps," she said, "but I wonder who'd be trying to get me at that hour."

"You didn't hear either?"

"No."

"But you were here?"

"Yes — who was it?" carelessly.

"Get your hat," I bluffed, "and I'll show them to you down at headquarters."

She glanced down at the green gown and walked toward an open bedroom door.

"I suppose I'd better get a cloak, too," she said.

"Yes," I advised her, "and bring your toothbrush."

She turned around then and looked at me, and for a moment it seemed that some sort of expression — surprise maybe — was about to come into her big brown eyes.

"You mean you're arresting me?"

"Not exactly. But if you stick to your story about being home in bed at 3:00 last Tuesday morning, I can promise you you *will* be arrested. If I were you I'd think up another story."

She left the doorway slowly and came back into the room, as far as a chair that stood between us, put her hands on its back, and leaned over it to look at me. For perhaps a minute neither of us spoke — just stood there staring at each other, while I tried to keep my face as expressionless as hers.

"Do you really think," she asked at last, "that I wasn't here when Bernie was killed?"

"I'm a busy man, Miss Kenbrook." I put all the certainty I could fake into my voice. "If you want to stick to your funny story, it's all right with me. But please don't expect me to stand here and argue about it."

She shrugged, and came around the chair on which she had been leaning.

"I suppose you *do* know something," she said, sitting down. "Well, it's tough on Stan, but women and children first."

My ears twitched at the name *Stan*, but I didn't interrupt her.

"I *was* in the Coffee Cup until one o'clock," she was saying, her voice still flat and emotionless. "And I *did* come home afterward. I'd been drinking *vino* all evening, and it always makes me blue. So after I came home I got to worrying over things. Since Bernie and I split finances haven't been so good. I took stock that night — or morning — and found only four dollars in my purse. The rent was due, and the world looked damned blue.

"Half-lit on Dago wine as I was, I decided to run over and see Stan, tell him all my troubles, and make a touch. Stan is a good egg and he's always willing to go the limit for me. Sober, I wouldn't have gone to see him at three in the morning; but it seemed a perfectly sensible thing to do at the time.

"It's only a few minutes' walk from here to Stan's. I went down Bush Street to Leavenworth, and up Leavenworth to Pine. I was in the middle of that last block when Bernie was shot — I heard it. And when I turned the corner into Pine Street I saw a copper bending over a man on the pavement right in front of Stan's. I hesitated for a couple of minutes, standing in the shadow of a pole, until three or four men had gathered around the man on the sidewalk. Then I went over.

"It was Bernie. And just as I got there I heard the copper tell one of the men that he had been shot. It was an awful shock to me. You know how things like that will hit you!"

I nodded, though God knows there was nothing in this girl's face, manner, or voice to suggest shock. She might have been talking about the weather.

"Dumfounded, not knowing what to do," she went on, "I didn't even stop. I went on, passing as close to Bernie as I am to you now, and rang Stan's bell. He let me in. He had been half-undressed when I rang. His rooms are in the rear of the building, and he hadn't heard the shot, he said. He didn't know Bernie had been killed until I told him. It sort of knocked the wind out of him. He said Bernie had been there — in Stan's rooms — since midnight, and had just left.

"Stan asked me what I was doing there, and I told him my tale of woe. That was the first time Stan knew that Bernie and I were so thick. I met Bernie through Stan, but Stan didn't know we had got so chummy.

"Stan was worried for fear it would come out that Bernie had been to see him that night, because it would make a lot of trouble for him — some sort of shady deal they had on, I guess. So he didn't go out to see Bernie. That's about all there is to it. I got some money from Stan, and stayed in his rooms until the police had cleared out of the neighborhood; because neither of us wanted to get mixed up in anything. Then I came home."

"Why didn't you get this off your chest before?" I demanded, knowing the answer.

It came.

"I was afraid. Suppose I told about Bernie throwing me down, and said I was close to him — a block or so away — when he was killed, and was half-full of vino? The first thing everybody would have said was that I had shot him!"

"So Bernie was the one who broke off, and not you?"

"Oh, yes," she said lightly.

I lit a Fatima and breathed smoke in silence for a while, and the girl sat placidly watching me.

Here I had two women — neither normal. Mrs. Gilmore was hysterical, abnormally nervous. This girl was dull, subnormal. One was the dead man's wife; the other his mistress; and each with reason for believing she had been thrown down for the other. Liars, both; and both finally confessing that they had been near the scene of the crime at the time of the crime, though neither admitted seeing the other. Both, by their own accounts, had been at that time even further from normal than usual — Mrs. Gilmore filled with jealousy; Cara Kenbrook half-drunk.

What was the answer? Either could have killed Gilmore; but hardly both — unless they had formed some sort of crazy partnership, and in that event —

Suddenly all the facts I had gathered — true and false — clicked together in my head. I had the answer — the one simple, satisfying answer!

I grinned at the girl, and set about filling in the gaps in my solution.

"Who is Stan?" I asked.

"Stanley Tennant — he has something to do with the city."

Stanley Tennant. I knew him by reputation, a —

A key rattled in the hall door.

The hall door opened and closed, and a man's footsteps came toward the open doorway of the room in which we were. A tall, broad-shouldered man in tweeds filled the doorway — a ruddy-faced man of thirty-five or so, whose appearance of athletic blond wholesomeness was marred by close-set eyes of an indistinct blue.

Seeing me, he stopped — a step inside the room.

"Hello, Stan!" the girl said lightly. "This gentleman is from the Continental Detective Agency. I've just emptied myself to him about Bernie. Tried to stall him at first, but it was no good."

The man's vague eyes switched

back and forth between the girl and me. Around the pale irises his eyeballs were pink.

He straightened his shoulders and smiled too jovially.

"And what conclusion have you come to?" he inquired.

The girl answered for me.

"I've already had *my* invitation to take a ride."

Tennant bent forward. With an unbroken swing of his arms, he swept a chair up from the floor into my face. Not much force behind it, but quick.

I went back against the wall, fending off the chair with both arms — threw it aside — and looked into the muzzle of a nickeled revolver.

A table drawer stood open — the drawer from which he had grabbed the gun while I was busy with the chair. The revolver, I noticed, was of .38 caliber.

"Now," his voice was thick, like a drunk's, "turn around."

I turned my back to him, felt a hand moving over my body, and my gun was taken away.

"All right," he said, and I faced him again.

He stepped back to the girl's side, still holding the nickel-plated revolver on me. My own gun wasn't in sight — in his pocket perhaps. He was breathing noisily, and his eyeballs had gone from pink to red.

"You know me?" he snapped.

"Yes, I know you. You're Stanley Tennant, assistant city engineer, and your record is none too lovely." I chattered away on the theory that conversation is always somehow to the advantage of the man who is looking into the gun. "You're supposed to be the lad who supplied the regiment of well-trained witnesses who turned last year's investigation of graft charges against the engineer's office into a comedy. Yes, Mr. Tennant, I know you. You're the answer to why Gilmore was so lucky in landing city contracts with bids only a few dollars beneath his competitors. Yes, Mr. Tennant, I know you. You're the bright boy who —"

I had a lot more to tell him, but he cut me off.

"That will do out of you!" he yelled. "Unless you want me to knock a corner off your head with this gun."

Then he addressed the girl, not taking his eyes from me.

"Get up, Cara."

She got out of her chair and stood beside him. His gun was in his right hand, and that side was toward her. He moved around to the other side.

The fingers of his left hand hooked themselves inside of the girl's green gown where it was cut low over the swell of her breasts. His gun never wavered from me. He jerked his left hand, ripping her gown to the waist.

"*He* did that, Cara," Tennant said.

She nodded.

His fingers slid inside of the flesh-colored undergarment that was now exposed, and he tore that as he had torn the gown.

"*He* did that."

She nodded again.

His bloodshot eyes darted little

measuring glances at her face—swift glances that never kept his eyes from me for the flash of time I would have needed to tie into him.

Then — eyes and gun on me — he smashed his left fist into the girl's blank white face.

One whimper — low and not drawn out — came from her as she went down in a huddle against the wall. Her face — well, there wasn't *much* change in it. She looked dumbly up at Tennant from where she had fallen.

"*He* did that," Tennant was saying.

She nodded, got up from the floor, and returned to her chair.

"Here's our story." The man talked rapidly, his eyes alert on me. "Gilmore was never in my rooms in his life, Cara, and neither were you. The night he was killed you were home shortly after one o'clock, and stayed there. You were sick — probably from the wine you had been drinking — and called a doctor. His name is Howard. I'll see that he's fixed. He got here at 2:30 and stayed until 3:30.

"Today, this gum-shoe, learning that you had been intimate with Gilmore, came here to question you. He knew you hadn't killed Gilmore, but he made certain suggestions to you — you can play them up as strong as you like; maybe say that he's been annoying you for months — and when you turned him down he threatened to frame you.

"You refused to have anything to do with him, and he grabbed you, tearing your clothes, and bruising your face when you resisted. I happened to come along then, having an engagement with you, and heard you scream. Your front door was unlocked, so I rushed in, pulled this fellow away, and disarmed him. Then we held him until the police — whom we will phone for — came. Got that?"

"Yes, Stan."

"Good! Now listen: When the police get here this fellow will spill all he knows, of course, and the chances are that all three of us will be taken in. That's why I want you to know what's what right now. I ought to have enough pull to get you and me out on bail tonight, or, if worst comes to worst, to see that my lawyer gets to me tonight — so I can arrange for the witnesses we'll need. Also I ought to be able to fix it so our little fat friend will be held for a day or two, and not allowed to see anybody until late tomorrow — which will give us a good start on him. I don't know how much he knows, but between your story and the stories of a couple of other smart little ladies I have in mind, I'll fix him up with a rep that will keep any jury in the world from ever believing him about anything."

"How do you like that?" he asked me, triumphantly.

"You big clown," I laughed at him, "I think it's funny!"

But I didn't really think so. In spite of what I thought I knew about Gilmore's murder — in spite of my simple, satisfactory solution — something was crawling up my back, my knees felt jerky, and my hands were wet with sweat. I had had people try to frame me before — no detective stays in the business long without having it happen — but I had never got used to it. There's a peculiar deadliness about the thing — especially if you know how erratic juries can be — that makes your flesh crawl, no matter how safe your judgment tells you you are.

"Phone the police," Tennant told the girl, "and for God's sake keep your story straight!"

As he tried to impress that necessity on the girl his eyes left me.

I was perhaps five feet from him and his level gun.

A jump — not straight at him — off to one side — put me close.

The gun roared under my arm. I was surprised not to feel the bullet. It seemed that he *must* have hit me.

There wasn't a second shot.

I looped my right fist over as I jumped. It landed when I landed. It took him too high — up on the cheekbone — but it rocked him back a couple of steps.

I didn't know what had happened to his gun. It wasn't in his hand any more. I didn't stop to look for it. I was busy, crowding him back — not letting him set himself — staying close to him — driving at him with both hands.

He was a head taller than I, and had longer arms, but he wasn't any heavier or stronger. I suppose he hit me now and then as I hammered him across the room. He must have. But I didn't feel anything.

I worked him into a corner. Jammed him back in a corner with his legs cramped under him — which didn't give him much leverage to hit from. I got my left arm around his body, holding him where I wanted him. And I began to throw my right fist into him.

I liked that. His belly was flabby, and it got softer every time I hit it.

He was chopping at my face, but by digging my nose into his chest and holding it there I kept my beauty from being altogether ruined. Meanwhile I threw my right fist into him.

Then I became aware that Cara Kenbrook was moving around behind me; and I remembered the revolver that had fallen somewhere when I had charged Tennant. I didn't like that; but there was nothing I could do about it — except put more weight in my punches. My own gun, I thought, was in one of his pockets. But neither of us had time to hunt for it now.

Tennant's knees sagged the next time I hit him.

Once more, I said to myself, and then I'll step back, let him have one on the button, and watch him fall.

But I didn't get that far.

Something that I knew was the missing revolver struck me on the top of the head. An ineffectual blow — not clean enough to stun me — but it took the steam out of my punches.

Another.

They weren't hard, these taps, but to hurt a skull with a hunk of metal you don't have to hit it hard.

I tried to twist away from the next bump, and failed. Not only failed, but let Tennant wiggle away from me.

That was the end.

I wheeled on the girl just in time to take another rap on the head, and then one of Tennant's fists took me over the ear.

I went down in one of those falls that get pugs called quitters — my eyes were open, my mind was alive, but my legs and arms wouldn't lift me up from the floor.

Tennant took my own gun out of a pocket, and with it held on me, sat down in a Morris chair, to gasp for the air I had pounded out of him. The girl sat in another chair; and I, finding I could manage it, sat up in the middle of the floor and looked at them.

Tennant spoke, still panting.

"This is fine — all the signs of a struggle we need to make our story good!"

"If they don't believe you were in a fight," I suggested sourly, pressing my aching head with both hands, "you can strip and show them your little tummy."

"And you can show them this!"

He leaned down and split my lip with a punch that spread me on my back.

Anger brought my legs to life. I got up on them. Tennant moved around behind the Morris chair. My black gun was steady in his hand.

"Go easy," he warned me. "My story will work if I have to kill you — maybe work better."

That was sense. I stood still.

"Phone the police, Cara," he ordered.

She went out of the room, closing the door behind her; and all I could hear of her talk was a broken murmur.

Ten minutes later three uniformed policemen arrived. All three knew Tennant, and they treated him with respect. Tennant reeled off the story he and the girl had cooked up, with a few changes to take care of the shot that had been fired from the nickeled gun and our rough-house. She nodded her head vigorously whenever a policeman looked at her. Tennant turned both guns over to the white-haired sergeant in charge.

I didn't argue, didn't deny anything, but told the sergeant:

"I'm working with Detective-Sergeant O'Gar on a job. I want to talk to him over the phone and then I want you to take all three of us down to the detective bureau."

Tennant objected to that, of course; not because he expected to gain anything, but on the off-chance that he might. The white-haired sergeant looked from one of us to the other in puzzlement. Me, with my skinned face and split lip; Tennant, with a red lump under one eye where my first wallop had landed; and the girl, with most of the clothes above the waistline ripped off and a bruised cheek.

"It has a queer look, this thing," the sergeant decided aloud, "and I shouldn't wonder but what the detective bureau was the place for the lot of you."

One of the patrolmen went into the hall with me, and I got O'Gar on the phone at his home. It was nearly ten o'clock by now, and he was preparing for bed.

"Cleaning up the Gilmore murder," I told him. "Meet me at the Hall. Will you get hold of Kelly, the patrolman who found Gilmore, and bring him down there? I want him to look at some people."

"I will that," O'Gar promised, and I hung up.

The "wagon" in which the three policemen had answered Cara Kenbrook's call carried us down to the Hall of Justice, where we all went into the captain of detectives' office. McTighe, a lieutenant, was on duty.

I knew McTighe, and we were on pretty good terms, but I wasn't an influence in local politics, and Tennant was. I don't mean that McTighe would have knowingly helped Tennant frame me; but with me stacked up against the assistant city engineer, I knew who would get the benefit of any doubt there might be.

My head was thumping and roaring just now, with knots all over it where the girl had beaned me. I sat down, kept quiet, and nursed my head while Tennant and Cara Kenbrook, with a lot of details that they had not wasted on the uniformed men, told their tale and showed their injuries.

Tennant was talking — describing the terrible scene that had met his eyes when, drawn by the girl's screams, he had rushed into her apartment — when O'Gar came into the office. He recognized Tennant with a lifted eyebrow, and came over to sit beside me.

"What the hell is all this?" he muttered.

"A lovely mess," I whispered back. "Listen — in that nickel gun on the desk there's an empty shell. Get it for me."

He scratched his head doubtfully, listened to the next few words of Tennant's yarn, glanced at me out of the corner of his eye, and then went over to the desk and picked up the revolver.

McTighe looked at him — a sharp, questioning look.

"Something on the Gilmore killing," the detective-sergeant said, breaking the gun.

The lieutenant started to speak, changed his mind, and O'Gar brought the shell over and handed it to me.

"Thanks," I said, putting it in my pocket. "Now listen to my friend there. It's a good act, if you like it."

Tennant was winding up his history.

". . . Naturally a man who tried a thing like that on an unprotected woman would be yellow, so it wasn't very hard to handle him after I got his gun away from him. I hit him a couple of times, and he quit — begging me to stop, getting down on his knees. Then we called the police."

McTighe looked at me with eyes that were cold and hard. Tennant had made a believer of him, and not only of him — the police-sergeant and his two men were glowering at me. I suspected that even O'Gar — with whom I had been through a dozen storms — would have been half-convinced if the engineer hadn't added the neat touches about my kneeling.

"Well, what have *you* got to say?"

McTighe challenged me in a tone which suggested that it didn't make much difference what I said.

"I've got nothing to say about this dream," I said shortly. "I'm interested in the Gilmore murder — not in this stuff." I turned to O'Gar. "Is the patrolman here?"

The detective-sergeant went to the door, and called: "Oh, Kelly!"

Kelly came in — a big, straight-standing man, with iron-gray hair and an intelligent fat face.

"You found Gilmore's body?" I asked.

"I did."

I pointed at Cara Kenbrook.

"Ever see her before?"

His gray eyes studied her carefully.

"Not that I remember," he answered.

"Did she come up the street while you were looking at Gilmore, and go into the house he was lying in front of?"

"She did not."

I took out the empty shell O'Gar had got for me, and chucked it down on the desk in front of the patrolman.

"Kelly," I asked, "*why did you kill Gilmore?*"

Kelly's right hand went under his coat-tail at his hip.

I jumped for him.

Somebody grabbed me by the neck. Somebody else piled on my back. McTighe aimed a big fist at my face, but it missed. My legs had been suddenly kicked from under me, and I went down hard with men all over me.

When I was yanked to my feet again, big Kelly stood straight up by the desk, weighing his service revolver in his hand. His clear eyes met mine, and he laid the weapon on the desk. Then he unfastened his shield and put it with the gun.

"It was an accident," he said simply.

By this time the birds who had been manhandling me woke up to the fact that maybe they were missing part of the play — that maybe I wasn't a maniac. Hands dropped off me, and presently everybody was listening to Kelly.

He told his story with unhurried evenness, his eyes never wavering or clouding. A deliberate man, though unlucky.

"I was walkin' my beat that night, an' as I turned the corner of Jones into Pine I saw a man jump back from the steps of a buildin' into the vestibule. A burglar, I thought, an' cat-footed it down there. It was a dark vestibule, an' deep.

" 'Come out o' there!' I called, but there was no answer. I took my gun in my hand an' started up the steps. I saw him move just then, comin' out. An' then my foot slipped. It was worn smooth, the bottom step, an' my foot slipped. I fell forward, the gun went off, an' the bullet hit him. He had come out a ways by then, an' when the bullet hit him he toppled over frontwise, tumblin' down the steps onto the sidewalk.

"When I looked at him I saw it was Gilmore. I knew him to say 'howdy' to, an' he knew me — which is why he must o' ducked out of sight when he saw me comin' around the corner. He didn't want me to see him comin' out of a buildin' where I knew Mr. Tennant lived, I suppose, thinkin' I'd put two an' two together, an' maybe talk.

"I don't say that I did the right thing by lyin', but it didn't hurt anybody. It was an accident, but he was a man with a lot of friends up in high places, an' — accident or no — I stood a good chance of bein' broke, an' maybe sent over for a while. So I told my story the way you people know it. I couldn't say I'd seen anything suspicious without maybe puttin' the blame on some innocent party, an' I didn't want that. I'd made up my mind that if anybody was arrested for the murder, an' things looked bad for them, I'd come out an' say I'd done it. Home, you'll find a confession all written out — written out in case somethin' happened to me — so nobody else'd ever be blamed.

"That's why I had to say I'd never seen the lady here. I did see her — saw her go into the buildin' that night — the buildin' Gilmore had come out of. But I couldn't say so without makin' it look bad for her; so I lied. I could have thought up a better story if I'd had more time, I don't doubt, but I had to think quick. Anyways, I'm glad it's all over."

Kelly and the other uniformed policeman had left the office, which now held McTighe, O'Gar, Cara Kenbrook, Tennant and me. Tennant had crossed to my side, and was apologizing.

"I hope you'll let me square myself for this evening's work. But you know how it is when somebody you care for is in a jam. I'd have killed you if I had thought it would help Cara — on the level. Why didn't you tell us that you didn't suspect her?"

"But I did suspect the pair of you," I said. "It looked as if Kelly had to be the guilty one; but you people carried on so much that I began to feel doubtful. For a while it was funny — you thinking she had done it, and she thinking you had, though I suppose each had sworn to his or her innocence. But after a time it stopped being funny. You carried it too far."

"How did you rap to Kelly?" O'Gar, at my shoulder, asked.

"Miss Kenbrook was walking north on Leavenworth — and was half-way between Bush and Pine — when the shot was fired. She saw nobody, no cars, until she rounded the corner. Mrs. Gilmore, walking north on Jones, was about the same distance away when *she* heard the shot, and she saw nobody until she reached Pine Street. If Kelly had been telling the truth, she would have seen him on Jones Street. He said he didn't turn the corner until after the shot was fired.

"Either of the women could have killed Gilmore, but hardly both; and I doubted that either could have shot him and got away without running into Kelly or the other. Suppose both of them were telling the truth — what then? Kelly must have been lying! He was the logical suspect anyway — the nearest known person to the murdered man when the shot was fired.

"To back all this up, he had let Miss Kenbrook go into the apartment building at 3:00 in the morning, in front of which a man had just been killed, without questioning her or mentioning her in his report. That looked as if he *knew* who had done the killing. So I took a chance with the empty shell trick, it being a good bet that he would have thrown his away, and would think that —"

McTighe's heavy voice interrupted my explanation.

"How about this assault charge?" he asked, and had the decency to avoid my eye when I turned toward him with the others.

Tennant cleared his throat.

"Er — ah — in view of the way things have turned out, and knowing that Miss Kenbrook doesn't want the disagreeable publicity that would accompany an affair of this sort, why, I'd suggest that we drop the whole thing." He smiled brightly from McTighe to me. "You know nothing has gone on the records yet."

"Of course if Miss Kenbrookdoesn't want to press the charge," McTighe was saying, watching me out of the tail of his eye, "I suppose —"

"If everybody understands that the whole thing was a plant," I said, "and if the policemen who heard the story are brought in here now and told by Tennant and Miss Kenbrook that it was all a lie — then I'm willing to let it go at that. Otherwise, I won't stand for a hush-up."

"You're a damned fool!" O'Gar whispered. "Put the screws on them!"

But I shook my head. I didn't see any sense in making a lot of trouble for myself just to make some for somebody else — and suppose Tennant *proved* his story . . .

So the policemen were found, and brought into the office again, and told the truth.

And presently Tennant, the girl, and I were walking together like three old friends through the corridors toward the door, Tennant still asking me to let him make amends for the evening's work.

"You've *got* to let me do something!" he insisted. "It's only right!"

His hand dipped into his coat, and came out with a thick bill-fold.

"Here," he said, "let me —"

We were going, at that happy moment, down the stone vestibule steps that lead to Kearny Street — six or seven steps there are.

"No," I said, "let me —"

He was on the next to the top step, when I reached up and let go.

He settled in a rather limp pile at the bottom.

Leaving his empty-faced lady love to watch over him, I strolled up through Portsmouth Square toward a restaurant where the steaks come thick.

In our September 1944 issue we brought you "The Case of the Kidnaped Pekinese," the first of the Twelve Modern Labors of Hercules. In the event that you missed it, let us explain that Agatha Christie conceived the brilliant idea of writing a saga of Herculean labors in which her modern Hercules — Hercule Poirot — emulates his legendary namesake.

Here, then, is another mythological tale brought completely up to date and (so to speak) detectivized. In point of classical sequence, this story is the eighth in the cycle of Labors — the capture of the mares of Diomedes, those wild horses of Thrace that ate human flesh. In Miss Christie's modern symbolism the "cannibalistic" quadrupeds become "flesh-devouring" bipeds, and it is Poirot's Herculean task to capture these modern eaters of human flesh — the drug peddlers.

So, again, Miss Christie invests a Poirot exploit with a larger meaning. As in the previous Labor of Hercules, there is a broader humanitarian aspect. Poirot, like the millions of allied men of good will the world over, is fighting those most despicable of criminals who cause "the slow death of the mind and the spirit, the destroying of all that is true and fine in a human being."

The Labors of Hercules:

The Horses of Diomedes, or

THE CASE OF THE DRUG PEDDLER

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

The telephone rang. "Hullo, Poirot, is that you?" Hercule Poirot recognized the voice as that of young Dr. Stoddart. He liked Michael Stoddart, liked the shy friendliness of his grin, was amused by his naive interest in crime, and respected him as a hard-working and shrewd man in his chosen profession.

"I don't like bothering you —" the voice went on and hesitated.

"But something is bothering *you*?" suggested Hercule Poirot acutely.

"Exactly." Michael Stoddart's voice sounded relieved. "Hit it in one!"

"*Eh bien*, what can I do for you, my friend?"

Stoddart sounded diffident. He stammered a little when he answered.

"I suppose it would be awful c-c-cheek if I asked you to come round. Perhaps you're busy. . . . B-b-but I'm in a bit of a j-j-jam."

"Certainly I will come. To your house?"

"No — as a matter of fact I'm at the Mews that runs along behind. Conningby Mews. The number is 17. Could you really come? I'd be no end grateful."

"I arrive immediately," replied Hercule Poirot.

Hercule Poirot walked along the dark Mews looking up at the numbers. It was past one o'clock in the morning and for the most part the Mews appeared to have gone to bed, though there were still lights in one or two windows.

As he reached 17, its door opened and Dr. Stoddart stood looking out.

"Good man!" he said. "Come up, will you?"

A small ladderlike stairway led to the upper floor. Here, on the right, was a fairly big room, furnished with divans, rugs, triangular silver cushions and large numbers of bottles and glasses.

Everything was more or less in confusion, cigarette ash was everywhere and there were many broken glasses.

"Ha!" said Hercule Poirot. "*Mon cher Watson*, I deduce that there has been here a party!"

"There's been a party all right," said Stoddart grimly. "Some party, I should say!"

"You did not, then, attend it yourself?"

"No, I'm here strictly in my professional capacity."

"What happened?"

Stoddart said: "This place belongs to a woman called Patience Grace — Mrs. Patience Grace."

"It sounds," said Poirot "a charming old-world name."

"There's nothing charming or old-world about Mrs. Grace. She's good-looking in a tough sort of way. She's got through a couple of husbands, and now she's got a boy friend whom she suspects of trying to run out on her. They started this party on drink and they finished it on dope — cocaine, to be exact. Cocaine is stuff that starts off making you feel just grand and with everything in the garden lovely. It peps you up and you feel you can do twice as much as you usually do. Take too much of it and you get violent mental excitement, delusions and delirium. Mrs. Grace had a violent quarrel with her boy friend, an unpleasant person by the name of Hawker. Result, he walked out on her then and there, and she leaned out of the window and took a pot shot at him with a brand-new revolver that someone had been fool enough to give her."

Hercule Poirot's eyebrows rose.

"Did she hit him?"

"Not she! Bullet went several yards wide, I should say. What she *did* hit was a miserable loafer who was creeping along the Mews looking in the dustbins. Got him through the fleshy part of the arm. He raised Hell, of course, and the crowd hustled him in here quick, got the wind up with all the blood that was spilling out of him and came round and got me."

"Yes?"

"I patched him up all right. It wasn't serious. Then one or two of the men got busy on him and in the end he consented to accept a couple of five-pound notes and say no more about it. Suited him all right, poor devil. Marvellous stroke of luck."

"And you?"

"I had a bit more work to do. Mrs. Grace herself was in raving hysterics by that time. I gave her a shot of something and packed her off to bed. There was another girl who'd more or less passed out — quite young she was, and I attended to her, too. By that time everyone was slinking off as fast as they could leave."

He paused.

"And then," said Poirot, "you had time to think over the situation."

"Exactly," said Stoddart. "If it was an ordinary drunken binge, well, that would be the end of it. But dope's different."

"You are quite sure of your facts?"

"Oh, absolutely. No mistaking it. It's cocaine all right. I found some in a lacquer box — they snuff it up, you know. Question is: where does it come from? I remembered that you'd been talking the other day about a big new wave of drug-taking and the increase of drug addicts."

Hercule Poirot nodded. He said: "The police will be interested in this party tonight."

Michael Stoddart said unhappily: "That's just it. . . ."

Poirot looked at him with suddenly awakened interest. He said:

"But you — you are not very anxious that the police should be interested?"

Michael Stoddart mumbled: "Innocent people get mixed up in things . . . hard lines on them."

"Is it Mrs. Patience Grace for whom you are so solicitous?"

"Good Lord, no. She's as hard-boiled as they make them!"

Hercule Poirot said gently: "It is, then, the other one — the girl?"

Dr. Stoddart said: "Of course, she's hard-boiled, too, in a way. I mean, she'd *describe* herself as hard-boiled. But she's really just very young — a bit wild and all that — but it's just kid foolishness. She gets mixed up in a racket like this because she thinks it's smart or modern or something like that."

A faint smile came to Poirot's lips. He said softly: "This girl, you have met her before tonight?"

Michael Stoddart nodded. He looked very young and embarrassed.

"Ran across her in Mertonshire. At the Hunt Ball. Her father's a retired General — blood and thunder, shoot 'em down — pukka Sahib — all that sort of thing. There are four daughters and they are all a bit wild — driven to it with a father like that, I should say. And it's a bad part of the county where they live — armaments works nearby and a lot of money — none of the old-fashioned country feeling — a rich crowd and most of them pretty vicious. The girls have got in with a bad set."

Hercule Poirot looked at him thoughtfully for some minutes. Then he said: "I perceive now why you desired my presence. You want me to take the affair in hand?"

"Would you? I feel I ought to do something about it — but I confess I'd like to keep Sheila Grant out of the limelight if I could."

"That can be managed, I fancy. I

should like to see the young lady."

"Come along."

He led the way out of the room. A voice called fretfully from a door opposite.

"Doctor — for God's sake, doctor, I'm going crazy."

Stoddart went into the room. Poirot followed. It was a bedroom in a complete state of chaos — powder spilled on the floor — pots and jars everywhere, clothes flung about. On the bed was a woman with unnaturally blonde hair and a vacant, vicious face. She called out:

"I've got insects crawling all over me . . . I have. I swear I have. I'm going mad. . . . For God's sake, give me a shot of something."

Dr. Stoddart stood by the bed, his tone was soothing — professional.

Hercule Poirot went quietly out of the room. There was another door opposite him. He opened that.

It was a tiny room — a mere slip of a room — plainly furnished. On the bed a slim girlish figure lay motionless.

Hercule Poirot tiptoed to the side of the bed and looked down upon the girl.

Dark hair, a long pale face — and — yes, young — very young. . . .

A gleam of white showed between the girl's lids. Her eyes opened — startled, frightened eyes. She stared, sat up, tossing her head in an effort to throw back the thick mane of blue black hair. She shrank away a little — as a wild animal shrinks when it is suspicious of a stranger who offers it food.

She said — and her voice was young and thin and abrupt:

"Who the Hell are you?"

"Do not be afraid, Mademoiselle."

"Where's Dr. Stoddart?"

That young man came into the room at that minute. The girl said, with a note of relief in her voice:

"Oh, there you are! Who's this?"

"This is a friend of mine, Miss Grant. How are you feeling now?"

The girl said weakly: "Awful. Why did I take that foul stuff?"

Stoddart said drily: "I shouldn't do it again, if I were you."

"I — I shan't."

Hercule Poirot said: "Who gave it to you?"

Her eyes widened, her upper lip twitched a little. She said:

"It was here — at the party. We all tried it. It — it was wonderful at first."

Hercule Poirot said gently: "But who brought it here?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know. . . . It might have been Tony — Tony Hawker. But I don't really know anything about it."

Poirot said gently: "Is it the first time you have taken cocaine, Mademoiselle?"

She nodded.

"You'd better make it the last," said Stoddart brusquely.

"Yes — I suppose so — but it was rather marvellous."

"Now look here, Sheila Grant," said Stoddart. "I'm a doctor and I know what I'm talking about. Once start this drug-taking racket and you'll land yourself in unbelievable misery. I've seen some and I know. Drugs ruin people, body and soul. Drink's a gentle little picnic compared to drugs. Cut it right out from this minute. Believe me, it isn't funny! What do you think your father would say to tonight's business?"

"Father?" Sheila Grant's voice rose. "Father?" She began to laugh. "I can just see Father's face! He mustn't know about it. He'd have seven fits!"

"And quite right too," said Stoddart.

"Doctor — doctor —" the long wail of Mrs. Grace's voice came from the other room.

Stoddart muttered something uncomplimentary under his breath and went out of the room.

Sheila Grant stared at Poirot again. She was puzzled. She said: "Who are you, really? You weren't at the party."

"No, I was not at the party. I am a friend of Dr. Stoddart's."

"You're a doctor, too? You don't look like a doctor."

"My name," said Poirot, contriving as usual to make the simple statement sound like the curtain line of the first act of a play, "my name is Hercule Poirot. . . ."

The statement did not fail of its effect. Occasionally Poirot was distressed to find that a callous younger generation had never heard of him. But it was evident that Sheila Grant had heard of him. She was flabbergasted — dumfounded. She stared and stared. . . .

It has been said, with or without justification for the statement, that everyone has an aunt in Torquay.

It has also been said that everyone has at least a second cousin in Mertonshire. Mertonshire is a reasonable distance from London; it has hunting, shooting and fishing; it has several very picturesque but slightly self-conscious villages; it has a good system of railways and a new arterial road facilitates motoring to and from the Metropolis. Servants object to it less than they do to other, more rural, portions of the British Isles. As a result, it is practically impossible to live in Mertonshire unless you have an income that runs into four figures, and what with income tax and one thing and another, five figures is better.

Hercule Poirot, being a foreigner, had no second cousins in the county, but he had acquired by now a large circle of friends and he had no difficulty in getting himself invited for a visit in that part of the world. He had, moreover, selected as hostess, a dear lady whose chief delight was exercising her tongue on the subject of her neighbors — the only drawback being that Poirot had to submit to hearing a great deal about people in whom he had no interest whatever, before coming to the subject of the people he was interested in.

"The Grants? Oh, yes, there are four of them. Four girls. I don't wonder the poor old General can't control them. What can a man do with four girls?" Lady Carmichael's hands flew up eloquently. Poirot said: "What indeed?" and the lady continued.

"Used to be a great disciplinarian in his regiment, so he told me. But those girls defeat him. Not like when I was young. Old Colonel Sandys was such a martinet, I remember, that his poor daughters —"

(Long excursion into the trials of the Sandys girls and other friends of Lady Carmichael's youth.)

"Mind you," said Lady Carmichael, reverting to her first theme, "I don't say there's anything really wrong about those girls. Just high spirits — and getting in with an undesirable set. It's not what it used to be down here. The oddest people come here. There's no what you might call "county" left. It's all money, money, money, nowadays. And you do hear the oddest stories! Who did you say? Anthony Hawker? Oh, yes, I know him. What I call a very unpleasant young man. But apparently rolling in money. He comes down here to hunt — and he gives parties — very lavish parties — and rather peculiar parties, too, if one is to believe all one is told — not that I ever do because I do think people are so ill-natured. They always believe the worst. You know, it's become quite a fashion to say a person drinks or takes drugs. Somebody said to me the other day that young girls were natural inebriates, and really I don't think that was a nice thing to say at all. And if anyone's at all peculiar or vague in their manner, everyone says "drugs" and that's unfair, too. They say it about Mrs. Larkin and though I don't care for the woman, I do really think it's nothing more than absent-mindedness. She's a great friend of your Anthony Hawker, and that's why, if you ask me, she's so down on the Grant girls — says they're man-eaters! I daresay they do run after men a bit, but why not? It's natural, after all. And they're good-looking pieces, every one of them."

Poirot interjected a question.

"Mrs. Larkin? My dear man, it's no good asking me *who* she is? Who's anybody nowadays? They say she rides well and she's obviously well off. Husband was something in the city. He's dead, not divorced. She's not been here very long, came here just after the Grants did. I've always thought she —"

Old Lady Carmichael stopped. Her mouth opened, her eyes bulged. Leaning forward she struck Poirot a sharp blow across the knuckles with a paper-cutter she was holding. Disregarding his wince of pain she exclaimed excitedly:

"Why, of course! So *that's* why you're down here! You nasty deceitful creature, I insist on your telling me all about it."

"But what is it I am to tell you all about?"

Lady Carmichael aimed another playful blow which Poirot avoided deftly.

"Don't be an oyster, Hercule Poirot! I can see your moustaches quivering. Of course, it's *crime* brings you down here — and you're just pumping me shamelessly! Now let me see, can it be murder? Who's died lately? Only old Louisa Gilmore and she was eighty-five and had dropsy, too. Can't be her. Poor Leo Staverton broke his neck in the hunting field and he's all done up in plaster — that can't be it. Perhaps it isn't murder. What a pity! I can't remember any special jewel robberies lately. . . . Perhaps it's just a criminal you're tracking down. . . . Is it Beryl Larkin? Did she poison her husband? Perhaps it's remorse that makes her so vague."

"Madame, Madame," cried Hercule Poirot. "You go too fast."

"Nonsense. You're up to something, Hercule Poirot."

"Are you acquainted with the classics, Madame?"

"What have the classics got to do with it?"

"They have this to do with it. I emulate my great predecessor Hercules. One of the Labors of Hercules was the taming of the wild horses of Diomedes."

"Don't tell me you came down here to train horses — at your age — and always wearing patent leather shoes! You don't look to me as though you'd ever been on a horse in your life!"

"The horses, Madame, are symbolic. They were wild horses who ate human flesh."

"How very unpleasant of them. I always do think these ancient Greeks and Romans are very unpleasant. I can't think why clergymen are so fond of quoting from the classics — for one thing one never understands what they mean and it always seems to me that the whole subject matter of the classics is very unsuitable for clergymen. So much incest, and all those statues with nothing on — not that I mind that myself, but you know what clergymen are — quite upset if girls come to church with no stockings on — let me see, where was I?"

"I am not quite sure."

"I suppose, you wretch, you just won't tell me if Mrs. Larkin murdered her husband? Or perhaps Anthony Hawker is the Brighton trunk murderer?"

She looked at at him hopefully, but Hercule Poirot's face remained impassive.

"It might be forgery," speculated Lady Carmichael. "I did see Mrs. Larkin in the Bank the other morning and she'd just cashed a fifty pound check to self — it seemed to me at the time a lot of money to want in cash. Oh, no, that's the wrong way round — if she was a forger she would be paying it in, wouldn't she? Hercule Poirot, if you sit there looking like an owl and saying nothing, I shall throw something at you."

"You must have a little patience," said Hercule Poirot.

Ashley Lodge, the residence of General Grant, was not a large house. It was situated on the side of a hill, had good stables, and a straggling, rather neglected, garden.

Inside, it was what a house agent would have described as "fully furnished." Cross-legged Buddhas leered down from convenient niches, brass Benares trays and tables encumbered the floor space. Processional elephants garnished the mantelpiece and more tortured brass work adorned the walls.

In the midst of this Anglo-Indian home from home, General Grant was ensconced in a large shabby armchair with his leg, swathed in bandages, reposing on another chair.

"Gout," he explained. "Ever had the gout, Mr. — er — Poirot? Makes a feller damned bad tempered! All my father's fault. Drank port all his life — so did my grandfather. It's played the deuce with me. Have a drink? Ring that bell, will you, for that feller of mine?"

A turbaned servant appeared. General Grant addressed him as Abdul and ordered him to bring the whisky and soda. When it came he poured out such a generous portion that Poirot was moved to protest.

"Can't join you, I'm afraid, Mr. Poirot." The General eyed the tantalus sadly. "My doctor wallah says it's poison to me to touch the stuff. Don't suppose he knows for a minute. Ignorant chaps, doctors. Spoilsports. Enjoy knocking a man off his food and drink and putting him on some pap like steamed fish. Steamed fish — pah!"

In his indignation the General incautiously moved his foot and uttered a yelp of agony at the twinge that ensued. He apologized for his language. "Like a bear with a sore head, that's what I am. My girls give me a wide berth when I've got an attack of gout. Don't know that I blame them. You've met one of 'em, I hear."

"I have had that pleasure, yes. You have several daughters, have you not?"

"Four," said the General gloomily. "Not a boy amongst 'em. Four blinking girls. Bit of a thought, these days."

"They are all four very charming, I hear."

"Not too bad — not too bad. Mind you, I never know what they're up to. You can't control girls nowadays. Lax times — too much laxity everywhere. What can a man do? Can't lock 'em up, can I?"

"They are popular in the neighborhood, I gather."

"Some of the old cats don't like 'em," said General Grant. "A good deal of mutton dressed as lamb round here. A man's got to be careful. One of those blue-eyed widows nearly caught me — used to come round here purring like a kitten. '*Poor General Grant — you must have had such an interesting life.*' " The General winked and placed one finger against his nose. "A little bit too obvious, Mr. Poirot. Oh, well, take it all round, I suppose it's not a bad part of the world. A bit go-ahead and noisy for my taste. I liked the country when it was the country — not all this motoring and jazz and that blasted eternal radio. I won't have one here and the girls know it. A man's got a right to a little peace in his own home."

Gently Poirot led the conversation round to Anthony Hawker.

"Hawker? Hawker? Don't know him. Yes, I do, though. Nasty looking fellow with his eyes too close together. Never trust a man who can't look you in the face."

"He is a friend, is he not, of your daughter Sheila?"

"Sheila? Wasn't aware of it. Girls never tell me anything." The bushy eyebrows came down over the nose — the piercing blue eyes looked out of the red face straight into Hercule Poirot's. "Look here, Mr. Poirot, what's all this about? Mind telling me what you've come to see me about?"

Poirot said slowly: "That would be difficult — perhaps I hardly know myself. I would say only this: your daughter Sheila — perhaps all your daughters — have made some undesirable friends."

"Got into a bad set, have they? I was a bit afraid of that. One hears a word dropped here and there." He looked pathetically at Poirot. "But what am I to do, Mr. Poirot? What am I to do?"

Poirot shook his head perplexedly.

General Grant went on. "What's wrong with the bunch they're running with?"

Poirot replied by another question. "Have you noticed, General Grant, that any of your daughters have been moody, excited — then depressed — nervy — uncertain in their tempers?"

"Damme, sir, you're talking like a patent medicine. No, I haven't noticed anything of the kind."

"That is fortunate," said Poirot gravely.

"What the devil is the meaning of all this, sir?"

"Drugs!"

"WHAT!"

The word came in a roar.

Poirot said: "An attempt is being made to induce your daughter Sheila to become a drug addict. The cocaine habit is very quickly formed. A week or two will suffice. Once the habit is formed, an addict will pay anything, do anything, to get a further supply of the drug. You can realize what a rich haul the person who peddles that drug can make."

He listened in silence to the spluttering wrathful blasphemies that poured from the old man's lips. Then, as the fires died down, with a final choice description of exactly what he, the General, would do to the blinkety blinkety son of a blank when he got hold of him, Hercule Poirot said:

"We have first, as your so admirable Mrs. Beeton says, to catch the hare. Once we have caught our drug peddler, I will turn him over to you with the greatest pleasure, General."

He got up, tripped over a heavily carved small table, regained his balance with a clutch at the General, murmured:

"A thousand pardons, and may I beg of you, General — you understand, *beg* of you — to say nothing whatever about all this to your daughters."

"What? I'll have the truth out of

them, that's what I'll have!"

"That is exactly what you will not have. All you will get is a lie."

"But damme, sir —"

"I assure you, General Grant, you must hold your tongue. That is vital — you understand? *Vital!*"

"Oh, well, have it your own way," growled the old soldier.

He was mastered but not convinced.

Hercule Poirot picked his way carefully through the Benares brass and went out.

Mrs. Larkin's room was full of people.

Mrs. Larkin herself was mixing cocktails at a side table. She was a tall woman with pale auburn hair rolled into the back of her neck. Her eyes were greenish-grey with big black pupils. She moved easily, with a kind of sinister grace. She looked as though she were in the early thirties. Only a close scrutiny revealed the lines at the corners of the eyes and hinted that she was ten years older than her looks.

Hercule Poirot had been brought here by a brisk middle-aged woman, a friend of Lady Carmichael's. He found himself given a cocktail and further directed to take one to a girl sitting in the window. The girl was small and fair — her face was pink and white and suspiciously angelic. Her eyes, Hercule Poirot noticed at once, were alert and suspicious.

He said: "To your continued good health, Mademoiselle."

She nodded and drank. Then she said abruptly: "You know my sister."

"Your sister? Ah, you are then one of the Miss Grants?"

"I'm Pam Grant."

"And where is your sister today?"

"She's out hunting. Ought to be back soon."

"I met your sister in London."

"I know."

"She told you?"

Pam Grant nodded. She said abruptly: "Was Sheila in a jam?"

"So she did not tell you everything?"

The girl shook her head. She asked: "Was Tony Hawker there?"

Before Poirot could answer, the door opened and Hawker and Sheila Grant came in. They were in hunting kit and Sheila had a streak of mud on her cheek.

"Hullo, people, we've come in for a drink. Tony's flask is dry."

Poirot murmured: "Talk of the angels —"

Pam Grant snapped: "Devils, you mean."

Poirot said sharply: "Is it like that?"

Beryl Larkin had come forward. She said: "Here you are, Tony. Tell me about the run? Did you draw Gelert's Copse?"

She skillfully led him away with her to a sofa near the fireplace. Poirot saw him turn his head and glance at Sheila before he went.

Sheila had seen Poirot. She hesitated a minute, then came over to the two in the window. She said abruptly:

"So it *was* you who came to the

house yesterday?"

"Did your father tell you?"

She shook her head.

"Abdul described you. I — guessed."

Pam exclaimed: "You went to see Father?"

Poirot said: "Ah — yes. We have — some mutual friends."

Pam said sharply: "I don't believe it."

"What do you not believe? That your father and I could have a mutual friend?"

The girl flushed.

"Don't be stupid. I meant — that wasn't really your reason —"

She turned on her sister.

"Why don't you say something, Sheila?"

Sheila started. She said: "It wasn't — it wasn't anything to with Tony Hawker?"

"Why should it be?" asked Poirot.

She flushed and went back across the room to the others.

Pam said with sudden vehemence but in a lowered voice: "I don't like that man. There — there's something sinister about him — and about her — Mrs. Larkin, I mean. Look at them now."

Poirot followed her glance.

Hawker's head was close to that of his hostess. He appeared to be soothing her. Her voice rose for a minute.

"— but I can't wait. I want it *now!*"

Poirot said with a little smile: "*Les femmes* — whatever it is — they always want it now, do they not?"

But Pam Grant did not respond. Her face was cast down. She was nervously pleating and repleating her tweed skirt.

Poirot murmured conversationally: "You are quite a different type from your sister, Mademoiselle."

She flung her head up, impatient of banalities. She said: "M. Poirot. What's the stuff he's been giving Sheila? What is it that's been making her — different?"

He looked straight at her. He asked: "Have you ever taken cocaine, Miss Grant?"

She shook her head.

"Oh, no! So that's it? Cocaine? But isn't that very dangerous?"

Sheila Grant had come over to them, a fresh drink in her hand. She said: "What's dangerous?"

Poirot said: "We are talking of the effects of drug-taking. Of the slow death of the mind and spirit, the destroying of all that is true and fine in a human being."

Sheila Grant caught her breath. The drink in her hand swayed and spilled a little on the floor. Poirot went on:

"Dr. Stoddart has, I think, made clear to you just what that death in life entails. It is so easily done — so hard to undo. The person who deliberately profits from the degradation and misery of other people is a vampire preying on flesh and blood."

He turned away. Behind him he heard Pam Grant's voice say: "Sheila!" and he caught a whisper — a faint whisper — from Sheila Grant. It was so low he hardly heard it.

"*The flask* . . ."

Hercule Poirot said good-bye to Mrs. Larkin and went out into the hall. On the hall table was a hunting flask lying with a crop and a hat. Poirot picked it up. There were initials on it. A. H.

Poirot murmured to himself: "Tony's flask is empty?"

He shook it gently. There was no sound of liquor. He unscrewed the top.

Tony Hawker's flask was not empty. It was full — of white powder. . . .

Hercule Poirot stood on the terrace of Lady Carmichael's house and pleaded with a girl.

He said: "You are very young, Mademoiselle. It is my belief that you have not known, not really known, what it is you and your sisters have been doing. You have been feeding, like the mares of Diomedes, on human flesh."

Sheila shuddered and gave a sob. She said: "It sounds horrible, put like that. And yet it's true! I never realized it until that evening in London when Dr. Stoddart talked to me. He was so grave — so sincere. I saw what an awful thing it was I had been doing. . . . Before that I thought it was — Oh! rather like drink after hours — something people would pay to get, but not something that really *mattered* very much!"

Poirot said: "And now?"

Sheila Grant said: "I'll do anything you say. I — I'll talk to the others. I don't suppose Dr. Stoddart will ever speak to me again."

"On the contrary," said Poirot. "Both Dr. Stoddart and I are prepared to help you all in every way in our power to start afresh. You can trust us. But one thing must be done. There is one person who must be destroyed — destroyed utterly, and only you and your sisters can destroy him. It is your evidence and your evidence alone that will convict him."

"You mean — my father?"

"Not your father, Mademoiselle. Did I not tell you that Hercule Poirot knows everything? Your photograph was easily recognized in official quarters. You are Sheila Kelly — a persistent young shoplifter who was sent to a reformatory some years ago. When you came out of that reformatory, you were approached by the man who calls himself General Grant and offered this post — the post of a 'daughter'. There would be plenty of money, plenty of fun, a good time. All you had to do was to introduce the "snuff" to your friends, always pretending that someone else had given it to you. Your 'sisters' were in the same case as yourself."

He paused and said: "Come now, Mademoiselle, this man must be exposed and sentenced. After that —"

"Yes, afterwards?"

Poirot coughed. He said with a smile: "You shall be dedicated to the service of the Gods. . . ."

Michael Stoddart stared at Poirot in amazement. He said:

"General Grant? General *Grant*?"

"Precisely, *mon cher*. The whole *mise en scène*, you know, was what you would call 'bogus'. The Buddhas, the Benares brass, the Indian servant! And the gout, too! It is out of date, the gout. It is old old gentlemen who have the gout — not the fathers of young ladies of nineteen.

"Moreover I made quite certain. As I go out, I stumble, I clutch at the gouty foot. So perturbed is the gentleman by what I have been saying that he did not even notice. Oh, yes, he is very very bogus, that General! *Tout de même*, it is a smart idea. The retired Anglo-Indian General, the well-known comic figure with a liver and a choleric temper, he settles down — not amongst other retired Anglo-Indian Army officers — oh, no, he goes to a *milieu* far too expensive for the usual retired Army man. There are rich people there, people from London, an excellent field to market the goods. And who would suspect four lively attractive young girls? If anything comes out, they will be considered as victims — that for a certainty!"

"What was your idea exactly when you went to see the old devil? Did you want to put the wind up him?"

"Yes. I wanted to see *what would happen*. I had not long to wait. The girls had their orders. Anthony Hawker, actually one of their victims, was to be the scapegoat. Sheila was to tell me about the flask in the hall. She nearly could not bring herself to do so — but the other girl rapped out an angry 'Sheila' at her and she just faltered it out."

Michael Stoddart got up and paced up and down. He said: "You know, I'm not going to lose sight of that girl. I've got a pretty sound theory about these adolescent criminal tendencies. If you look back into the home life, you nearly always find —"

Poirot interrupted him. He said: "*Mon cher*, I have the deepest respect for your science. I have no doubt that your theories will work admirably where Miss Sheila Kelly is concerned."

"The others, too."

"The others, perhaps. It may be. The only one I am sure about is the little Sheila. You will tame her, not a doubt of it! In truth, she eats out of your hand already. . . ."

Flushing, Michael Stoddart said:

"What nonsense you talk, Poirot."

In "Rumor, Inc." (his fourth appearance in EQMM), Nick Noble the dipso-detective will remind you of another great short-story sleuth, Baroness Orczy's Old Man in the Corner. Nearly half a century ago, the Old Man in the Corner sat in the Norfolk Street branch of the Aërated Bread Company's chain of tea-shops in London; today Nick sits in the third booth on the left of the Chula Negra café, a cheap Mexican restaurant in Los Angeles. Nearly a generation and a half ago, the Old Man in the Corner subsisted on a remarkably simple diet — cheese cake and milk; today Nick subsists on an even simpler diet — sherry. More than four decades ago, the Old Man in the Corner was the perfect armchair detective of fiction, never visiting the scene of the crime, never examining the evidence, never questioning the suspects; in "Rumor, Inc." Nick is the perfect armchair detective — he too never rises from his table. The Old Man had his constant listener — Polly Burton of the British Press; the old Nick has his constant questioner — Lieutenant MacDonald of the Los Angeles Police Department. The Old Man, so pale, so thin, fidgeted incessantly with a piece of string, tying and untying complicated knots; the old Nick, even paler, even thinner, also unties complicated knots — the strange and intricate knots that Lieutenant MacDonald brings to his "man of last resort," the wine-blooded, fly-swatting habitué of La Chula Negra . . .

RUMOR, INC.

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

"This isn't my field," Lieutenant MacDonald said. "I'm homicide, and this — well, I guess it's properly the F. B. I.'s job. But there's an open season on all evil in times like these."

"In times like these," Nick Noble repeated. "Tuesday they ran out of sherry . . ." He cradled his waterglass of wine between his thin white hands as though it might run out again.

MacDonald controlled his smile. He knew the past history that had turned the most brilliant detective on the Los Angeles police force into a wino living out his days in this cheap Mexican restaurant (La Chula Negra, third booth on the left); and it wasn't funny.

"I'm glad there's sherry today," he said. "Because I need that wonderful sorting- and filing-machine you call a brain."

Nick Noble brushed the non-existent fly from his nose and said, "I'm listening."

"I'll condense it as much as possible. I ran onto this lead in the Steiner killing. He was shot by a jealous husband — his murder's irrelevant except that it brought me in. I was with him when he was dying, and he wanted to talk. It sounded like babbling and nobody else took it seriously, but I . . ." MacDonald paused, then asked abruptly, "Nick, where do you think rumors come from?"

"Minds without patterns."

This time MacDonald did smile. "Patterns are your obsession, aren't they? But I don't mean common-or-garden rumors. I mean big stuff — rumors that hurt the war effort. Where do they come from?"

"Goebbels," Nick Noble said tersely.

MacDonald nodded. "But there's got to be a go-between, there's got to be someone to plant them here. More than one. An organization — Rumor, Incorporated. And that's what Steiner was trying to tell me. He'd been in it and broken away and still was afraid to inform on it. But now that he was dying anyway . . . It's a woman that runs it; I did gather that much. But when I tried to pin him down on her name, he got cagey. He was feeling better; he thought he might live —

"So he said to me in that odd voice of his — I never did learn what his past was, but there was a trace of education and culture buried somewhere under his toughness — he looked up and said 'Detective, ain't you? Smart guy, huh? Want to know her name? O. K. Horace'll tell you.'

"He died then," MacDonald went on. "They say sometimes you do feel better just before . . . I went through all his papers and addresses. No Horace anywhere. I checked roughly on all the women's names I found. Most of them I was able to eliminate almost at once. I've got four left." He shoved a sheet of paper across the table.

Nick Noble picked it up and read:

Margaret Harkness, M. D., 35, 1548 Wilshire Blvd., L. A.

Lizette Turnbull, welder, 22, 1230 La Corona Dr., Glendale

Lally Chilton, actress (?), 28, 4916 Franklin Ave., Hollywood

Mrs. Odile Fancourt, 31, 5527 Cashmere Rd., L. A. Unhesitatingly his finger pointed to the third name.

"That question mark?" MacDonald said. "She hasn't worked for months, but she lives in style. However, there might be a simpler explanation than a rumor ring."

Nick Noble shook his head. "That's your girl."

MacDonald had hardly expected so prompt an answer, even from Nick Noble. "Why?"

"Horace. Lally. What's it apt to stand for? Lalage. Girl in Horace's verses. Other names couldn't be. So — 'Horace'll tell you' her name."

MacDonald grinned. "So I'm a dope as usual. And I'm laying any odds — or should it be odes? — that you're right. The next thing indicated is a little chat with Miss Chilton; and if you are right, Nick, by God there'll be fewer rumors from now on."

The pay phone in the Chula Negra is up front by the cashier's desk. MacDonald looked up the Chilton number, noted it on his paper, and dialed.

Even on the phone the voice that answered did something to the base of his spine. He had heard rich throaty voices before, but never one that made him wonder how he could carry on an interrogation if his caudal vertebrae went all unprofessional at the mere sound of a "Hello."

He managed to say "Miss Chilton?" and she said "Yes." That made three syllables he'd heard in that voice, and each was more potent than the last.

In silence he swore at himself and aloud he said, "Joe Steiner gave me your number. He said maybe you could throw some work my way."

Across the wire he heard a buzzing, and Lalage Chilton said, "Hold on just a minute. There's the doorbell."

He held on. He heard the *chink* of the phone being set down, then a step and the click of the doorknob. He heard the door swing open and Lalage say, "Why, Mr. Patrick! How —"

Then he heard the shot and the sound of Lalage's body slumping to the floor.

The expensive chastity of the Hollywood apartment must have provided the ideal contrast to the lush exuberance of Lalage Chilton. She still dominated it. Even her corpse was more vibrantly alive than any woman MacDonald had ever known.

He tried to keep his mind on the contents of her desk. But even though the police doctor now bent over her head and hid them, her open eyes still stared into his mind. They were violet. He'd read about that and never believed it, but they were. There was a scent in the air that he half identified as Chanel number something; but it still puzzled him until he realized that the other factor was simply the odor of Lalage's flesh. That would change soon . . .

The doctor said as he rose, "Shot through the heart at close range — powder burns on left breast. Probably a tallish man — about your height. Some time in the past hour. But you know the time better than I do, if you heard it."

MacDonald said "Thanks" and concentrated on the desk. It was worth concentration. It was, in fact, a gold mine.

Lalage Chilton had been a methodical woman. There was a file of employers, a file of underlings, a file of material. The employers went back to such names as Wiedemann and Ferenz, which the F. B. I. knew very well by now, and up to some new names which the F. B. I. would soon know equally well. The underlings . . . it was doubtful what charges might be brought against them, but they'd probably repay watching.

The material was carefully filed by subject, each card bearing a set of symbols which MacDonald soon deciphered as meaning the hirelings assigned to spread that particular rumor and the places and people they were to work on. Such diverse statements as *No real need for West Coast gas rationing* and *Onion shortage due to government bungling* were patently aimed at different economic and mental levels.

MacDonald felt hatred and contempt and a sort of bitter admiration for the callously capable Lalage. And at the same time he saw the violet eyes and smelled the odor that was not Chanel (but would soon be charnel) and was glad that he had met her only when she was dead and almost disarmed.

"The sergeant tells me," the doctor said, "you heard her call her killer by name. That's a break."

MacDonald said, "Is it?" He picked up the address book. "There's two Patricks here."

The doctor looked at the book. The page for P hung loose, half torn out. It was headed by a Patrick, Alan, who lived nearby on Beachwood. Then after Pell and Pillsbury and Porter and (unbelievably) Putzenschimmel came Patrick, Francis, at the Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles.

"Neither of them in the files. But I had to check through this desk to get enough background on La — the woman to question them. Now I'll try to see which Patrick got rid of this serpent."

The phone bell rang and MacDonald picked up the French instrument. White fingerprint powder still clung to it. (There had been a useless assortment of prints, with Lalage's on top.) "Hello," MacDonald said.

"Hello. May I speak to Lally?"

"She's not in just now. May I take a message?"

"That's the luck of the Patrick's for you." The voice had a grating, gravelly quality. "Just tell her Mr. Patrick called."

"Hold on," MacDonald said hastily. "Alan or Francis?"

The voice sounded surprised. "This is Jerry Patrick," it said. "Jerry for Gervase."

MacDonald stopped in at the Chula Negra on his way to the Biltmore. "Remember, Nick, what I said when I left here this morning? 'This is one case I won't need your patterns on; the victim's already told me her murderer's name.' Ha!"

There was a half-smile in Nick Noble's pale blue eyes. "She double-crossed you?"

MacDonald explained. "So there's three Patricks," he ended. "From what I got out of Gervase on the phone, they're all distant cousins. Alan is an actor, lives in Hollywood. Gervase is a writer, staying at a friend's out in Beverly Hills. Francis is at the Biltmore, and Gervase is pretty cagey about just what Francis's profession is. Which stirs my curiosity and starts me looking him up first."

Nick Noble said, "Tell me about it when you've seen them."

"You've got curiosity too? I can't blame you; this is once you were in on it even before the murder."

The wino shook his head. "Possible pattern," he said. "Want to see if I'm right."

Francis Patrick had graying temples but a jet black mustache. He was taller than MacDonald (though not so much that the bullet angle might clear him), but it was not his height alone that made him dominate. His formal attire, precise and complete even to spats and gloves, impressed the West Coast eye; and the measured exactitude of his movements, the rounded authority of his voice, the level coldness of his eyes formed the picture of a man shaped to command.

His first words set MacDonald against him. "Ah, officer," he said, somewhat oratorically, "I am glad to see one young man in America with sense enough to stay out of uniform despite the pleas of the warmongers."

The Lieutenant's lips tightened. "Don't give me the credit, thank you."

"As you wish," the other said reluctantly. "Will you sit down, Lieutenant?"

MacDonald had managed to anticipate the invitation by a fraction of a second. He felt that he would need every psychological advantage. "Been in Los Angeles long, Mr. Patrick?"

"I registered in this hotel this morning. Before that I was staying with friends."

"Permanent address?"

"None, I confess. My work takes me everywhere."

"What is your occupation?"

"Stock-broker." He paused and added, "Retired."

"Then your 'work' —?"

"Shall we call it a hobby? It is hardly of any importance to the police."

MacDonald said, "You knew Lally Chilton?"

"Slightly."

He took a shot in the dark. "Employed her to help you in your hobby?"

The commanding face was impassive. "Hardly. I was merely told by some friends in the East that she was an amusing specimen of the fringe of Hollywood. I looked her up."

"And was she?"

"Amusing?" The face condescended almost to wink. "Intensely."

MacDonald felt an absurd twitch of jealousy. "Where were you this morning around eleven?"

"Across the street in Pershing Square." The reply was prompt.

"With anyone?"

"Alone."

"Doing what?"

"Applying my ear, officer, to the ground. For a man with my . . . hobby, there are few things so educational as listening to what the common man thinks."

MacDonald laughed. "You won't find that out in Pershing Square. At a union meeting or a Rotary luncheon or a church supper or on a commuters' train — yes, there you'll find out a fraction of what people think. In Pershing Square you'll find nothing but pure crackpottery."

"And what makes you think, Lieutenant, that the common man is not a crackpot?" Francis Patrick's face was earnest, so earnest that MacDonald said nothing when he paused. The room was full of the echo of his rich voice.

He spoke again, with quiet and imposing conviction, "The untapped natural resources of crackpottery in this country, my dear officer, would astonish you. There is a Gresham's law of the mass intellect: muddleheadedness inevitably drives out clear thinking. And the political science of the future lies in the control and application of that law to purposive ends. No, there is nothing idle about a visit to Pershing Square."

MacDonald rose. "I'll see you soon again."

"I trust so. You are too astute a young man, Lieutenant, to have your mind cluttered with the idealistic cobwebs of such fictions as the nobility of the common man; I should take great pleasure in sweeping away a few of them."

MacDonald said, "Goodbye." He waited for Francis Patrick to ask a question, but nothing happened.

It had been a profitable five minutes. It was reasonably clear what Francis Patrick's "hobby" was and how it tied in with Lalage Chilton's profession. And it was exceedingly instructive that he had never asked the reason for the Lieutenant's interrogation, nor questioned the use of the past tense in reference to Lalage.

Alan Patrick of Hollywood was not home — sudden date with a producer, his landlady said — so MacDonald went on to Beverly Hills. The address was a small adobe bungalow in the foothills. There were strange noises inside — the clinking of glass and loud snatches of song. MacDonald caught phrases of the Marseillaise, the Internationale, and the Italian Hymn of the Fascisti.

A party, and surely one of oddly assorted political tastes. MacDonald frowned, but rang the doorbell anyway. There was sudden silence, then the creak of an opening window.

MacDonald turned toward the window, saw the bright spurt of flame in the shade of the house, and ducked even before he heard the shot. The bullet zoomed past him into a wooden post.

Then the gravelly voice he had heard on the phone shouted, "Friend or enemy?"

MacDonald said "Friend" and moved swiftly before the other could fire again.

The voice yelled, "Come in. That was just a warning to stay friendly."

MacDonald drew his automatic and stepped into the house. In the room from which the shot had come he found Gervase Patrick. He was apparently the whole party all by himself. He sat by the window, the revolver in his left hand cradled against the bandage and sling that covered his right arm. He wore old working clothes — not the smart disarray of Hollywood, but just plain shabby garments. His hair was twisted in a half-dozen directions, and his eyes and voice corroborated the evidence of the bottles on the table.

He sang a snatch of the Garibaldi hymn and said, "Have a drink. Always drink when I'm sad. Always sing when I'm drunk. Always sing political songs — more *zoomph* to 'em."

"Always shoot at strangers?" MacDonald asked.

"On'y when I'm sad. Or drunk. Or sad. Have a drink."

It was simpler to obey. MacDonald nursed his drink as he said, "It was sad about Lally, wasn't it?"

"Saddest thing you know." Gervase

Patrick refilled his glass. "Wonnerful woman. Great head on her shoulders. 'F all places. Polo," he added.

"Polo?"

"Saw you looking at my sling. Polo accident. Made two goals before I knew it was broken, then passed out."

MacDonald kept a hand on the automatic in his pocket and advanced toward him casually. "Nice rod you've got there." He held out the other hand suggestively, but Gervase ignored it. "You don't want it any more, do you?"

Gervase Patrick looked up. "Damned if I do!" he agreed abruptly, and hurled it far out the window. "Have a drink. Heard your voice onna phone smorning. Thought you needed a drink. You know Lally?"

"A little. Where were you when you phoned her?"

"Here. Working. All alone. All alone . . ." He went into the Berlin song, then broke it off in mid-bar and began on the Peat-bog Soldiers.

"Working?"

"Writing. Told you I was a writer, dinni? Writing for Lally. Shhh!" He looked around the room with melodramatic caution. "Not supposed to tell nobody. Not my own cousin. Not my own only onest cousin. He hires Lally, Lally hires me, and nobody knows from nothin'. Not even my other only cousin. He's even onlier, he is. Now with Lally dead and all . . ."

"You wrote up ideas for Lally? And your cousin Francis hired her to distribute them?"

"Din' say that. Never said a thing. Not a word. Not a mumblin' word." That set him singing again, in a harsh baritone. Somehow the spiritual modulated amazingly into the Horst Wessel Lied. He sang it with a sort of proud contempt. "Thaswot Francis needs," he said. "A song. Ev'body needs song. You look like a tenor. C'mon. Lessing."

He was still singing when MacDonald left. The Lieutenant looked over the street and the weed-covered lot next door. Finding that revolver might take hours. He stopped on the porch, took out his knife, and pried at the wooden post. That would do just as well.

The family resemblance of the cousins Patrick was marked in their features, but in nothing else. The actor Alan was oddly the least actorish of the lot; he lacked both the impressiveness of Francis and the eccentricity of Gervase. Only the sports shirt and ascot marked his profession; otherwise he was simply an agreeable and inconspicuous young man, well groomed, quiet, a little shorter than MacDonald (though still well within the bullet's angle).

"I can guess why you're here," he said after introductions. His voice was low, and it seemed to cost him a certain effort to control it.

"How did you know?" MacDonald asked frankly.

"I dropped by Lally's on my way to see this producer. There was one of your men there. He told me."

"Then you can see why I'm checking on all the Pa —" (no, there was no point in giving out what he had heard on the phone) "— on all the names in her address book. You knew her well?"

"Well enough to go to Las Vegas last month."

"You were married to her?"

"That was supposed to be the idea. But she changed her mind at the last minute and I stayed up all night playing slot machines. Not what I'd been expecting."

"Why?"

"Who ever knew the whys with Lally? But I still had hopes. There was always the chance . . . You see, I loved her."

"I can understand that. If you didn't know enough."

"What do you mean, 'enough'?"

MacDonald changed his ground. "Your cousin Francis approves of young men who stay out of uniform. You share his opinions?"

Alan Patrick's eyes flashed and he uttered a most uncousinly epithet. "No. My clothes are no more my fault than — than I imagine yours are yours." He held up his right hand. "My draft board just happens not to care for men without a trigger finger."

"And producers don't mind?"

"I wear gloves or we shoot around it and use a double for hand close-ups. If you're under forty and still breathing you rank as a juvenile now."

"I gather you don't care for your cousin's political notions?"

Alan Patrick took some typed sheets from a table. "I was working on these this morning. Speech I'm giving at the Screen Actors' Guild. Me making a speech . . .! But this is a time when every man has to make himself heard."

MacDonald glanced over the speech. Hardly original or even well written, but full of solid democratic truths which the other Patricks would never understand.

"You were writing it this morning? Around eleven, say?"

"Oh oh. The fatal alibi? Yes, I was here alone, working at this, while Lally . . ." His voice died away.

"And how would you feel," MacDonald asked, "if you knew that that speech was attacking Lally as bitterly as the bullet that killed her?"

Alan Patrick gaped. MacDonald explained briefly what he had learned of Lalage Chilton's profession.

The actor spoke slowly, after a long pause. "I thought I didn't have any illusions about Lally," he said. "I knew she couldn't pay for that apartment. But I loved her, don't you see, and *that* didn't matter. It damned near killed me when your man told me she was dead, but no tears. Not for me. I couldn't. It went too . . ." He stood up and opened the door. "Will you get the hell out of here, Lieutenant, before I start bawling?"

"So that's the set-up," MacDonald said. "And at the moment I'm in a fair way to go nuts. Three Patricks — each of them knowing of Lally's death before I could mention it, and each of them without the merest shred of an alibi. If only just one of them had an alibi so airtight I could work on cracking it . . ."

Nick Noble stared into his sherry glass. "Motive?" he said.

"One of them loved Lally. The others were tied up with her in a fascistic racket — Francis as a would-be Fuehrer and Gervase as a minor Goebbels. Either relationship turns to murder when it sours. Any one of them alone I'd arrest on suspicion in two shakes of a sheep's tail. But which?"

Nick Noble sipped his sherry — a very small sip. "Last glass today unless the truck comes," he explained, and added in the same tone, "All three."

"A conspiracy? Nick, you're crazy. Gervase and Francis would never trust each other, and Alan hates their whole damned racket. And the killing's a one-man job; no need for accomplices. No, it's one of the three —"

He broke off. The plump Mexican waitress was looking at him curiously and asking, "Lieutenant MacDonald?"

"Yes?"

"Telephone."

He approached the phone almost reluctantly. The last time he had talked over it . . . He picked up the receiver and recognized at once the gravelly voice that said, "MacDonald?"

"Speaking."

"Got that report from ballistics yet?" Gervase sounded almost sober by now; at least he wasn't singing. "Oh," he went on before MacDonald could answer, "I saw you dig out that slug. So even though I retrieved the gun, I guess there's no use holding out any more."

MacDonald kept his voice quiet. "Where are you?"

"At Lally's. Seemed appropriate somehow. Don't blame your guard; he got the butt end of the revolver. And now —"

"You're ready to give yourself up?"

"Overready, Lieutenant. But not to you."

And for the second time that day MacDonald heard a shot and a thud over the phone of the Chula Negra.

He started for the door, then turned back to the phone, dropped in a nickel, and gave certain instructions to headquarters. As he started out again, a twinge of compunction hit him. He went back to the third booth on the left and took thirty seconds to repeat the phone episode to Nick Noble. He felt good; he had never before succeeded in bringing astonishment to that sharp white face.

This time he really went out the door, almost knocking down a man about to enter the restaurant. He recognized Alan Patrick and paused. "Meet me here in an hour," he told the actor. "No time to explain now; but by then we'll have it cleared up."

Alan Patrick looked dazed as he walked on in. He went up to the bar and ordered a boilermaker, which he had to explain to the elderly Mexican woman. She was out of whiskey and suggested he try tequila with his beer and it was a fine idea. Just what he needed. He had downed one and was waiting for another when the plump waitress came up and said, "Mr.

Patrick?"

"Yes?"

"In the booth, please."

He followed her, frowning. His frown deepened as he saw the man who had summoned him — a sharp-nosed, thin little man, as white as things that live in caves.

"Alan Patrick?" Nick Noble said.

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Noticed finger. MacDonald spoke to you. Guessed it might be."

The actor's mobile face was puzzled. "When I asked for the Lieutenant at Headquarters they told me I might find him here. I did, but he dashed right off without explanation. What's happened?"

There was pain and anger in Nick Noble's pale eyes as he looked at his empty sherry glass. "Hard to talk without . . ." he said. "Hard to think." He leaned back and let his eyes glaze over while Alan Patrick contemplated him curiously.

Finally Nick Noble's eyes came back to life and he said, "You knew, didn't you?"

"Knew what?" The actor's voice was wary.

"Knew Lalage was Rumor, Inc. Why else kill her?"

"Kill her? Me?" Alan Patrick laughed. "Man, I loved that girl!"

"Sure. But hated what she did. Conflict. Only solution: murder."

"Nonsense."

"Not nonsense. Pattern. You lived in own apartment. So you had to be murderer. Finger, too, of course."

"So I killed her? And I suppose that's why Cousin Gervase confessed and committed suicide?"

Nick Noble smiled a faded smile of relief. "You just said MacDonald didn't tell you anything. How know about Gervase unless —"

"Don't tell me I killed him too?"

"— unless you *are* Gervase."

The bantering grin left Alan Patrick's face. "Go on," he said tensely.

"Three men. Family resemblance. Different hair? Easy. Different height? Elevations; actors know. One wears gloves; one has sling; one has missing finger — *which gloves and sling hide.* Different ages and very different characters; *but one is actor.*"

"MacDonald heard Gervase shoot himself just before I came here."

"Phone booth on corner. Can't trace dial calls. That clinched it; story couldn't be true."

"Why?"

"Supposed to be at Lalage's apartment. She had French phone. Man with arm in sling can't hold French phone and shoot himself. What you use? Paper bag?"

Alan Patrick nodded. He said softly, "It was a smart idea, I thought. After I . . . after Lally was dead I saw the phone. I knew someone must have heard my name and the shot. If she knew only one Patrick, I was done for."

"Started to tear out P page in address book," Nick Noble put in.

"Yes, and then I saw that would only look worse; they'd find me some other way. She had to know *more* Patricks; so I invented them — both of them. One in the address book —"

"Out of alphabet. First hint."

"But not conclusive. She might easily have added it later. Then I phoned up and was another Patrick. I took a room at the Biltmore for one, and for the other — a friend in Beverly Hills was away and had given me a key in case I wanted to throw a brawl too noisy for my apartment."

"That's why it had to be you that was real. Only permanent address."

"I knew it'd be seen through in time. But it gave me a chance to get away. First scatter suspicion, then focus it on 'Gervase'. When MacDonald finds out the suicide's a fake and gets the ballistic report on 'Gervase's' gun, the hunt'll concentrate on Gervase Patrick. Meanwhile Alan P. slips out of town unnoticed."

"One slip. Francis and Gervase not in files."

"I didn't know about the files. But I was lucky that Lally was still on the outs with me and said '*Mr.* Patrick.' If she'd said 'Alan' — well, I'd have had a hard time convincing anybody that three people with the same first name had a family resemblance."

"On outs? Las Vegas. You found out then?"

"A slip she made while she was drinking. And a man she met who talked too much. Then I began working on it . . . Don't you see?" His voice was pleading. "This . . . this *thing* . . ." He held up his right hand. "The middle finger can pull a trigger. Lally knows that," he added bitterly. "But the Board . . . And I've got to fight. Every man has to. This was one way . . ."

"Fugitive from justice," Nick Noble said tonelessly. "Can he fight?"

"Somehow. Someplace. I was going to get across the border, head south. Mexico, Brazil . . . They've got armies, and maybe they're not so particular. Or their merchant marine —"

"Fascist," Nick Noble said.

Alan Patrick had stood pat when called a murderer, but now his face flushed. "What the hell —"

"Fascist thinks he's too strong for democracy. Makes his own laws. The hell with justice; do what's expedient. The hell with debts; cancel 'em by force. Us, we like justice. We pay debts. Our kind of strength."

Alan Patrick said slowly, "The Lieutenant won't be back for an hour. You'll tell him, of course, but that still gives me a head start."

Nick Noble said nothing.

Alan Patrick looked into the pale blue eyes set in the white face. Finally he called to the waitress. "I wonder," he said, "how many tequila boilermakers a man can drink in an hour."

Nick Noble smiled.

"Anyway," Patrick said half defensively, "I killed Rumor, Inc."

Nick Noble said, "A man's work. But without gun. Kill every rumor you meet. Something everybody can do. Even me."

The actor stared at him a long time and said at last, almost with awe, "What *are* you?"

Nick Noble brushed the invisible fly from his nose. "Thirsty," he said, fondling the empty sherry glass.

During one of your Editor's flying visits to Hollywood, he had occasion while working on the Paramount lot to consult a Film reference book which listed the sources for certain motion picture stories. One item caught his eye and prompted an urgent memorandum. It claimed that a motion picture had been based on a book titled CRIMES OF THE ARMCHAIR CLUB, *by Arthur Somers Roche.*

A scouring of the second-hand book market from coast to coast failed to bring a book of that title to light. Inquiry into library and publishing records drew another blank. To this day your Editor has seen neither hide nor hair of that book. Does it exist? Or is it a myth? Any reader who can supply information — or better still, the book itself — is invited to write posthaste.

With this irrelevant preface, we now welcome Arthur Somers Roche's first appearance in EQMM — "A Victim of Amnesia," the story of a man who lost his memory. . . . If we could only remember the name of that reference book in which CRIMES OF THE ARMCHAIR CLUB *was mentioned . . . yes, indeed — a victim of amnesia . . .*

A VICTIM OF AMNESIA

by ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE

THE SERGEANT peered over the tops of his steel-rimmed spectacles. He twirled the huge blotter around on the slanting desk before him, and dipped his pen in the inkwell.

"And here I was thinkin' to meself that the dove of peace was roosting — do doves roost, Officer McCarthy? Or do they perch? You don't know. Well, God forgive me for being soft-minded enough to think that a harness bull would know anything about ornithology! Ah, do not blush, Officer McCarthy. Your ignorance is in no way remarkable. It is me own knowledge of science and mythology that's remarkable. Me, a student and scholar, ordered by Fate to put down arson and riots and other breaches of the peace, when I should be holding down the presidency of a university.

"Well, roost or perch, the dove has flown away. Here it is midnight, and I was congratulating myself because not an arrest had been made in this precinct. 'Tis the millennium, I was telling myself. And then you come in here with this evil-looking person and shatter me faith in human nature and the efficacy of good example, as instanced by meself, and the value of brute force, as exemplified by you."

His bushy eyebrows drew together in a portentous frown, which could not, however, entirely hide the good humor in his blue eyes.

"What's the charge against the prisoner?" he asked.

Officer McCarthy grinned. "There ain't none, Sergeant Ryan."

"Ah, the gentleman dropped in for a little social relaxation? Or is he here to make complaint against some one else? Introduce us, Officer McCarthy."

"That's just it," said the policeman. "He don't know who he is."

Sergeant Ryan adjusted his glasses. He shifted in his chair in order that he might get a better view of McCarthy's companion. He saw a well-built man of medium height, with extremely keen gray eyes. They were deep-set below a well-shaped forehead above which grew black hair that was as straight as an Indian's. Indeed, the sharp-edged, high-bridged nose, and the high cheekbone, bore out the impression that here was some one in whose veins ran the blood of the American aborigines. His mouth, though wide enough for good humor, was thin-lipped. His chin was bony and aggressive. And his skin had that leathery look which comes to those who live and labor out-of-doors.

But his clothing seemed to have nothing to do with the plains or hills from which he might reasonably have been assumed to come. For an expert tailor had cut the blue flannel lounge suit which he wore; an English tailor, Sergeant Ryan decided. And the slightly brogued low tan shoes could have come from the British Isles. The hat which swung from his hand was a gray felt of delicate and expensive texture. His scarf was a golden brown, and beneath it Ryan could see a shirt of soft fine linen. The sergeant added the face and the clothing together and reached the sum: "wealthy sportsman, English."

"So you don't know your name?" he said wonderingly.

The stranger laughed embarrassedly. "Sounds jolly rot, doesn't it?"

Sergeant Ryan mentally complimented his own shrewdness. He had guessed the man's nationality correctly, for his accent was indisputably British.

"Well, it does seem strange for a young fellow in the pink of condition, like you seem to be, to forget who he is. You talk like an Englishman. I don't know how it is in dear old Lunnon, but it ain't exactly healthy to spoof the police over here. Not in my precinct, anyway. So, just out of the kindness of my great big generous heart, I'm telling you that if you came here for a laugh you picked the wrong spot."

The stranger smiled deprecatingly. "If there's any laugh in this, it's on me, not you. I assure you, I never felt less like laughing in my life."

Sergeant Ryan stared at him. But this was not the impertinence or the brazenness of the practical joker; it was the ingenious frankness of a bewildered man. Indeed, there was more than bewilderment in the stranger's manner: there was a hint of fear. Sergeant Ryan's sympathetic heart softened.

"Well, it's a tough position you're in, young man," he said. "It'd give me the willies."

The stranger wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. Sergeant Ryan noted that it was of expensive linen.

"It makes me feel a little ga-ga," said the young man.

"'Ga-ga'? Now, that's a new one on me. Does it mean the willies?"

The stranger smiled. "Something like that, I imagine."

"Well, I don't blame you," said the sergeant. "But suppose you tell me the whole story."

The stranger shrugged his well-knit shoulders. "There's very little to tell. I suddenly found myself walking on a broad avenue along the edge of a park. I didn't know how I got there, where it was, or who I was." He smiled rather winningly. "It's a dreadful sensation."

"I believe you," declared the sergeant with emphasis. "You don't suppose you'd been drinking a little bootleg liquor? It does strange things to people, you know."

"Now, that's a funny thing," replied the stranger. "While I don't know my name, or where I come from, I do remember many things. For instance, I know that I never drink, and smoke only occasionally. No, it wasn't liquor."

"What did you do when you found out your memory'd gone?" asked the sergeant.

The stranger looked embarrassed. "Well, at first I went into a blue funk; got in a regular state of panic. You know, it isn't a cheerful situation. Then I said to myself, 'Look here, old man, this will never do. Won't get you anywhere except completely ga-ga.' "

"That 'ga-ga' is a grand word," commented the sergeant. "Go on."

"Well, across the park I could see tall buildings, bigger than anything that I'd ever seen in London."

"You remember London then?" interrupted the sergeant.

"I seem to know, somehow, that London is my home. But where I lived there, I couldn't possibly tell you. Also, I remember Paris and Brussels and the Riviera and Rome quite as well as I remember London."

"Polly-voo Francy?" asked the sergeant.

"Ah, oui, Monsieur. Mais je ne suis pas Français. No I'm not French. I'm English."

The sergeant nodded. "I believe you. Go on."

"Well, I looked for a sign, and discovered that I was on Fifth Avenue. I walked into the park and sat down on a bench. I did my best to rouse my recollection. But after two hours I hadn't learned anything about myself. I couldn't go back of the moment when I found myself strolling on Fifth Avenue. And so, finally, seeing this officer here, I walked up to him and explained my predicament. He advised me to come to see you. He said that you were not merely his superior officer, but a man of science." Sergeant Ryan cast a glance of approbation at Officer McCarthy. The latter had a grin. He felt that he would be a roundsman soon if Sergeant Ryan's influence had any weight.

"An amachoor only," disclaimed the sergeant modestly. "However, I know something about your trouble. I've come into contact with similar cases before. Usually, the person's memory is restored in a very short time. Sometimes, there's no medical treatment at all required. Just a little rest, a little time, required and the memory comes back. You've probably been under some heavy strain. You don't look as though you'd been sick."

"I feel fine," said the stranger. "I can't believe that I've been under any strain."

The sergeant shrugged. "Maybe not. Sometimes a blow on the head — are you hurt anywhere?"

The stranger shook his head.

"Have you any money?"

The young man pulled out a purse. From it he took several hundred dollars.

"Don't seem as though you've been robbed," said Ryan. "You haven't looked through your clothes?"

"For letters or other papers? I haven't a thing of the sort on me."

"I meant for marks on your clothing," explained the sergeant.

A light gleamed in the Englishman's eyes. "I hadn't got around to thinking of that. Perhaps — "

"Let's go in an inside room," suggested the sergeant.

But, strangely enough, there was not even a laundry mark upon the stranger's linen. The label that should have been sewed in his jacket was missing. His hat bore no maker's mark. His shoes had no identifying symbol.

"Well, I don't know what to do for you," admitted Sergeant Ryan as the stranger clothed himself. "If you acted nutty, I could ship you over to Bellevue. But you haven't created any trouble, and it ain't a crime yet in this country for a man to forget his name. Of course, they'd take you in at Bellevue if you went there by yourself. What do you say?"

"It seems so absurd," said the Englishman. "If I knew of some private specialist — "

"I know the very man for you. Thaddeus Conkling, on Central Park West. He's the biggest man in the country on mental troubles. If he'd take you, you'd be in the best possible hands."

"Is he terribly expensive?" asked the stranger.

Ryan shrugged, "Lord knows. But when I was a traffic cop I yanked him from in front of an automobile, and every Christmas he sends me a box of cigars. And he passes the time of day mighty pleasantly whenever we happen to meet. For a friend of mine he'd be reasonable in his charges."

"You're extremely kind," said the stranger.

Sergeant Ryan waved a pudgy hand. "You're a likely looking lad, and it's little enough I'll be doing for you. We'll go to see him in the morning. Where do you plan to spend the night?" He inquired.

"I haven't the vaguest idea," admitted the stranger.

"I'd take you home with me myself, only what they pay a police sergeant don't rent any palaces. There isn't an extra room in my flat. But

McCarthy here will take you around to the Ballston; it's a decent quiet place, and you can send a bellboy out for the toilet articles you'll need."

"I don't know how to thank you," said the Englishman.

"Don't try," said Sergeant Ryan. "I'll call around for you about nine tomorrow morning. And don't worry. Mind that. You'll be all right in a few days."

"Do you really think Conkling can cure him?" asked Officer McCarthy, after he had returned from piloting the victim of amnesia to the hotel.

"The Lord knows," replied the sergeant. "But I hope so. I took a fancy to that lad. I never saw a smarter looking young man. It's a shame if a brain like that won't function."

"It is that," agreed McCarthy.

The Englishman was up and dressed and had breakfasted when Sergeant Ryan called the next morning.

"How are you feeling?" asked the sergeant.

"Couldn't be better, but the old bean is just the same. It's a most amazing sensation, Sergeant."

"Save your symptoms for Dr. Conkling, my boy," said the sergeant.

The camel would have hardly more difficulty in passing through the eye of a needle than a patient would in reaching the presence of Dr. Thaddeus Conkling without an appointment. But the physician was evidently a man who remembered his obligations. Sergeant Ryan sent in his name, and a moment later a white-robed nurse ushered the sergeant and his companion past a line of waiting and disapproving patients, into his inner office. He greeted Ryan cordially, and the Englishman had a chance to observe the man who, according to the sergeant, stood at the head of his profession.

A huge man, several inches above six feet and wide in proportion, with a tremendous red beard, bold blue eyes that were slightly protruding, and a great scimitar of a nose, he looked more like the reincarnation of an ancient Viking than a practitioner of medicine. There was something about him that seemed to suggest elemental, undisciplined forces, and that was not at all like a man of healing. He seemed destructive, not constructive. But his manner, bland and soothing, assorted better with his profession than his appearance.

He greeted the Englishman courteously, and when Ryan had explained their presence, his protruding eyes looked interestedly at his new patient, and not without kindness or its close simulation.

"Well, I guess we can fix this young man up soon enough. The examination will take some little time, Sergeant."

"I didn't expect to wait," said Ryan. He shook hands with his protégé. "Let me hear from you soon."

"Indeed I will," said the Englishman. "And I'm certainly grateful to you."

He turned to Dr. Conkling as Ryan left the office. Into his eyes came an expression of anxiety. "Doctor, this condition of mine can't last, can it?"

"Strip," said Conkling. The kindliness in his eyes was replaced by the absorption of the man of science. The Englishman obeyed him. Twenty minutes later his physician ordered him to put on his clothes. While he was doing so, and for an hour thereafter, Conkling questioned him on every conceivable subject. At the end of that time, he confessed himself baffled.

"Yours is a most unusual case. Ordinarily, in cases of aphasia or amnesia, there are abnormal symptoms that go along with the disease itself. But in your case there is absolutely nothing save the fact that you have forgotten your identity. I have questioned you in every possible way of which I can think. But none of those questions seem to strike a note upon the chords of memory. Physically, you are in perfect condition. Mentally, aside from this blank spot in your brain, you are one of the most alertly intelligent patients I have ever examined. I imagine that we must publish discreet advertisements, hoping in that way to find your family. The sight of your father, or a brother or sister, or even an ordinary acquaintance, would probably do more for you than all the medical treatment in the world."

"What reason do you assign for my condition?" asked the patient.

Dr. Conkling shrugged his massive shoulders. "A great grief, a prolonged mental strain, the after-effects of a severe illness, or a blow would induce your condition. That is why I'm puzzled. Your physical condition indicates absolutely that you have suffered none of these. Except possibly a blow."

"But you can't find even the slightest trace of a blow upon me," objected the Englishman.

"That is true," admitted the physician. "But the blow might have been suffered a long time ago, and its effect be felt only now. You have nothing to worry about. I assure you that the trouble will go no deeper than it lies now. Unless my entire professional experience is at fault, your condition, if it changes in any way, will do so for the better."

"That's not very encouraging, is it?" commented the Englishman, a shadow of anxiety crossing his face.

"I can't work miracles," said Conkling. "If you were highly nervous, or if your physical condition were bad, I would not hesitate to recommend an operation. Somewhere in the skull a piece of bone is pressing upon your brain. But, without knowing where the spot is — its approximate position — we would have to rely entirely upon X-rays. I would not care to do so in the case of a perfectly healthy man."

"Then you can do nothing for me?" asked the patient.

"I suggest that you advertise," said the doctor.

The patient stared at him. "What sort of a man would you take me to be, Doctor?"

"You mean your character?" asked the doctor. His bushy eyebrows lifted in surprise.

"Exactly," said the Englishman.

Conkling's eyes half-veiled themselves behind lids whose veinous redness lent a terrifying aspect to his countenance.

"Your features would indicate that you are a man of imagination and recklessness. Your body bears two scars. Either or both might have been wounds received during the war. Unquestionably you were of military age. But they might have been received in brawls of one sort or another. My only reason for thinking this latter is the fact that your right hand has been broken in two places. They are exactly the sort of breaks that might have been caused by the delivery of a blow by the hand. Your complexion indicates that you have lived greatly out of doors. I should sum up by saying that you probably have an adventurous and reckless nature."

"But my morals, Doctor?" persisted the patient.

Conkling lifted his lids. "I would say, my friend, that you are not a man scrupulous in the ordinary sense of the word."

The Englishman nodded. "That's what I'm getting at, Doctor. Suppose that advertising for my friends should bring me enemies?"

"You are not speaking at random," said the doctor.

"I don't know what I'm driving at," was the other's reply. "I only know that I woke up last night, tiptoed to the door of my room, opened it and found myself trying the door of the room next to mine. I wasn't walking in my sleep; I was wide awake. I intended to rob that next room. Now, I know that is wrong. I may not have been a thief before I lost my memory. But how do I know? Wouldn't it be better for me to abandon any effort to re-establish myself under my own name? Might it not be possible that I would find the police waiting for the owner of that name?"

"You are very frank," said the doctor.

"A doctor's office is like a confessional, isn't it?" retorted the patient.

"This one is," said Conkling grimly. "But I have told you that I would not risk an operation."

"And I'm not sure that I'd consent to one," said the patient. "I'd like to know who I am, but I'd like to find out quietly. I don't want to stir up any hornets' nest."

"You are a very remarkable man," said Conkling. "May I ask what you intend to do when you leave this office?"

"Heaven knows. I have nearly five hundred dollars. After that's gone — I have no trade, no profession, no means of earning a livelihood, and no friends."

Dr. Conkling drummed upon his desk with great spatulate fingers.

"You interest me," he said at last. "I gather that you do not look with equanimity upon the prospect of starvation."

"You're exactly right," said the other. "According to what little I've found out about myself in the last fourteen hours or so, your diagnosis of my character is correct. That I am more than reckless, a law-breaker, I don't know."

Conkling ceased his drumming. "You have, of course, no plans. And you interest me. You are a rare type. A man of evident culture who is apparently completely normal. I believe that I would be overlooking a scientific opportunity if I did not keep you near me. I have need of a sort of secretary-companion. The pay will be ample for your needs. You will live here with me. As you work for me you will also be under my medical observation. What do you say?"

"I may be the most vicious criminal at large; I may be a murderer," objected the Englishman.

The physician smiled, exposing great white teeth, sharp like those of some carnivorous animal.

"You are an extremely well-built young man," he said. "But though I am at least twenty years older, I would back myself in any contest of skill or strength with you. For your own sake, I would advise you to restrain any homicidal impulses toward me."

The Englishman grinned. "I was only suggesting something."

"I was making more than a suggestion; I was uttering a warning," rejoined Conkling. "What do you say?"

"What can I say, except that I am extremely grateful," replied the Englishman.

"It is settled, then. One of the servants will show you your quarters. You will dine with me. Your other meals you will take in your room. You will be paid fifty dollars a week. I will explain your duties in a few days. In the meantime, I would suggest that you familiarize yourself with the city. That will be all for now."

He made a gesture of dismissal, then called the patient back.

"Oh, I can't call you 'you' all the time. Have you any choice of names?"

The Englishman shook his head.

"I will call you, then, McFarlane, Philip McFarlane. That will be all, McFarlane."

The duties of McFarlane were not at all onerous. They consisted for the most part in accompanying the doctor on long walks after office hours, and in affording an audience to the physician in the evening when he ordinarily played the violin for a couple of hours. The new secretary had plenty of leisure, and he improved it in an odd fashion.

He studied the habits of the whole household. He learned what servants were light sleepers, what they did on their nights off, at what hours they might be expected to return. Also, he learned by heart the plans of each floor. And he took it upon himself to oil certain locks and hinges that had a habit of squeaking. And exactly three weeks after his entrance into the

Conkling household he crept, at two o'clock in the morning, into the room where his employer slept. With an uncanny deftness he took a bunch of keys from the pair of trousers which Conkling had hung over the back of a chair. Kneeling before a house-safe in one corner of the bedroom, he opened it. He had abstracted a great wad of bills when a slight noise from the bed made him turn. His employer was awake.

He leaped for the door; Conkling intercepted him. The two bodies clashed with a noise that woke the household. Savagely McFarlane tried to break the grip of the giant who had grappled with him. Working free, he struck his employer a half-dozen trip-hammer blows in the face. The physician shook them off; his great arm circled through the air, his fist collided with McFarlane's jaw, and the secretary went to the floor completely knocked out.

He awakened some time later to find himself seated in an arm-chair, his feet and hands bound, while before him, drinking coffee from a cup that stood upon a table, sat Conkling. The physician grinned; he seemed, in his pajamas, with his hair and beard awry from the recent struggle, like some great hairy ape. "Feeling better?" he asked cheerfully.

"What are you going to do with me?" demanded McFarlane.

The doctor's grin grew broader. "The butler, his wife, who is the parlor maid, the cook and myself are all witnesses to your attempt at robbery and your assault upon me. What do you think I'm going to do?"

"Send for the police, I suppose," said McFarlane hoarsely.

Conkling set his coffee-cup down. "You interested me from the moment you came here. My interest has been increased by your activities of the past week. It was a touch of positive genius, oiling the doors."

"You knew that?" cried McFarlane.

"Certainly. Exactly as I knew why you were questioning the servants. You thought the cook and the butler would be out to-night, didn't you?"

"Why didn't you discharge me, let me go, when you knew what I planned?" demanded McFarlane.

The doctor shrugged. "Wherever you went you would be a criminal. Your own frank confession, plus my accurate observation of you, convinced me of that fact. Why not let you commit your crime amid friendly surroundings?"

"Is that your reason? Pity for me?"

Conkling lighted a cigar. "That, and the fact that, being a scientific man, I hate to see good material go to waste. Unmoral men, men without a single scruple and possessed of great physical courage, have their uses. I was not sure of your courage. If you dared put up a fight against me you would be a brave man. So then, you have certain qualifications valuable to me."

"In what way?" asked McFarlane.

"Before I answer let me remind you that no less credible a witness than

Sergeant Ryan can testify that you came to me as a patient suffering from a well-known mental ailment. Three witnesses beside myself can testify as to tonight's occurrence. Anything that you might say about me would be discounted in advance. You are a criminal and, if I choose to say so, insane."

He puffed at his cigar. "Do I make the situation, your situation, extremely clear?"

"Go on," said McFarlane.

"There are, then, a certain group of men in this city who resent the inequitable distribution of wealth, and occasionally make efforts at readjustment. Have you heard of the Malbron gang?"

McFarlane shook his head sullenly.

"Of course not; there has been nothing in the papers about them recently. And you have no recollection of events in this country before you came to me. Well, the Malbron gang, as the police vulgarly term them because of the name by which their leader is known to the police, is the most efficient group of criminals — if one cares to use so crude a word — in the world. Their leader is always on the lookout for promising recruits. Not low thugs, but men of manner even though not of tradition. Men of culture, who can understand the justice that lies behind the Malbron activities. For it is unjust that traders should glean the profits of the world, and men of science like myself should slave for money to live and carry on their experiments.

"We are gentlemen and men of great intellectual attainments. Unfortunately some of us run more to brain than to body. We need athletes like yourself. I shall now go to sleep. You may think over the offer which I now make you: to join our association. In the morning you may join us, or go to jail as a thief. Good-night. Oh, by the way, I am Malbron."

He turned out the light and McFarlane heard him climb into bed.

"Don't leave me here tied up all night," said the prisoner. "Of course I'll join!"

The new recruit to the Malbron gang walked by the side of his leader across Central Park to Fifth Avenue. Dr. Conkling was in a mood of bloodthirsty cheeriness that would have made a lesser man than McFarlane tremble with fear.

"The house to which we are going is the home of Thomas Bretton, the famous inventor. You will meet there tonight our entire personnel. In the week that has elapsed since I disclosed my identity to you, you have been under close observation. You have passed all tests. Tonight you will be admitted to full membership in our society. And I wish to give you a last warning. Betrayal means death. And it means a most unpleasant death. I assure you that there is no one of our association who would not gladly kill a traitor."

"Why should I be a traitor?" asked McFarlane.

The doctor shrugged. "I can't think of any reason; but I am warning you."

As he spoke they emerged from the Park onto the Avenue. A newsboy thrust a paper almost in Conkling's eyes. "Paper, boss?" he cried.

Conkling pushed him aside, but McFarlane spoke to the boy.

"I'll take them all," he said.

"T'anks, boss," said the urchin. The transaction took only a moment; McFarlane stuffed the great wad of papers into his overcoat pocket and fell into step with his employer. Two minutes later they entered a house on the opposite side of the street.

McFarlane had rarely seen a more intellectual-seeming group of men than the half-dozen gentlemen who awaited Conkling and himself in Bretton's library. And yet, as Conkling's eyes protruded in an abnormal fashion, so each of the others had some physical characteristic which spoke of a mentality, or a morality, at war with society. And in the atmosphere that these abnormalities gathered around themselves was a hint of terror.

Outwardly they were all affable, but behind their courtesy he could feel their appraising scrutiny. He realized that he was in the meeting-place of the most dangerous group of criminals in the world. They adjourned shortly to a dining-room, where suave servants waited on them. After dinner, a most excellent one, they repaired again to the library, and there the business of the meeting began. Plans were advanced for the robbery of a bank, plans that called for the participation of at least seventy-five men.

"You see, McFarlane," said Bretton, "you have become one of the leaders of our association. To you plans can be made known, for you may be able to suggest improvements."

"I think I can," replied McFarlane boldly. "For instance, your idea of decoying the police in the neighborhood away from the scene, is not feasible."

The servant who had admitted McFarlane and Conkling to the house, entered the room without knocking, with the appearance of great haste.

"Deegan has just telephoned. He says that he followed Dr. Conkling and McFarlane to the house. On the way McFarlane bought some papers from a newsboy. It looked all right, but Deegan followed the boy. He says that the boy went to Madison Avenue, stepped in a taxi and drove to the offices of the Holland Detective Agency."

McFarlane was standing by a window; he backed into the embrasure; his left hand shattered the glass, and his right raised a revolver. Conkling broke the silence.

"Clever, exceedingly clever, the whole business, especially taking all the boy's newspapers. I suppose that meant that we'd all be here tonight."

McFarlane bowed. "Your deductions do you credit, Doctor."

"And you are young Holland, son of the founder of the agency, eh? The youth who was supposed to have entered the cattle business in South America."

McFarlane bowed again. "You are a brilliant man, Doctor, and it was necessary to take elaborate precautions."

Conkling sighed. "You would have been so admirable an asset to us. It is too bad."

His mild speech had been assumed to hide his almost insane wrath. That he could think with calm cunning at such a moment proved his marvelous self-control. He deceived the young man standing in the window. For when Conkling drew a revolver, McFarlane thought that he intended to use it against his captor. So he ordered Conkling to drop his weapon. The doctor never raised it. He simply pressed the trigger as the muzzle pointed slantingly downward. The bullet hit, McFarlane later discovered, the electric light switch in the wall, the box-like closet where were the fuses that regulated the lighting of the house. The room was plunged into darkness. And in that darkness the misguided genius who headed the Malbron gang, who had foreseen this or a similar situation, and knew exactly how to meet it, escaped. The rest were captured. For as the shot sounded, detectives in the street broke down the outer door, and Conkling's associates surrendered without a struggle.

But it was a barren victory. For while Conkling kept his freedom the Malbron Gang could be reorganized and led into new depredation.

"Son," said the elder Holland that night, "I'm going to retire. You were right and I was wrong. You said that the Malbron Gang must be composed of men unique in criminal annals. You were right. I thought you were bizarre in your method, and mad to suspect a man like Conkling. But you've proved your case. I wish that Conkling had been captured. I'd like to talk to him. What would you have done if he had wanted to operate on you for your mental trouble?"

Young Holland laughed. "A perfectly good semblance of an Englishman suffering from amnesia would have been transformed instantly into a Yankee detective, Dad."

Old Holland shook his head. "The world is filled with madness. Old police methods will not avail against the brilliant minds that have gone in for crime. What next, son?"

The younger man shrugged his shoulders.

"Sleep," he said emphatically. "I've been on my guard for three weeks. Tonight I sleep without fear of talking in my slumber, and betraying myself to a watching and listening man of genius."

◆

SCENE ONE: NEW YORK, 1907

Shortly after the turn of the century, the English author Oswald Crawfurd rebelled against the romantic school of detective fiction, dominated at that time by Sherlock Holmes and his many ersatz imitators. In the Introduction which Mr. Crawfurd wrote especially for the American edition of his THE REVELATIONS OF INSPECTOR MORGAN, *he stated his literary ambition — "to establish the detective police in that position of superiority to the mere amateur and outsider from which he has been ousted in contemporary fiction."*

SCENE TWO: NEW YORK, 1944

Nearly forty years later, in an entirely different yet comparable way, the American author Ben Wilson also rebelled against a certain school of detective fiction. He revolted against the modern science of crime detection. We can imagine Mr. Wilson sitting back in his uneasy chair, sated on the exploits of Dr. Thorndyke and his modern ersatz imitators, and saying: "Fie on lie detectors, guy suspectors, and pry directors! Fui on microscopes, microspectroscopes, and microphotometroscopes!" And forthwith, Mr. Wilson reverted to first principles: he invented an old-fashioned detective, involved him in an old-fashioned murder, and supplied him with an old-fashioned clue — indeed, the most old-fashioned of all old-fashioned clues! And in this fullness of old-fashionedness Mr. Wilson paradoxically achieved a newness and freshness . . . So, meet Sheriff Jeremy Dodd and his good old-fangled notions of what makes the detective world go round.

JUST AN OLD-FASHIONED MURDER

by BEN WILSON

"WHY don't you just forget about him?" Deputy Paul Briscoe asked. "Go on as you always have, and pretend like the professor isn't here."

Sheriff Jeremy Dodd squeezed up his wrinkled face until it looked like a crumpled paper bag. "My mind has always been good at pretending," he said, "but my nose just hasn't got that much imagination." He sniffed loudly at the strong chemical odor that drifted into the office.

A full sniff was evidently too much. Jeremy thumped his fist on the littered desk and the papers flew up like a flurry of partridge. "Not an unsolved crime on my record in fifteen years!" Jeremy raged, putting more volume into his voice than was necessary to carry across the office to the deputy — he projected his words to reach the professorial ears in the next room. "And I never needed a laboratory that stinks up the whole county."

Deputy Briscoe smiled. "You're

wasting your breath, Jeremy."

"I solved those axe murders up in Findley Township five years ago," Jeremy shouted at the door of the newly set-up laboratory — the room that used to have a card- and checker-table in it, instead of a weird assortment of instruments and charts. "And I didn't need no microscope to do it, either!"

"He can't hear a word," Deputy Briscoe said quietly. "He's got cotton stuffed in his ears. Says he can't concentrate on his experiments with you out here yelling all the time."

The deputy was a short, stubby man of about fifty, with a face just as browned, but not as wrinkled, as the sheriff's. Deputy Briscoe looked as effective as a sawed-off shot-gun, while Jeremy looked as innocent as an empty holster.

"Fifteen years, and an absolutely clean blotter," Jeremy continued, still yelling. "And then the supervisors have to go and move a namby-pamby professor in on me."

The door of the laboratory opened, and a small, pale man wearing a white smock stuck his head out briefly. "Shush," the man said, and closed the door again.

Jeremy leaped for the door. "Don't you shush me, you butterfly-chaser, you!"

"He's not a butterfly-chaser," the deputy corrected softly. "He's a criminologist."

"Why ain't he helping those other scientists invent things to beat the Japs and Nazis, instead of cluttering up my office?"

"He isn't that kind of scientist," the deputy explained patiently. "What he does is look in a microscope and tell you what color hair the criminal had, and how tall he was and what he had for supper for the past three weeks."

The telephone rang, interrupting Briscoe's enlargement upon the wonders of modern criminology. Briscoe reached for the receiver and a worried look appeared on his face as he listened. He set the phone back on its cradle slowly. "You're in for something, Jeremy," he said. "That blotter isn't clean any more. Matt Clane was just found murdered on his island."

Professor Phillips, looking paler than ever, popped out of the laboratory like a cuckoo from a clock. "Did you say murder?"

Jeremy glared at him. "Your ears are getting to look more like keyholes every day," he muttered. "I thought they were stuffed with cotton."

"I heard the phone ring," Phillips explained, coloring. He looked at Briscoe. "Did you say murder?" he asked again.

Briscoe nodded. "On an island in the Mississippi, about ten miles from here. A farmer named Matt Clane."

"I've almost been expecting it," Jeremy said judicially. "Bound to happen sooner or later, with that darn fool keeping all that money up there, instead of putting it in the bank."

Phillips darted back into the laboratory, shrugging out of his smock.

"Jeremy, this puts you squarely on the spot," Briscoe said soberly. "It gives the supervisors a chance to point out your old-fashioned methods of crime detection again. They'll say, 'See? We told you it's about time we had a sheriff who—' "

"Who couldn't catch a criminal without a lie-detector, a short-wave radio set, and the help of the Mayo Clinic," Jeremy finished.

Briscoe shrugged. "I don't like it," he said, indicating the closed door of the laboratory. "He's got all that equipment to work with, and you've got nothing. And you know he and the supervisors are going to do all they can to show you up."

"Well, go help him cart that junk," Jeremy snapped, picking his battered hat off the papers on the desk. "I'll go up in the coroner's boat."

It was almost noon when Jeremy and the coroner approached Matt Clane's island. "This is it over on the left," Jeremy pointed.

The coroner, a lean, white-haired man, cut the motor and turned the boat in toward the level shore.

The island stood well away from the others in that section of the Mississippi River that separates Illinois from Missouri and Iowa. The fields were brown and bare now. Only a stubble of chopped-off cornstalks gave evidence that the island had been worked. The wooded area at the south of the island was more colorful than a hardware paint-chart. The green, fern-like leaves of the locust trees stood out in sharp contrast to the yellows and reds of the maples. Here and there a white birch highlighted the Autumn scene.

Jeremy and the coroner pulled the boat out of the river, and wound the anchor-rope around a tree trunk. "Matt Clane must have had a lot of money," the coroner remarked, looking at the fields. "This is the fourth year in a row the river didn't come up over his land."

Jeremy nodded. "And these islanders figure if they get just one crop out in four years they can stay even." He stooped and picked up a handful of soil—soil the river had been slowly building up for centuries. "Look at this," he marveled. "So rich, it's a wonder the stones don't sprout leaves."

They walked up the crooked, worn path to Matt Clane's two-room tar-papered shack.

They found Matt's body down in the marsh grass about a hundred yards behind his tool-shed. His yellow hound, Annie, was lying near the body, whimpering.

While the coroner examined the body, Jeremy watched Deputy Briscoe beach the other boat. Professor Phillips was in the back, atop a pile of laboratory paraphernalia. A small negro boy sat up in the bow. Jeremy started back toward the shack to intercept them.

"Sammy, here, discovered the body," Briscoe said as they came up. "It was his father who phoned the office. Tell the sheriff about it,

Sammy."

The boy was shaking with fright, and hanging behind Briscoe's short legs. "I was fishin'," he explained. "An' ole Annie," he indicated the dog, "she was howlin' an' carryin' on. So I come an' look, an' — "

Jeremy patted him on the shoulder. "Good boy," he said. He fished a dime out of his pocket and handed it to the boy. "Now you go down and wait in the boat."

"Yessir, thank you, yessir," the boy muttered. The thanks were more for his release than for the money. He ran for the river.

"Just a moment, boy!" Professor Phillips called.

As the boy stopped, Jeremy demanded, "What do you want with him?"

"We should question him further," Phillips said, disapprovingly. "An important witness can't be dismissed so lightly."

Jeremy grunted. "You go ahead, boy," he said. "Can't you see anything that ain't under that microscope?" he asked Phillips. "That kid's scared stiff. He couldn't tell me anything my own eyes won't."

Jeremy started for the shack, and Phillips fell into step behind him. The screen door, secured only by the bottom hinge, hung away from the shack as if disdaining even that much connection with the structure. Jeremy kicked two empty cans off the bottom step, and avoiding the weak spot on the platform porch, stepped inside.

The furnishings were bare, unpainted. A mussed-up coat, and a wooden rocker could be seen through the curtained doorway to the shack's other room."

A corner of the rag rug had been thrown back, and the floor-boards removed. There was a hole about two-foot square beneath the shack.

"Robbery," Phillips pronounced solemnly. "This is where the man kept his money."

"Don't need a microscope to see that," Jeremy said.

The coroner came in behind them. In answer to Jeremy's questioning look he told him, "Clane was hit over the head with a heavy instrument — probably one of those window-weights people around here use for anchors. He never knew what hit him. The way I figure it the murderer must have hidden in the marsh grass, and waited for Matt Clane to come along. Then he jumped up behind him, and struck him down from behind." He looked the room over quickly. "Find anything in here besides an empty hole?"

Jeremy shook his head, and walked outside. He looked around the small island for an hour. "Well, we might as well go home," he said finally. He looked at Phillips, wearily. "Maybe it *is* going to take a microscope to solve this one. There's nothing here the eye can see."

Phillips smiled. "I'll stay a little longer," he said. "An hour is hardly sufficient to determine whether or not a case can be solved."

Jeremy called the hound. "Come

here, Annie, old girl. Come here. We can't leave you alone to starve to death."

The hound hung close to Jeremy's heels. As the coroner started the motor, she snuggled close to Jeremy in the boat. Jeremy pulled her head up on his lap, and stroked her gently, to stop the whimpering. The boy, Sammy, sat in the bow of the boat trying to keep from looking at the island.

As they passed island after island downstream, the coroner remarked, "They all didn't do as well as Clane this year. These islands aren't as high as his."

"Pretty tough," Jeremy said. "Their first crop was ruined when the control dams were closed to hold the river back while the Illinois was on a rampage. If the Mississippi had been let loose on them down below, it would have ruined whole towns." He looked at a low-lying island on the right. "Take Burnyard's land there, for instance. Burnyard had his corn in. Then they held the river back, and the corn rotted in the ground. Then after the dams were open again, after the Illinois River had quieted down, Burnyard still had plenty of time. So he planted all over again. Then Old Man Mississippi decided to go on a rampage of his own, and that finished Burnyard for this year. He ain't been able to get a crop out in five years."

"I can't see why they stick it out," the coroner said. "Look — there's Burnyard now, standing on the bank."

"Pull in close," Jeremy said quickly. "I want to talk to him."

Burnyard, a huge man in faded overalls, a black beard almost hiding his face, scowled as they approached. He grabbed the collar of a great, black Doberman to hold him back as the coroner let the boat drift in close.

"Trouble up at Matt Clane's island," Jeremy called. "Matt was murdered."

"That's no skin off my hide," Burnyard said.

"Been up to Matt's place lately?" Jeremy asked.

"You accusin' or just askin', sheriff?" Burnyard let loose of the Doberman, and came closer to the water. The big dog, his hair bristling, jumped two feet out into the river. He lurched back and forth in the water, growling at the boat.

"Just asking," Jeremy said.

Burnyard pointed to a flat-bottomed boat, an eight-footer. "See the patchwork on the boat? I just got it fixed 'bout a half-hour ago. I hit an underwater log two weeks ago, and I been stranded on this island ever since."

"Okay," Jeremy said. "Guess that answers my question, don't it? If I think up any more, I'll come back."

The coroner revived the motor, and pulled back out into the river. "Wouldn't surprise me none if that's the man we wanted," Jeremy muttered.

The coroner laughed. "It's just such unscientific observations as that, Jeremy, that get you into trouble."

"Scientific my grandmother!" Jeremy exploded. "Crimes around here ain't scientific. They're just plain old-fashioned."

They cruised in silence for a few minutes. "Wonder if he really wrecked his boat?" Jeremy said, absently.

Sammy, in the bow, spoke up. "Yessir, he wreck his boat all right."

"How do you know?"

"My pappy seen it. Pappy, he come home an' laugh an' laugh. He say ol' mean Mr. Burnyard run a hole in his boat big 'nough to walk through. An' he ain't been able to run pappy offen the good fishin' hole for onto two weeks."

The coroner grinned and chanted in sing-song: "Confucius say 'Man who jump to conclusions like egg falling off wall; he crack up on solid rock of facts.' "

"I ain't jumping to conclusions!" Jeremy said testily. "Maybe Burnyard got that boat fixed earlier today than he says he did."

"And maybe you'd better look for another suspect," the coroner answered.

It was almost dark when Professor Phillips came back to the sheriff's office. Jeremy swore when he saw the things the professor had brought back from the island. Phillips had plaster-of-Paris molds of footprints. He had samples of leaves and twigs — fingerprints from the shack — photographs. Not an angle of scientific criminal investigation had been neglected.

"Looks like he's got enough to occupy him for the winter," Deputy Briscoe said, carrying in a load. "Did you get any leads?"

Jeremy shook his head. "Just another of those darned hunches. I got to get over looking at people, and then saying to myself, 'There's the one that probably did it.' "

Briscoe looked at Jeremy expectantly. Jeremy was silent for a moment. Then he asked, "What do you know about Mose Burnyard?"

Briscoe dropped the load he was carrying. "Jeremy, you got it! Burnyard's flat broke — the river has ruined him for good. He never liked Matt Clane anyway and he was jealous because Matt's crops have been good every year and his have been washed out."

Jeremy nodded soberly. "Now all we got to do is prove it."

Matt Clane's hound came over and laid her head across Jeremy's knee. "What are you going to do about the dog?" Briscoe asked.

"Keep her," Jeremy said. "I always did like Matt. He was a darn old fool in some ways, but I liked him. I want his murderer found even if — " Professor Phillips walked through with another load. " — even if it takes a gol darned professor to do it!" Jeremy finished vehemently.

The next few days were a trial for Jeremy. He submitted, muttering, as plaster molds were fitted to his feet by Professor Phillips. "Lot of monkey business," he said. "I didn't kill Matt."

"I have to find out which are yours," Phillips explained in a too-patient voice, "so I can eliminate them as nonsuspect."

There was more activity in the

office than Jeremy had ever seen. Every one of the supervisors dropped in to watch Professor Phillips at work. Jeremy felt like an old horse being appraised at a glue factory. When the supervisors looked at him, he could feel them putting an ex- in front of the word "sheriff."

But Jeremy couldn't keep away from the laboratory, much as he wanted to. He didn't have a single clue, and here was Phillips developing photographs and projecting them on a wall-screen, until every detail stood out — boiling things in colored liquids in test-tubes, blowing up fingerprints until they looked like a picture of a field cultivated for contour planting. Phillips had all kinds of clues.

Jeremy wondered how much of what Briscoe had said was true. Could a criminologist pick up a few insignificant items near the scene of a crime, twigs and fingerprints and footprints, and then tell you how tall the criminal was, what color his hair was, and all that stuff? Maybe he was getting too old to be sheriff. Maybe they did need a modern criminologist nowadays.

Jeremy never actually entered the laboratory. He hung around at the doorway, like a dog watching a flea circus, a worried expression always on his face.

But as weeks and weeks passed, the activity in the laboratory diminished. The supervisors began popping in only for a moment, and then they stopped coming altogether. The worried look was transferred to Professor Phillip's face, and the smile to Jeremy's.

By the time Professor Phillips had finished fitting all his plaster molds to the persons who had reason to be on the island — Matt Clane's body, the coroner, Jeremy, Briscoe, and himself — he had run out of footprints.

"The ground was hard and dry," Jeremy said. "Except for that swampy part that was too soft to hold a footprint. It's a wonder you even found ours."

"I found them only in that wet strip out behind the tool-shed," Phillips admitted. "The murderer evidently didn't come up out of the marsh grass."

"What about all the other junk we carted back from the island?" Briscoe asked.

"Nothing there, either," Phillips admitted. "I've tried everything. The murderer didn't leave a clue of any kind."

Jeremy smiled at him. "I wouldn't say that, Professor. I think maybe he did leave a clue." Jeremy was playing with a calendar on his desk, dreamily looking out the window at the first snow of the year.

Professor Phillips rushed to the desk. "What is it? If you have something you had better turn it over to me for analysis."

Jeremy chuckled. "You wouldn't be interested in it. It's not scientific at all. In fact it's downright old-fashioned."

Phillip's face reddened. "Where is it?" he demanded. "I insist upon seeing it."

"It ain't here yet," Jeremy told him. "But I think I can arrest the murderer this afternoon or tomorr —"

The ring of the phone interrupted him. Jeremy picked up the receiver hopefully, and listened only for a moment. "That's what I've been waiting for!" he shouted. "We've got him!"

He grabbed his hat from the desk, and reached for his overcoat. "If you'd like to come along, Professor, I'll show you some clues that even your microscope couldn't have picked up that day. But first, Briscoe, we need two men to help us. It'll take four of us to take Burnyard off his island."

"You've been hiding evidence from me all this time!" Phillips accused.

"I'm not the one that's been hiding it," Jeremy laughed.

"Well, whoever has will have to answer for obstructing justice," Phillips declared shrilly.

"Now that's what happens when a man jumps to conclusions," Jeremy told him pontifically. "He ends up threatening to arrest old Mother Nature herself."

While Briscoe was waiting for the operator to put through his call for reinforcements, he turned to Jeremy. "How'd you pin it on Burnyard?"

"He made one big mistake," Jeremy explained. "Besides killing Matt Clane, he should have killed Matt's dog, Annie. He and that big Doberman of his — the only one in these parts — went up to Matt's island that day, and I can prove it. It couldn't have been any other day, because Burnyard's boat was laid up until then. He fixed it earlier that day, just like I suspected."

"Who was that on the phone?" Phillips asked suspiciously.

"My wife. I told her to ring me as soon as it happened. The vet's there now. Annie just had pups out in my garage — eleven of them. And eight are black Dobermans just like their father!"

Professor Phillips slumped down into a chair wearily. Jeremy whacked him on the back. "Now don't that beat anything you ever saw under a microscope, Professor?"

◆

Inspector Magruder made his début in a strange and unusual tale published in our May 1944 issue. If you still retain a prickling memory of "The Man in the Velvet Hat," you'll find "The Finger Man" even more intellectually disturbing . . .

Again the authors, Jerome and Harold Prince, state their purpose in an accompanying letter: they are "trying to picture Magruder as a detective whose special skill lies in his intimate understanding of the intricacies of human behavior." Again, they utilize the theme of detection-and-horror. Again, they employ a stream-of-consciousness technique. But it should be said, in justice to one of the most promising collaborations among the new writers of detective stories, that while you may be reminded throughout "The Finger Man" of other authors — M. P. Shiel, James Joyce, Dos Passos, Lord Dunsany — you will become increasingly aware of a quality that is not derivative, that is all Prince, that is theirs and theirs alone. And it is this Princely stamp that gives their work an individuality that overshadows the influence, consciously or unconsciously exerted upon them, of other writers.

THE FINGER MAN

by JEROME & HAROLD PRINCE

SHARP focus in the green, grey, blue, black, blinking, wide, dull, staring irises of many eyes: long rows of spikes, parallel, crowded, rust-veined, jutting from a block of wood; and a naked man's foot, trousers rolled, hovering over the spikes, up, down, foot on the spikes, muscles bulging, balanced on the spikes, skin, taut, whole, and the other foot, naked, too, over the spikes, down hard on the spikes, muscles, beating, moving, on the spikes, walking, one foot after another, across the board, skin unbroken — and a leap, the thud of heels on thick carpet, palms cracking against palms, tinkling of ice in tall glasses, woman-murmurs, deeper grunts of praise . . . and then a man's cheek, and the point of a hat pin, dancing, moving, steel-grey, swiftly, deep into the cheek, creasing the skin, point of the hat pin, bloodless, glinting high on the opposite side of his face; and the women, crowding about him (pin withdrawn, skin unbroken), chattering, applauding, men, dinner-jacketed, voices louder than necessary, taking his hand, patting him on the back, and he, flushed, grinning, answering questions, Jane saying to him, how wonderful it was, what a pity it was over, was it really over, was it, he, nodding, saying yes, regretfully yes, Jane coaxing, please, Don, please, the others coaxing, come on, Gallegher, be a sport, he, shaking his head, Jane, wheedling, please, the others urging, please; all right, but you must be quiet — this is going to be hypnosis and you must be quiet; they, forming a circle around him now, seated, standing, leaning, backs against the bar, an empty arm-chair beside him, he, glancing from face to face, asking for a volunteer, they, smiling, no, don't count on us, he, trying again, shrugging, turning to Jane, I can't go on without   will I do? A little man, standing head as high as Gallegher's shoulder, dinner jacket hanging badly, face, clean shaven, few angles, and Jane, oh-ing feminine delight, (you just watch this, her eyes were telling her guests), whispering, wonderful, wonderful; and the little man, head back, now, against the soft cushion of the chair, lights dimming about him, Gallegher, eyes, a pencil, in front of him, a long thin pencil, growing longer, and the room, trembling, grey as in dreams, and then Gallegher, pointing to where the Dali hung over solid wall, saying, you see that doorway, go through that doorway, and, they, opening the circle for him, grinning, the little man walking, rapidly, toward the wall, the picture toppling, his body pushing against the wall, pushing again, grins into laughter, pushing again, and Gallegher, finally calling him off, directing him back to the center of the room, saying, shine Robinson's shoes, and the little man, kneeling in front of the seated Robinson, whipping his handkerchief over Robinson's shoe tips, Robinson, speech liquor-thick, deriding, the others, crowding about, giggling, he, wiping the sides of the shoes, straightening the shoe laces, and Gallegher, beside him now, snapping his fingers, saying incisively, that will be all   the little man, staring, shaking away bewilderment, Robinson above him, explaining, youth-cruel, handkerchief into a ball, falling to the floor, laughter surrounding him, Robinson, fumbling in his pockets, spraying the carpet with copper coins, the laughter rising, he, on his feet, nostrils dilating, pudgy hands clenched into fists, stepping toward Robinson, in front of him: Robinson, standing; and the little man, pushing his way out of the group, walking to the bar, watching, the little man asking for a drink, Jane whispering earnestly to Robinson, the young man, nodding, Jane saying, good boy, Robinson toddling to the bar, slinging one arm over the little man's shoulder, saying, all in fun, can't you take a joke, swallowing a Manhattan, another, the little man, edging away, Robinson following him, repeating blurred apologies, the little man, trying to smile, finally saying, all right, forget it, and Robinson, happy, clapping him on the back, shouting for a dozen more rounds all on one tray, and they, breaking into small groups, talking, Jane at the piano, the younger set around her, Gallegher at the bar, lecturing informally, Jane beginning to play jazz, the little man walking away from the bar, a couple dancing, Jane beating it out with her left hand, they, crowding about the piano, deep gut-bucket blues, ***oh sweet má-má now*** *don't you let me dów-aún*, Harlem rhythm jumping, *oh sweet má-má now don't you let me* at the bar, Robinson had collapsed.

The room in motion, discords on the piano, Gallegher holding Robinson's head, the doctor elbowing his way through, stethoscope over the heart, eyelids bent back, Jane, saying, hushed, is he dead, the doctor, bending closely over the body, searching for a wound, Jane: is he dead, the doctor, looking up, puzzled, Gallegher, saying, he's not dead — but he must go to a hospital, the doctor, nodding, walking to the phone, Jane, following, grabbing him by the arm, saying, then what's wrong with him — what's happened, the doctor, stopping, uneasy, hesitating for a moment, beginning to say

Gallegher said, "He had too much to drink. Isn't that so, Doctor?"

The doctor looked at Gallegher. He said,

"Yes."

Then, Gallegher, outside, Central Park opposite, green-black, walking, north, into the Seventies, and the little man, waiting, walking beside him now, saying,

"I'm glad you know."

Spray-gun rain, cold, halos around the lamp-posts,

"My name is Hoffman," the little man said. "You'd be surprised how much I had to pay to get in."

Two steps to Gallegher's one, half a block in silence, then, popping, like a broken blown-up paper bag,

"I had to see you."

Cross-town traffic bending into the Avenue, red light blinking into green, tires screeching on the asphalt; softly, Hoffman,

"I need your help."

An old two-decker bustled by like a frightened old lady. Gallegher nodded. Then the Frick Museum was beside, soon behind them, and Hoffman was talking, words leap-frogging at first, then freely, night-phrases, jagged, Gallegher, looking straight ahead of him, saying little, above them: the white-on-black edge of a right angle, jutting: E. 83 ST., and Gallegher, stopping, leaning on his cane, listening, cars passing like the ticks of a clock,

"I live here," Gallegher said. Then slowly, "I'm sorry . . . really. I can't help you."

The little man said, "I don't understand. You've helped others."

Gallegher said, "Oh, I see. You've read my books."

"Over and over. That's why — There's no one else."

Gallegher said, "I can give you some advice . . . if you want it. Why don't you see a psychiatrist?"

"Psychiatrist? I told you I've tried everything. I went. It was like tonight in the chair. He said I talked. A lot, he said. I don't know. I don't want to go back."

Gallegher shrugged. He held out his hand.

"There's nothing I can do, believe me." Then, kindly, "Good night."

Hoffman took his hand.

"Good night."

The little man stood where he was, alone, his face puckering, baby fashion, spasms moving his tightened lips, drops of moisture forming in the corners of his eyes. He blew his nose. Then he moved away from the apartment house, into a side street: a candy store at the corner, a telephone booth; then out into the street again, dimout dark, collar up against the wind, face turned away from the Avenue, elevator-heels clicking, his shadow, in front of him, growing longer, reaching out for the darkness, light from the Avenue snake-slithering down the center of the gutter, the sound of leather on concrete, sharp and rhythmic, growing fainter, . . . then rain-soaked shoes beating on a stone step, door bell shrilling, a crack widening in the doorway, behind it: auburn hair tumbling, a young girl's throat; Sam! and light splashing on the sidewalk, rain pecking at the closing door, his coat, flung on a table, hat, spinning to rest beside it, and she, two steps above the living room, looking down at him from the foyer, head in his hands, panting,

"Sam, what on earth are you doing here at this hour?"

He said, "Where's Dave? I'm in pain — the whole left side of my face. Where's Dave?"

She said, "Dave had to go to the lab. Somebody called." Then, "You *are* sick," crossing over to him, "You're green."

He said, "Who called?"

"A patient. Dave never tells me who. He should be home soon." She looked at the clock. "He should be home now. I called there a half hour ago. Nobody answered. He must be on his way." She said, "I'm jittery."

She lit a cigarette, threw her head back, inhaled. Then she squashed the cigarette. "Wait a minute." She left the room, returned with a wet wash rag. She bent over him, placing the rag on his forehead. He could feel the edge of her dressing gown brushing against his cheek.

He breathed, "Bernice . . ."

"Do you feel any better?"

"Bernice . . . you're lovely."

She burlesqued her surprise, saying, "At your age." She lit another cigarette, saw it tremble, ground it out. The door was behind, Hoffman in front of her. She turned her head swiftly. The door was still closed. Hoffman was leaning forward. The wash rag was lying on an end table beside him. His forehead glistened.

Hoffman said, "I'm not so old. Forty-three isn't so old."

She tapped a cigarette package. It was empty. She tossed it aside. The clock was electric; it was never wrong.

Hoffman said, "I know what you think of me, Bernice. All of you think the same. Bernice . . . I'm not what I seem."

She was listening for the sound of an automobile's brakes, or for hurried footsteps.

"Bernice . . . suppose, suppose that I had power, so powerful that I could —"

She shrilled, "Don't be silly."

His mouth moved awkwardly; then

he sank back in his chair, his eyes lowered. She was on her feet, walking (the door, the clock, the clock, the door), pulling up the window blind, letting it sag, slowly. Up the street, she could hear a couple quarreling. There was no other noise.

She said, "I'm sorry, Sam. But you can be such an ass at times. Oh, my God, you're green again."

He looked at, then he looked away from her. She thought: he's pouting — Dave will put him out — he'll thank Dave for putting him out. It was ten after one. She looked again. It *was* ten after one. She heard the mechanism buzz a dozen times at the other end of the wire before she hung up. The couple up the street were quiet. Hoffman was sitting stiffly, his head still averted, saying nothing. She drummed on the window sill with her fingers. She said,

"Oh, my God, Sam. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Can't you talk?"

He refused to look at her. She snapped the radio on, viciously. The tubes began to warm, humming. The telephone bell screamed. Hoffman was standing. Bernice ran past him. The receiver was against her ear.

The radio said, "Do you know, I used to be a fighter in a candy store."

Bernice said, "Yes. This is Mrs. David Simon. What is it?"

The radio was amazed. "A fighter in a candy store?"

Bernice said, "This *is* Mrs. David Simon. What *is* it? *Please.*"

"Yeah, yeah," the radio answered. "I used to box candy."

Bernice let the phone slip back in its cradle. There was no blood left in her face. Her lips were moving, but she made no sound.

Hoffman had begun to walk up the steps to the foyer. The muscles around his mouth were twitching.

Hoffman, the room like a pan shot: French windows opening on a terrace, books from ceiling to floor, a map in a black glass frame, medieval distortions, on the mantel-piece: two ivory lions, between them a shelf of books, titles: GALLEGHER, GALLEGHER, GALLEGHER, and below, in front of the fireplace, behind a desk, rubber tip of a pencil tapping, Gallegher, head thrown back, Hoffman forgotten, *Out of this great seminal period of American life, with the realities of a mature scientific and industrial epoch giving the lie to those starry-eyed Utopians of the turn of the century, there emerges a man whose exuberant romanticism may well be the expression of a new decade. In his own lifetime, still young, he has already become a legend — the incomparable Gallegher, heir to the traditions of Mungo Park, Richard Burton, and Marco Polo. In a gay prose, noted for* Gallegher, the review still in his hand, rising abruptly, Hoffman wanting to speak, Gallegher, gesturing for a moment's time, leaning against the terrace doors, frowning, *It is to be feared that Gallegher, like Saltus or Bierce or Poe before him, works too often with the ersatz; but unlike the others, he has not the refuge of fiction or antique biography to sustain him. To* *him, the esoteric and the occult have always been the factual concomitants of strange places and alien shores; but the war has brought disenchantment: ancient Gods vanish and the medicine man wears a silk hat when the Marines land with Coca-Cola and the Saturday Evening Post. Later, one will be forced to decide that behind the brilliant facade of his style, the bric-a-brac of pretentious folklore and old wives' tales, there is little except a bibulous and brooding imagination. What happens — and what does not happen — in the Moluccas, happens — or does not happen — in Times Square.* Gallegher, flushing, suddenly impatient, testily,

"Look here, Hoffman, there are a few points that need clarification. I'm not a witch doctor. What you saw at the party were tricks anybody can learn. I'd like to believe you —"

Hoffman said, "There was another last night."

The light behind him, full on Hoffman's face, Hoffman, eyes dog-soft, quietly,

"Before the party, I had dinner with an old friend. He's a doctor. Dave Simon?" Gallegher shaking his head, no. "He joked about my wanting to see you. I can't — I couldn't stand that. We quarrelled. I knew what it would mean. I thought maybe you would help — Then you left me — I went to his home. I wanted to apologize. I wanted to do something. I thought maybe I could stop it."

Gallegher, behind the desk again, the morning papers in front of him, sheets turning rapidly,

"I couldn't."

Stopping, reading, marking the outline of a column in blue pencil, setting the paper aside, picking up another, searching, Hoffman,

"His laboratory blew up. He was in it. . . . Have you found it there, too?"

Gallegher nodding, making a note, nodding yes, Hoffman,

"Please cure me."

Looking up, Gallegher, Hoffman, no expression on their faces, Hoffman, Gallegher; then, carefully, like drops from a burette,

"You knew all the while, Mr. Gallegher. Maybe you were afraid to admit it, even to yourself, but I have that power. It doesn't matter who he is, or what he does to me — if he angers me, my anger brings death . . . and he doesn't wait long for it to come," right hand spanning the side of his face, eyes closed, head swaying softly, almost to himself, "I know five have died already. God only knows how many more there were. . . . It isn't suicide, Mr. Gallegher — you know it isn't accident. That's only the way it happens. I get so angry, I can't talk . . . or see . . . everything is all upside-down. And then my power kills them."

After a while, Gallegher said, "Come back tomorrow. At four."

He returned — to find Gallegher almost boyish in his enthusiasm. (There was a chance — he may have found it, here, after all, on his own door-step, murder, undiscoverable, following hard on Hoffman's anger, done by the unseen.) And for the next few days Hoffman was treated in a manner calculated to break down his mental barriers; and he responded, talking freely, while Gallegher, informal, jotted down what he was told in a queer admixture of abbreviations and shorthand. We must get the facts first, Gallegher had said; but as the days passed and his notebook filled, he realized that Hoffman could do no more than merely embellish the story he had told him that night after the party; and he could see in Hoffman's eyes the beginnings of a lack of confidence, and the doubt that this method of catharsis by suggestion would ever cure him. Gallagher said then: We can't cure yet, but we can prevent. Let's try to remove the source of irritation. Quit your business for a while, stay home, read light books, stay away from people — above all, stay away from crowds. When you come here each day, since you can't drive, take a taxi. . . . Hoffman smiled at that, promised, and came back to sessions that were beginning to grow empty, until he suggested to Gallegher that, perhaps, others had been able, in some lesser measure, to duplicate his power consciously, and that if he knew their wilful techniques, he could put his finger on his own unconscious parallel actions, and, knowing them, eliminate them — and Gallegher accepted with alacrity. After that — and a week had already passed — the daily conferences became lectures, with Gallegher picking from his memory all the cases of the power of the will over matter, and Hoffman, humble, attentive, finding no analogies, leaving each night at six, unsatisfied, but confident that tomorrow must bring an end to it all.

By the close of the third week, Gallegher's knowledge had approached the exhaustion point, and he was irritable from the dysphoria that comes with the unfulfillment of half-formulated hopes. Several times that day, he was on the verge of telling Hoffman that he had never really known of a case that could not be explained naturally, but instead he repeated what they had talked about yesterday and the day before; and when the stuttering session was over, Hoffman said thanks and goodbye, obsequious as always, and still hopeful.

It was just after six, Gallegher saw, and there was an appointment at six-thirty that he was eager to keep. He hurried downstairs, but neither he nor the doorman could find an empty cab. He decided against telephoning a garage, and walked east toward Lexington Avenue, then a few blocks north to the subway: kiosk, hot tunnel smell, a newsboy shouting, voice dwarf-thin, office girls, sweaty, complaining, whining sounds, jostling Gallegher, down the stairs, a small landing, at right angles to it: another flight of stairs, steep, below him: the station, massed, two long lines converging on a booth, nickels spewed from a glass arch, turnstiles clicking, crowd-murmur, Gallegher, stopping, finding a coin, on the platform
steel noises pouring from the tunnel,

louder, a brief case, insect-face of the rushing train, the crowd, mass-moving toward the edge of the platform, a brief case, swinging, dropping, legs against it, an old man, stumbling, many eyes: dull then wide, many mouths: gaping, the old man falling, scream, screams, a subway guard catching the old man, train at rest, crowd funneling toward the doors, the guard, picking up the brief case, flinging it at a man entering the train, shouting, red-faced, *You damn fool, you're in such a hurry to get in, you might have killed somebody,* doors snapping shut, train shuddering, Gallegher, looking down from the landing: a little man in the train, face squeezed against a glass window, the train moving slowly,

Gallegher shouted.

moving faster,

Gallegher waved and shouted.

the little man,

making no sign, the train, a blur of yellow and black, a blast of wind, the crowd-murmur swelling, empty tracks.

Gallegher turned and walked up the steps to the street. Apparently, Hoffman had not seen him. . . .

Nearby, Gallegher found a small French restaurant. He telephoned Inspector Magruder. Magruder said he'd have the information for him by tomorrow afternoon, would that be soon enough? Gallegher said, yes thanks, then ordered a bottle of Chablis and cold duck. He drank a good deal of the wine, but ate so little that the proprietor, mock-irate, stood over him, scolding. Gallegher made the necessary remarks, then left, walking across Central Park, then down through the Mall. At Fifty-Ninth and Eighth, he remembered the two tickets in his pocket: MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, HOCKEY, SIDE ARENA, BOX. He decided to use one.

When he took his seat, the game had already started. Across the ice, two players were throwing punches at each other, hitting the air, looking clumsy. Gallegher thought: *He'll want to kill me now. . . .* The puck was in play again; no pattern: blues, reds, yellows, streaking up and down the ice. . . . I think he saw me. It's not without its irony: after all these years on the other side of the world, writing about it, never truly believing, wanting to, perhaps hoping, and now, here, home, in New York. . . . The tall player wearing number seven took a short pass, body-shifted, slipped by his guard and drove hard for the goal. . . . Stay away from crowds, Hoffman, I told him, above all stay away from crowds. I'll do that, Mr. Gallegher. But if he had gone tonight — rush hour, the Eighty-Sixth Street Station — he must have gone other nights. Mr. Gallegher, you've written how out in the East they make their minds control things, won't you tell me how it's done? The subway — people, tired, unhappy, anger flaring easily. He didn't come to me to be cured. . . . Skates flinging sprays of snow, players tangling on the ice, a red light over the cage flashing, and a woman next to him, bobbing up and down, shouting, "Oh, you Billy-Boy! Oh, you wonderful man!" . . . He came to me to learn how to use his power. He must know I know — other nights at six . . . The crowd was on its feet. . . . The subway is his proving ground. . . . Then he saw the puck coming. He put his hand to his face. When he took it away, it was covered with blood.

Across the street to the Polyclinic, surgery, white gauze swathing his head, pulse: one hundred and thirty, hypodermic: barbital derivative, deep sleep; then home, noon, behind his desk, refusing to move, waiting, leaving his food untouched, forbidding the maid to bring in knives or forks, not bathing, the hour hand, slow, no one in to see him, his mind made up, no telephone calls answered, the maid, always at least three feet from him, he, watching the clock, having the maid remove the letter opener, the fountain pens; and, at four, Hoffman, coming across the room, swaggering, one elbow leaning on the desk, gay,

"I'm sorry to hear about your," pausing melodrama-fashion, "accident."

Gallegher saying nothing,

"Look here, Gallegher," Hoffman, "we're getting nowhere, and to me, time is money. You're not helping me, so I'm going to tell you what you're going to do. You've got publishers, you've got outlets — you're going to write me up. They'll read about me all over the world and — who knows? — maybe somebody will be able to help."

Gallegher breathing hard,

"No."

Hoffman, smiling indulgently, sitting on the desk, feet dangling,

"Why not?"

"You're a liar."

Color rising in Hoffman's face, draining, Hoffman, moving off the desk, looking down at Gallegher, a row of sweat-drops on Hoffman's forehead, Hoffman, apologetic,

"I'm sorry to have troubled you."

Leaving, turning,

"Send me a bill — I'll pay you more than you ask."

Hoffman gone, and Gallegher, leaning back in his chair, not believing it, then grinning, bubbling over, saying to the long-chinned man who had just come in,

"It's the damndest thing. All I wanted to do was bring it to a head — have it out with him face to face — and he collapsed like a pricked balloon. It was a hoax all the time."

The man, gesturing his bewilderment, saying,

"I wouldn't know. You, Gallegher? I'm Kuchatsky," badge flashing, "Homicide. Inspector Magruder sent me up with some info for you."

"Oh, yes. . . . I don't need it now," the brandy bottle in his hand, breaking the seal, "Say thanks to Magruder anyway," picking the two glasses from the desk top, "Have a drink with me," and Kuchatsky pleased, accepting, then remembering, saying doubtfully,

"But the Chief isn't going to be happy. If he says do something — Well, you know the Chief."

And Gallegher, amused, brown liquid gurgling, handing Kuchatsky a glass, pouring for himself, Gallegher,

"I'll listen."

Kuchatsky sipping, then putting down his glass hurriedly, a dirty-brown notebook, tiny, lost in his wrestler-hand, partially reading,

"In the last three weeks, there were sixty-three deaths by suicide or accident in the Metropolitan Area."

Gallegher, lifting his glass, inhaling the bouquet, placid, Kuchatsky,

"Of these sixty-three, one — a sixteen year old girl — died on the Eighty-Sixth Street Subway Station at six-fifteen P.M. two weeks ago," tumbler to Gallegher's lips, tilting, "And nine more of them — three men and six women — used the Eighty-Sixth Street Subway Station without fail every week-day between the hours of six and seven P.M. before their deaths."

Suddenly, the brandy odor seemed strange. The glass slipped from Gallegher's fingers. A wet spot was growing on the rug.

"That's a hell of a thing," said Kuchatsky, "wasting good liquor."

Gallegher's rooms, Gallegher, Magruder, alone, Magruder, tobacco pouch, pipe bowl scooping within it, tip of his nail, wooden match flaring, lighting his pipe slowly.

"Do you know Freudenberger?" he saked.

Gallegher lifted his eyes and said, 'Yes, well. He's one of the old guard, psychoanalysts — studied with Freud under Charcot. He's one of the few practitioners in this country who still uses hypnosis as a therapeutic."

Magruder nodded, handed Gallegher a sheaf of typewritten paper stapled together.

Magruder said, "He treated Hoffman — just once. What you're reading is a transcript of Hoffman's monologue under his hypnosis."

Gallegher read it. When he had finished, he said,

"It's just what he told me."

Magruder said, "Yes, I know." Then: "I asked Freudenberger what he thought of it. He told me it might mean one of many things, or all of them — a strong mother fixation, frustrations, an abnormal yearning for power — recognition. He said that the four deaths mentioned in the manuscript were probably wish-fulfillments without any true factual basis. We traced back. Freudenberger was wrong."

There were blue dabs under Gallegher's eyes. He looked like a man who hadn't slept for a long time, and who knew he wouldn't sleep for a long time again.

"When Hoffman was seven," Magruder said, "his nurse — whom he probably had reason to hate — fell down a flight of stairs and broke her neck. He was found kicking the corpse in the face. His father had him sent to a private sanitarium for observation. The sanitarium was located here in New York. There was a girl inmate, Alice — the Alice of the manuscript

— who hazed Hoffman. She was later found dead in a sewer. She had been playing with Hoffman and some other children in a restricted street opposite the sanitarium and had fallen down an open manhole. The house physicians, though, found no traces of homicidal mania, and when his father died, he was released in his mother's care. She took care of him, good care of him — and then she died three years ago. He almost immediately proposed marriage to his secretary — that's *the* Edith. She refused and was found one morning at the bottom of a staircase in his office building. The fall had broken her neck — just as it had his nurse's."

Magruder saw the bones white under Gallegher's cheeks. He mixed a drink. He watched Gallegher gulp it down. Then he said, "He was fond of this Nelson he mentions. Nelson was his junior partner. He blackmailed Hoffman for some minor infraction of the moral code. Nelson committed suicide by leaping from the terrace of Hoffman's penthouse apartment. Then, with Nelson and Edith dead, he turned his affections to Bernice Simon. Bernice Simon was married. You know what happened to her husband. And, by the by — Robinson? the drunk at the party?" Gallegher nodded. "He was poisoned. They found acetone and traces of carbon tetrachloride. It seems he swallowed some cleaning fluid. That doctor who treated him first told me he thought so, but that you browbeat him. Why did you do that?"

Without tone, "I just thought he was drunk."

Magruder said, "So Hoffman was telling the truth. We know definitely of five deaths by accident or suicide that followed quarrels with him. But we've found no physical evidence at all that connects Hoffman with the commission of any of these deaths."

Gallegher snapped, "How could you expect to? The power he has doesn't leave fingerprints."

Magruder sucked on his pipe. He said slowly,

"I've been on the Force for thirty years. I've seen queerer things. I'm not disagreeing, but it strikes me — doesn't it strike you — that there are a few aspects of this affair that don't quite mesh with your ideas? Here's what I mean: I think of the supernatural as something infallible. Yet this power of his doesn't always work. Robinson is still alive. So is that old man you saw stumble on the subway station. So are you — and I think he'd like to see you dead."

Gallegher's voice was tired. "I explained all that. He hasn't full control of his power. At first, it was entirely unconscious. He came to me to learn how to use it."

Magruder said, "You're probably quite right. But there *is* another way of looking at it. That night you saw him in the subway, he saw you. He also saw the papers the next morning. He knew that you would think he had directed that wild puck to hit you, and that you were about to be murdered by his power. So he came —

and offered you a bargain. What he said, in essence, was this: give me publicity and I'll give you back your life. Being hit by a puck was a dramatic accident, but if you had slipped on a banana peel and he had known about it, he would have behaved the same way. What he was after all the time was recognition, some type of fame at any cost — and the power that comes with it. Because of your position in the literary world, you could give him that — and with a certain amount of dignity: he wouldn't be a freak. Remember — under hypnosis, he said he flew over tall buildings. Freudenberger pointed out to me that that's a well-known dream symbol for the desire for power. It all fits together."

Gallegher rubbed his temples, his eyes closing. Then he looked at Magruder. He said, meaning: please don't treat me like a child, "You know it doesn't. Because he came to me to learn, ten people who used the Eighty-Sixth Street Subway Station died. Magruder, that wasn't coincidence."

"You're right. It couldn't be coincidence. We know that Hoffman used that subway every night at six after he left you. There may have been quarrels — we think so; we can't be sure. But there is a possibility that what happened in the subway had nothing to do with his power. . . . No, Gallegher, I'm not trying to kid you. Listen to me: After you had been hit by the puck, he visited you. You had decided to force the issue, insult him, and battle for your life by matching your will against his then and there. I can understand that, knowing your background — your nerves were shot, you'd been hurt. You did insult him. You called him a liar. He folded. The word 'liar' frightened him. Was that because he realized you knew he had been using the subway? That couldn't be the lie. If I'm right, he was capitalizing on that very knowledge of yours to force you to terms. He had been lying all along about something else, and he thought you had discovered it — something so important that he was willing to give up his plans for obtaining publicity through you, and to offer you more money than you asked for — in order to keep it quiet."

Gallegher shook his head. He said hopelessly, "What could he have been lying about?"

Magruder said, "I don't know — except that it may have been connected with his activities in the subway and elsewhere. He's being tailed. Kuchatsky is watching his apartment through binoculars. We're not making too much progress. But if I'm right about his psychopathic desire for publicity, I'll be able to find out." He paused. Then: "I know how you feel about this, Gallegher, but you'll have to cooperate for your own good. We'll give you all the protection necessary, but do this for me: Call Hoffman, apologize, be nice to him. Tell him you'd like him to meet a friend of yours. Stress this: that this friend is a great authority on the occult, with wide influence, and a wider audience. Ask for an appointment at his penthouse."

Gallegher's face went stiff and blank. After a while, he said, "All right — as long as I'm free of fear again."

A penthouse, the street twenty stories below it, one side: masonry, windows, a door swinging open; three sides: bamboo sticks, close together, neck high, rooted in concrete, perennials, green, weaving around, between them, through the door: Gallegher, a tall man beside him, blue serge suit, string of a polka dot tie hanging from a shapeless white collar, hair, chemical-black, close-cropped as a cinema Prussian's, features, good-looking, hard-boiled fashion, intelligent; and Gallegher acknowledging the welcome,

"This is my friend who is a student of the occult. Mr. Hoffman — Mr. Magruder — Mr. Magruder — Mr. Hoffman."

Hands stretched, pressed, and Gallegher, leaving them, nerve-gnawed facial muscles relaxing, March wind, soft, gusts from the Hudson, yards away from him: standing, Hoffman, Magruder, talking,

"Mr. Hoffman just told me a very interesting story. It's about a man who has a power which brings death to whoever angers him. You know, Gallegher," meaning: why did you waste my time bringing me here, "I don't put much stock in that sort of thing any more."

Hoffman, nostrils thin, sucking his lower lip, sitting not far from Gallegher now, looking up at Magruder, eyes frosting, Magruder, turning to Hoffman, glib,

"A few months ago, I went up to a small town in Maine to investigate a series of so-called devil deaths at the local inn. The town was in a panic — until the police chemist discovered that the innkeeper was putting roach paste in the soup," laughing, business man fashion, loud, hollow, and Hoffman, face wooden, staring coldly in front of him, Magruder,

"Oh, say, Hoffman, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. It's only that after all these years, I'm a bit disillusioned. I'll tell you something, though — I think more of a murderer than I do of a man with supernatural powers. I think it's a finer thing to be a criminal genius *yourself* than merely to be the instrument of something beyond you."

Hoffman, eyes like white buttons, then narrow as a camera slit, body taut as the hair of a bomb sight,

"Do you?"

"I'm writing a book about it."

Surging to his feet, eyes racing back and forth over Magruder's face, smile: a rictus, then vanishing, suddenly calm,

"I know a man — he's not a criminal, Mr. Magruder, mind you that, he's not a criminal — but I think *you* would appreciate his life's work."

Walking slowly up and down, then turning to Magruder, Magruder, absorbed, Gallegher watching Hoffman, Hoffman, so slowly that Gallegher counted watch-ticks between the words,

"This man was told when he was a child," to Magruder, "told by God," Magruder, nodding, understanding, pace accelerating now, "that he was to single out the transgressors for Divine judgment."

Hoffman waiting, Gallegher shifting his eyes, Magruder nodding, go ahead, go ahead, Hoffman, excitement tumbling the words,

"But God said to him: you're human, you can make mistakes. Prepare the execution. *I'll* accept or reject. *I'll* be the executioner — not *you.*"

Gestures frenetic now, eyes glowing, Magruder, Gallegher, Magruder saying softly,

"I'm sorry, I don't understand."

And Hoffman, laughing, explosive, one syllable,

"Oh, it's simple and it's wonderful. Suppose this man knew of an evil woman. Before she walked down a flight of stairs, he would place a small toy on the top of the stairs — a roller skate, a toy elephant on wheels. If God didn't want her, she would see the toy. If he wanted her, she would fall and break her neck. . . . I know that a child was once marked by him — oh, long ago. She was playing blind man's buff in the street with her hand over her eyes. He removed the manhole cover. God accepted her," face close to Magruder's, words machine-gunned, whispering, "He opened the Bunsen burners in a doctor's laboratory. God wanted this doctor. The doctor came into the laboratory with a lighted cigar in his hand."

Eyes like aircraft flares,

"He found evil where people congregate: theatres, ballparks, museums — but he liked the subway best of all. He dropped his brief case on the platform once. She stumbled. The train cut her head off, right at the base of the neck. Sometimes there were difficulties: he had to follow the men and women he marked in the subway. There was a carpenter. He followed him to his shop, loosened the head of his hammer. God wanted him — and the hammer-head struck him in the temple. . . . Tomorrow perhaps, or the next day, he'll go to a night club he knows. He'll drop a match in the fireproof decorations. If God accepts —" a voice uncertain, walking more slowly, standing still, "He put cleaning fluid in a cocktail at the bar. The man drank it — but he didn't die. The other man smelled the bitter almonds over the brandy," Hoffman, suddenly pale, "God rejects, too," sitting, his body an empty sack, shivering, biting the underside of his index finger, his chin quivering like an infant's,

"But nobody would admire that man. They'd call it murder. Nobody would understand that man."

Magruder saying,

"I would. I'd like to meet him."

And Gallegher, bitterly,

"A page from Krafft-Ebing."

Hoffman, eyeballs lost in the corners of their sockets, grin incipient, to Gallegher,

"*Maybe* . . . that's where I read it."

And Magruder, expiration of air, soft, almost whistle-sound,

"For a moment there," disappointment, "you almost had me believing you knew this man."

Then, Hoffman, looking up, smile: experimental, soon natural, bustling to his feet,

"Gallegher! Come here to the edge of the terrace. The Hudson is beautiful. You've never seen such a view."

Gallegher shaking his head, no, not a chance, pressing his body firmly to his chair, Magruder, catching his eye, motioning him to go, Gallegher hesitating, Magruder insistent, Gallegher, walking, close to the bamboo fence, his body leaning against it, then: leaves dancing in the air, the street in front of him, bamboo sticks floating downward, a hand hurting his shoulder, street turning into blue sky, Magruder flinging him back on the terrace floor, two men above him, swaying together, Magruder's voice,

". . . binoculars . . . we saw you cut through the bottom of those poles," a panting Hoffman, quiet now, handcuffs on his wrists . . .

Gallegher rose. Hoffman smiled at him, then turned to Magruder,

"You see," the little man said, "this one, God did not accept."

◆

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933

of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, published bimonthly at Concord, N. H., for October 1, 1944

State of New York, County of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Joseph W. Ferman, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: *Publisher*, Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., New York; *Editor*, Ellery Queen, 570 Lexington Ave., New York; *Managing Editor*, Mildred Falk, 570 Lexington Ave., New York; *Business Manager*, Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., New York.

2. That the owners are: The American Mercury, Inc.; Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., N. Y.; Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., N. Y.; Mildred Falk, 570 Lexington Ave., N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

J. W. Ferman, *Business Manager.*

Sworn to and subscribed before me, this 5th day of September, 1944.

[Seal] Gertrude J. Huebner, *Notary Public.*
(My commission expires March 30, 1946.)

It was inevitable. It was so ordained from the beginning. It was Kismet, Destiny, Fate. In his third exploit Careful Jones, Cardsharper Extraordinary, succumbs to his predetermined and appointed lot. It happens to four out of five great criminals of fiction . . .

In his first adventure ("The Showdown," issue of January 1944) Careful Jones was an out-and-out crook whose brilliant foresight and dexterity of hand were the efficient means of lining his own pockets. The world was Careful Jones's personal oyster — and he never gave a sucker a break.

In his second adventure ("The Imponderables," issue of July 1944) Careful Jones gave a new twist to the Old Army game, helping a young flyer in distress. There was the tip-off. Careful Jones had taken the first step, but there are none so blind . . .

And now, in the third adventure of his recorded career, Careful Jones proves himself a true modern descendant of Robin Hood: "trim the rich to help the poor" is his new code — and by the patron saint of poker, who's to say he's wrong?

THE ACE OF SPADES

by "PAT HAND"

CAREFUL JONES looked about the Lawson suite with a distasteful eye. It was large and luxurious with a view from the sitting room of a private section of deck. There were fresh flowers everywhere, and baskets of fruit, and boxes of candy on all the tables. A sable coat, belonging to the youngish, red-headed, diamond-bedecked Mrs. Pierre Lawson, had been flung carelessly over the back of a chair. It was the most expensive suite on the ship.

The distaste in the gray still eye of the almost legendary Careful Jones was not due, however, to any disbelief in luxury or wealth. He liked men to make a great deal of money so that he could take some of it away from them in high-powered games of chance. But he had been one of a group of passengers to whom the captain of the *Minotaur* had explained the desperate plight of some war refugees on board and he was remembering that Pierre Lawson, although one of the wealthiest men in America, had contributed an almost infinitesimal check to the relief fund. To make matters worse, Mr. Lawson had been sitting into their six-man poker game and winning steadily with the same cold efficiency he displayed, no doubt, in the operation of his steel plants.

He came in now, puffing out his pleated shirt front and rubbing a hand over his bluish dewlaps. "First here, Jones?" he rumbled. "Hope the others get here soon. I feel lucky tonight."

"You won't need luck," said Jones, twisting an unlighted cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. "I've been watching things and I must say you play a shrewd game of poker."

The steel magnate grunted deprecatingly but it was clear he was very much pleased. "Nothing to poker," he declared. "Just follow the same lines as you do in business and you can't fail to come out on top. Know your odds, watch your opponents, never lose your nerve. And above everything else, never take foolish risks." He reached for a cigar in a handsome humidor and snipped off the end. "I always win."

Careful Jones nodded. "You've put your finger on the fine points," he conceded. "Especially about watching your opponents. I've been playing poker, man and boy, for more'n fifty years and, from what I've managed to pick up in that time, I say knowing the other fellow's game is just about seventy-five per cent of winning. It's not only getting on to his special angles; it's finding out the little things he does unconsciously and then cashing in on 'em. For instance, Mr. Lawson, when you're loaded for bear you always clear your throat before making your first bet."

The millionaire looked ruffled at this hint of a flaw in his game. "I do? I've never noticed it myself. Are you sure of it?"

"Sartain sure. I got on to *that* the very first night and it's saved me quite a bit of dough since. Every man has 'em. Take that fellow Crouch. I don't give him much myself anyway, being of the honest opinion that the fellow's a two-faced, low-down, yellow-bellied skunk with some other faults I'd mention if we had the time — "

Lawson laughed. "Go right on. My own opinion exactly. But he's a good player — wins right along."

"He knows his stuff but he has one of these little weaknesses just the same. Ever notice the cat's-eye ring he wears? Well, Mr. Crouch likes to pull a bluff about twice every evening. I'll say this for him, he picks his spots. But whenever he's set to run a sandy, he touches that ring with his thumb under the palm. He may do it for luck but I think he don't know he's doing it. All you have to do, Mr. Lawson, is to keep your eyes peeled on that thumb of his and you'll take the fellow for a nice buggy-ride before the evening's out."

The steel man's eyes glistened avidly. "Very interesting, Jones. Have you observed anything about our other opponents?"

"Well, there's this Colonel Braddock. He just can't resist holding an ace for a kicker. He'll do it even with three of a kind in his hand. The funny part of it is, he knows it's wrong and he fights against it. When he frowns and gives himself a twist in his chair, you can be dead sure he's going to hold an ace with whatever else he's got in his hand."

Pierre Lawson began to laugh slyly. "I see where I'll have to keep a closer eye on the pair of them. But what I really want to know, Jones, is this. What little give-away tricks have you got yourself?"

"I wish I knew." Jones shook his head earnestly and then repeated, "By George, I wish I knew. I'd give a lot to find out if I've got any of these habits myself."

The other players began to drift into the room, nodding respectfully to the great Mr. Lawson and seating themselves immediately at the round poker table in the centre of the room. The millionaire snapped down the lid of the humidor and shoved it to one side. "Well, gentlemen, let's get started," he said.

Careful Jones looked at the other members of the group with a freshly appraising eye. They were all prosperous looking, inclined to be tight-lipped and running without exception to purple nose veins and inflated waistlines. "I may have to pull a fancy one on these birds," he said to himself. "Somehow I got to see that a fat contribution goes to the refugee fund out of this game."

It was nearly one o'clock. Half an hour before, Mrs. Lawson had passed silently across the room and vanished through one of the doors, a French maid at her heels. A trace of seductive perfume still lingered on the air. The game was to break up at one sharp.

Careful Jones, who had managed to accumulate what he termed his "chunk o' taller", was dealing. Lawson and Crouch were both well ahead of the game. The rest of the party were down for rather considerable amounts.

Jones laid the pack of cards on the table. "Gentlemen," he said, "I was kind of disturbed over those poor critters the captain told us about this afternoon. What say we donate the proceeds of this last pot to the fund?"

Lawson snorted indignantly. "I paid over a check to Captain Trimble. I certainly won't agree to anything of the kind. What's wrong with you, Jones? Getting soft in the head all of a sudden?"

"I'm four thousand down as it is," grumbled one of the others.

The rest remained silent. Were they waiting to see what cards they would draw first? It seemed likely. Jones paused expectantly and then said, "Well, if I happen to win myself, I'm going to turn the cash over to the captain. So let's make it a good one anyway."

He began to deal. Lawson on his left looked at his five cards and checked himself hurriedly when he found himself on the point of clearing his throat.

"I'll open the second front myself," he said with a perfect air of indifference. "As this is the last deal, I'll give you suckers a chance for some action. What do you say to a hundred?"

Two pairs of eyes, the dealer's and Lawson's, glued themselves on Crouch's hands as that unpopular member of the circle considered what he would do. Both of them were sure that his pudgy thumb touched the inner rim of the ring on his index finger before he said, "Well, if it's action you're looking for, I'll just give it a tilt for five of the same. That'll keep the grocery clerks out anyway."

The man on Crouch's left whistled in dismay and threw in his hand. "That keeps one of the grocery clerks out," he said.

The next player laughed. "Not having the chance of a lily-fingered Hottentot, I'm now in favor of contributing this pot to the needy refugees," he announced. He also threw in his hand.

Colonel Braddock was frowning and twisting in his chair. "Six hundred to stay in?" he asked. "Well, gentlemen, I think pretty well of these cards of mine. They make another tilt obligatory. Making it an even grand."

"I'll stay for the thousand," said Jones, shoving a stack of chips to the centre of the table.

It was a full minute before Lawson made up his mind about his next move. He had observed the antics of the Colonel and was not much disturbed over the raise from that quarter. It was clear, however, that he did not like the fact that Jones himself had elected to stay in. He had acquired a healthy respect for the judgment of that impassive-faced veteran and he was certain now that the danger, if any, would come from him. Finally he saw the double raise.

Crouch blithely pushed more chips forward. "Once you start to toy recklessly with fate," he said, "you might as well keep right on doing it. Another thousand, gentlemen."

Braddock groaned and saw him. It was now the turn of the dealer to pause. Jones seemed to study his cards anxiously, then finally elected to stay. Lawson followed suit.

Before calling for cards, Jones decided to make another effort. "Between the lot of us we've built up a pretty handsome pot," he said. "Come, gentlemen, how about that little idea of mine? It wouldn't hurt any of us."

"Nothing doing," said the steel magnate, sharply.

Jones turned his head toward the next man. "Feeling generous, Crouch?"

"Me? What do you take me for? I've got this pot all sewed up and what's more I know exactly how I'm going to spend every solitary little dollar in it."

"Colonel Braddock?"

"I'm in the red," said the Colonel, impatiently. "I need this pot to get even."

The old stager said to himself bitterly: "The cheap skates! They're all rolling in it and it wouldn't hurt 'em to be a little generous for once in their lives. Well, it looks as if I'll have to win the pot myself."

His fingers began to move. Slowly, clumsily even, it might have seemed to a casual watcher. One card went on demand to the millionaire, one to

Crouch, one to Braddock. No eyes in the room were keen enough to see that Jones was indulging his skill in the most difficult of all feats of card manipulation — the second card deal. When his own turn came, he announced, "Dealer also takes one," and dropped in front of himself *the card which had been on top of the deck all the time.*

Lawson was too concerned with his prospects to realize that he cleared his throat before saying, "The opener bets an even two thousand."

There was no twitch of the Crouch thumb this time. He saw the bet and raised it an equal amount. Braddock considered his hand sourly and then threw the cards face up on the table. "Look at that!" he grated. "I go in with three tens and can't better them, while both these two luckbags fill. They won't get any more sucker money out of me! And I announce here and now that I'm cured for all time of holding kickers." He had held an ace with the tens and had drawn a fine deuce for his pains.

Careful Jones said in grumbling tones: "You fellows are sure running hog-wild. Still, I like what I got here. I stand by what I said about the fund, so I'm not going to put any more of my own money in than I have to. I'll just see."

There was a trace of perspiration on the round forehead of the steel man. He seemed to be wavering between alternate flashes of optimism and doubt — particularly when he glanced at the expressionless face of the dealer. "I should bump you back, Crouch, by rights," he said, finally. "I've got *you* beaten — but what about this oldtimer from the Wild West? I don't believe in foolish risks and anyway the pot's pretty big as it is. I'm just seeing."

Crouch spread his hand on the table. "I made it," he said, confidently. "A spade flush. King, queen, jack, ten, six. Drew the six. Of course if I had drawn the spade ace, I'd have had a royal flush. That would have made it a sure thing — but you can't have everything, I guess."

The steel magnate was so certain of winning now that he did not wait for the dealer to declare himself. "No good," he said, briskly. "No good at all, Crouch. I have a full house. Three sevens, two aces. I could have used the ace of spades too — that would have copper-riveted my chances of winning. But I'm not complaining about the neat little seven that came drifting in." He reached out an exultant hand toward the great pile of chips on the green baize as he twisted his head in the direction of Careful Jones. "Good?" he asked.

"As it happens, no," answered the dealer. He spread out his hand. "I caught too. A straight flush. Lowest in the whole deck, five down to ace, and all spades. A real, honest-to-goodness straight flush just the same, and good enough to win the pot for the widows and orphans."

Paying no heed to the sharp and angry comments from his disappointed opponents, he drew twenty-one thousand dollar bills from a plethoric wallet, counted them carefully aloud and then put them in an envelope. He moistened the flap and closed it tight with one circular sweep of a splayed thumb. He was thinking, "I must spike their guns before the uproar starts."

Lawson began to say, "There's something damned odd about this —"

Jones touched a button on the wall behind him and said to the Lawson valet who answered: "Here, young fellow, take this straight to Captain Trimble's cabin. Hang on to it tight — there's quite a chunk o' taller in it. Tell Captain Trimble it's a contribution for the refugees from — from Mr. Lawson and some acquaintances of his." He looked over at the millionaire and his eyes achieved a semblance of a twinkle.

"Say," demanded Crouch suddenly, "what card did *you* draw?"

"The spade ace."

Lawson exploded. "All of us could have used that card!"

"That's so," agreed Jones. "Odd, wasn't it?"

It was even odder (though Careful Jones failed to mention it) that once he had reserved the ace of spades for himself, neither Lawson, Crouch nor Braddock could draw *anything* to beat him. In dealing cards to the others, Jones had been careful about that. In fact, it was little precautions of that nature which caused some people to call him *Extra*-Careful Jones.

At the time of this writing Dr. Francis Leo Golden is a Personnel Officer in one of New Jersey's State Departments. During the Hauptmann trial that climaxed the Lindbergh kidnaping, Dr. Golden was Administrative Secretary to Governor Hoffman. In that capacity he had charge of the "box-office" at Flemington and it was his code message to Sheriff Curtiss that represented the only "open sesame" into the courtroom itself. Yet, Dr. Golden informs us that he never went into the courtoom himself!

The character of Dr. Farnsworth is based on a real-life person — that venerable practitioner of forensic medicine, Dr. William Jerome Arlitz of Hoboken, New Jersey. Dr. Golden writes that "Dr. Arlitz has been the 'expert witness' in many famous cases; like Mr. Tutt, he always added a third dimension to the law — the application of justice tinctured with humaneness." Remember the anecdotes related about Dr. Joseph Bell, the Edinburgh physician who served as the model of Sherlock Holmes? Here's an anecdote about Dr. Arlitz: he once testified for the Lackawanna Railroad in a Workmen's Compensation case involving an aged Italian laborer who as the result of an acid explosion had had his legs badly pock-marked.

Counsel for the plaintiff asked Dr. Arlitz: "Don't you think, Doctor, that these pock-marks constitute a cosmetic defect?"

Dr. Arlitz smiled wanly: "Yes, Counsellor, if you're going to make a ballet dancer out of him."

"The Testimony of Dr. Farnsworth" is a sensitive and unusual story. It should deeply satisfy both addict and dabbler who want something more than an animated puzzle. It should be a particular joy to those fans who are sticklers for authenticity — who not unreasonably expect medical characters to know their medicine, expert witnesses to be really expert. And last but not least, it should be a rare treat for music lovers — yes, that is a clue freely handed to you on a silver platter; but unless you're an especially astute "musico-sleuth and medico-detective," you'll be as neatly taken in as was your Editor.

THE TESTIMONY OF DR. FARNSWORTH

by FRANCIS LEO GOLDEN

The ambulance from Mercy Hospital glided into the tunneled passageway and drew up with pin-point brakeage at the door of the Emergency Room.

An orderly came out to help the chauffeur. The man was lifted from the stretcher on to the table. "Easy boys," cautioned the interne, "be careful of his left side."

Ordinarily, Dr. Larry Wayne would not have been within two wards of Emergency. But the evening had horrible portents for him and he could not explain his inward jumpiness. It was peculiar the way that Delaine had brushed him off when he suggested the movies. Had she not consecrated Thursday nights to the attachment that had sprung up between them?

The nurse looked up at his approach. The interne barely nodded. "What have you got, Ben?"

"Tough, Dr. Wayne. Entire left side of the head bashed in."

Larry scrubbed up. "Hemorrhage?"

The interne was cryptic. "Profuse. Zygomatic process may be exposed."

Dr. Wayne peered into the lesion. "H'm, not so good. The tempero-mandibular joint is completely crushed. Whoever slugged him wasn't fooling. Better get the Chief down here. We're in sacred territory — territory that's his special province."

That was why the telephone was so insistent. The quiet of the red-brick and green stuccoed home atop Madison Avenue fought the challenge until, wearily, Dr. Mark A. Farnsworth lifted the receiver.

"Larry thinks I should come down, eh? Very well, I shan't be long."

Just as wearily he replaced the phone on its outswinging bracket. The house was cold. Through the casement windows he could see below —to the Hudson where the twinkling lights of the ferry-boats were furrowing a path toward New York.

His finger touched the buzzer. Mrs. Grady bustled in. "If you're going into the movies, Midge, leave word with Robert I'll be at the Hospital."

"Shouldn't have to be a-gettin' up of a night like this." She sniffed the air. "Yer work too hard as it is."

"My dear Midge," he said roguishly, "you have served me well and faithfully these past thirty-odd years. And during that time you have, by your patient effort and deep devotion to duty, exemplified my constant preachment: that there is in every living creature an obscure but powerful impulse to active functioning. Life demands to be lived. Inaction is foreign to the healthy organism. Only the dead can be really idle."

She looked up at his venerable figure. The long, blue jowls always so smoothly shaven; the closely-cropped, gray mustache that set off admirably the light blue of his eyes. "Thim big words. Always big words. No wonder the Judge always says yer right. He can't understand yer!"

Dr. Wayne was handling the transfusion when the Chief reached Emergency. "Call out the trauma, Larry, while I'm scrubbing." Dr. Farnsworth cocked his ear toward the table.

"I've ridden the old wagon for years," said Larry, "and I've seen many a chap conked on the cocoanut, but this is a honey. The blow covers the parietal and temporal region."

"Extradural hemorrhage?"

"Right, Chief. The middle meningeal artery."

"Pulse?"

"Not so hot."

"Respiration?"

"Slowing up."

The Chief accepted the towel from the student nurse. He beamed fatherly on the young man in white who in the seriousness of the case had forgotten his uneasiness of the early evening. Dr. Farnsworth knew the fibre of Wayne. He had carefully checked the progress of Larry since that day at Mrs. Gaudeau's bedside when Wayne had insisted on a diagnosis of diabetes because of the presence of acetone on the breath. The Chief had been guiding him these past three years as his logical successor in the field of forensic medicine. Running to Court several times a week was tiring on legs that were fast losing their elasticity. Dr. Farnsworth enjoyed his days as the Expert Witness, but now the vascular demands on his system were imperative. He had to slow his pace. That was where Larry Wayne was so helpful.

Wayne stepped aside. Dr. Farnsworth surveyed the field of injury. "I think transfusion has only been a reprieve, Larry. He has been dealt a savage blow. The fracture is compound." His sensitive fingers located the depression of the fragments. "Extends to the base of the skull," he said.

Dr. Farnsworth spoke on. "He must have lain a while after the blow. Police case, I suppose?"

Larry looked at the interne. "What's the story, Ben?" The interne looked away. The nurse spoke through her gauze mask. "Ben doesn't want to tell you, Dr. Wayne."

"What do you mean?"

"Apartment on Commonwealth Avenue. This patient here is the party of the first part. There were two weeping dames in the room. Bending over this fellow when the police arrived was the lady pharmacist of our Hospital, Miss Delaine Kennedy, your dimpled, little red-head."

Larry looked at her querulously. "You don't mean —"

"Ask the Homicide Squad. They're out in the reception room waiting to ask you a few questions."

"It just couldn't be," whispered Larry.

Dr. Farnsworth glared at the nurse. "We usually save personalities until disposition has been made of the patient. Next time, Miss Howard, a little restraint, please!"

"I'm sorry, Dr. Farnsworth."

Larry gazed at the man on the table. "I don't know who is. But Delaine is not the type who — " He could not finish the sentence.

Dr. Farnsworth snapped him out of the mood. "If our Hospital pharmacist means that much to you, Larry, we'll go radical. There are some cerebral concussions that might respond to venesection. You young fellows know little about it. But we can't debate here. This man is going out — and going fast. And, evidently, Larry, two lives are at stake. This chap's and our Miss Kennedy's."

It was well after midnight before Dr. Farnsworth threw his gown and gloves into the hamper. Larry was disconsolate.

"We've done all we could, boy. It

was just hopeless. He must have been nailed by an exceptionally heavy instrument. What did the police say?"

Larry looked up dejectedly. "A hammer. The fellow is a section foreman on the railroad. It was his own hammer. He was the boy-friend of Miss Kennedy's sister. They have Delaine at Headquarters. I'm going down there now."

Dr. Farnsworth called out from the shower-room. "Better call Pawlston, Larry. He's a good lawyer. You'll probably need some bail, too. Get in touch with Townsend. He'll rout the Fidelity man out of bed."

Robert was sitting up for Dr. Farnsworth when he reached his citadel atop Madison Avenue. The brass kettle over the fireplace was whistling a happy tune. "I'll have your tea in a moment, sir." Robert wheeled the table over to the easy chair.

"You didn't have to wait up, Robert."

"Lor' bless you, sir, if I didn't, Mrs. Grady would pay me off in the mornin'. A spot of brandy in it, sir?"

Dr. Farnsworth nodded. "And have you any cheese and crackers, Robert?"

The man looked nervously to the door. "I'm under special orders, sir. She says cheese don't agree with you and you're not to have it."

"Nonsense, Robert. That old termagant is in a constant conspiracy to rob me of all my gustatory pleasures. Ah, well. I daresay she's right. Never mind, Robert. I'll just sip away."

"That will be all, sir?"

"Yes, Robert. You may put out the lights, too. I have some meditation before I turn in." The man's steps went softly across the rug as he doused the lamps.

"Robert?"

"Yes, sir."

"What happens when you love two young people who love each other?"

"Don't know as I understand, sir." The man paused at the door.

"You've heard of Damon and Pythias, Robert? And Jonathan and David? Friendship, to endure, must be tested in the fires of suffering."

"Dare say you're right, sir."

"I've got to think out a great problem, Robert. It involves that great crucible of physiology — the human mind. Friendship survives, Robert, only if we have faith."

"Good-night, sir. If you need more logs, you'll find them in the box."

Robert closed the door. Dr. Farnsworth reached into the drawer for his queer-bowled pipe. He recalled the first day he met Miss Kennedy. He was passing the pharmacy in the basement of Mercy when he heard a contralto-ish voice call after him. There was vibrancy in the tones. Binet could have written a new chapter on its sonorescence. It was Wordsworthian "beauty born of murmuring sound."

"Dr. Farnsworth, please?"

He turned his head toward the doorway. She was slightly below average height, but you failed to see that in the cherry-tinted hair that was drawn back from the forehead in a series of terraces. There were dimples, too, that caught the shadows of her smile.

"Yes."

"I'm worried about this prescription for Mrs. Grayson."

"Prescription?" He smiled disarmingly. H'm, she had cerulean eyes. "Prescription? My, my, yes. You're the new pharmacist, aren't you? Little lady, I'll let you in on a great State secret." He had pretended to look up and down the corridor for eavesdroppers. "When we had the vacancy as pharmacist, the Board was reluctant to engage a girl. But I rose to the defense of Female Rights. I said to them, rather sternly, 'What are we going to do when our boys leave for the front? We've got to realize woman's importance in every field of endeavor heretofore reserved exclusively for men.' Did you ever hear me make a speech, Miss — Miss — ?"

"Kennedy. Delaine Kennedy."

"I'm a rough, growling, old bear, Miss Kennedy." His smile had softened the fierceness of the grimace. They both laughed, but she had carried the melody. That had reminded him of something else. Her application stated that she had four years at the Conservatory of Music; then there was that hiatus of several years before she enrolled at the College of Pharmacy. He'd ask sometime about this.

"Now, about that prescription?"

"It calls for a grain of morphine," she had answered. "Surely, there must be some mistake." He looked the paper over carefully. "H'm, Mrs. Grayson, eh? Make it one-quarter grain."

"Thank you, Dr. Farnsworth. I just had to make sure."

She was a sweet portrait framed there in the doorway. He could understand why Larry Wayne, so wholesome himself, loved this girl. "In making sure, Miss Kennedy, you've saved a patient's life."

He had periodically studied her work in the pharmacy. She was vigilant, trustworthy, and always cheerful. She had further endeared herself to him the night when little Gloria cried for her mother. That was a nasty case. He had been in the Staff Room reading a paper on the Pituitary Hormones when they brought in Mrs. Allerton on the stretcher. He had been called to Emergency. There was no hope for the mother, but the child had come through the accident with merely a few scratches and a twisted ligament.

The youngster cried pitifully. Each sob was punctuated by the yearning call: "I wan' my mamma." Miss Kennedy, off duty, had been passing by. She quieted the child without apparent effort.

"There, there, Gloria. Your mama isn't far away." She led the child, with the assistance of Dr. Farnsworth, into the Play Room. "Your mama can't be far away because mamas never are. Look around the room, darling. Aren't the wall paintings lovely? See the Three Bears? Someone has taken their breakfast. And what have we here? A piano. A teeny-weeny piano. Let me play for you, Gloria."

A very light sob had escaped the child. "I like to hear moosic."

He had listened, too. It was a miniature piano. The sounds were quite metallic, but, yet, soothing to the child. Miss Kennedy's left hand caressed the key-board; her right arm was around the child's waist.

The chords were familiar and yet he could not recall the name of the piece in the greater contemplation of Miss Kennedy's gift of lulling a motherless child to sleep. Not until he had reached the cloistered comfort of Mrs. Grady's tea-before-the-fireplace did the melody bestir him. He had to make several pilgrimages to the piano and copious references to his music library before his curiosity was appeased. Miss Kennedy had been dashing off excerpts of Richard Strauss's symphonic study, *Panathenaenzug*. . . .

And now, Miss Kennedy was in great trouble. The tabloids would be screaming their innuendos; Larry would be in a daze; Pawlston would be adopting new thespian attitudes in wooing the jury. The courtroom would be crowded; the Judge would feel important. Yes, all that was familiar ground to Dr. Mark Farnsworth, sitting here in a darkened room and watching the River through the casement windows. He would appear at the trial as a witness. But this time he would be more than The Expert giving telescopic testimony. He was in "at the kill." His eyes had penetrated the traumatic depths of the man's skull. His words, reluctantly drawn from his lips by an ambitious District Attorney, would send Miss Kennedy to the "chair."

The reverie was disturbed by Mrs. Grady. "Angels and saints, would you look at him now! Sitting in a cold room and him thinkin' he's as young and healthy as a squirrel. Off to bed wi' yer and none of yer big talk."

"You wouldn't be harsh to me, Midge, you old meanie, if you knew that I just received consolation from one of your favorites."

"Meanin' what?" She had turned up the lamp to find him chilblainish. Her shawl went over his shoulders.

"I was thinking of St. Paul. A great man, Midge. He once said that no obedience to moral rules can take the place of Love. Where Love is genuine, it will, if combined with intelligence, suffice to generate whatever moral rules are necessary."

"St. Paul said that? Sure them is lovely words comin' from him."

"Lovely, Midge, and quite sustaining."

The Principal Keeper greeted Dr. Farnsworth warmly. "We don't get to see much of you, Doctor."

"It isn't lack of good fellowship, Tom. These walls could never be inviting. How is she?"

"Miss Kennedy? No rest at all. Paced the floor all night. That young doctor of yours is on his way over. He couldn't get a Judge to consider bail. It's a murder charge, you know."

"I never thought about that, Tom.

Or maybe it's because I have some doubts that she is a . . ." He could not say the word.

The P.K. interrupted: "The police don't have any doubts. She screamed to them that she was guilty and would they please let her kid sister alone."

The buzzer sounded. Through the intercommunicating phone boomed the voice of a guard. "P.K.? Dr. Wayne in the outer reception room."

The P.K. answered with a switch of the key. "Send him in."

Dr. Farnsworth could see that Larry, too, had had a restless night. His eyes were glassy and red. His collar was smudged and his overcoat was draped over his shoulders carelessly.

"You'll have to talk to her, Chief. I just can't."

"What about the sister?"

Larry drew his palms across his unshaven cheeks in a gesture that spelled despair. "From what I can piece together, the guy has been treating the sister shamefully. No — they weren't married. He's a dipso. And when he goes on a binge, it's a beaut. Del insists she walked in while he was belaboring the kid. That's what she told the cops."

"She clipped him, eh?" Dr. Farnsworth patted Larry affectionately. "Wait for me. I'll go see her now."

Miss Kennedy looked up at his approach. When the door rolled back, she threw herself into his arms. "Oh, Dr. Farnsworth," she sobbed.

"It's all right, little lady, let it all out." The story came in tearful staccato.

"I love her so much, Dr. Farnsworth. I know you can understand that. And when he started to hit her . . ." She was biting her lips and struggling for control. "I couldn't stand it, I just couldn't stand it!"

He quieted her with all the blandishments he possessed. Her head drooped on his chest, and unconsciously, he found himself stroking her hair. "You'll be calm, won't you? Larry and I have retained a good lawyer. And we'll have to testify."

She looked at him. "I'm sorry you were dragged into this sordid mess. And Larry. What must he think of me?"

"Think of you? Why, that juvenile baboon loves you — and you know I'm so jealous of him that — that I must love you, too."

He arose to go. She clung to him for a moment. "My sister. She's been pushed around so much. Would you see that . . ."

He nodded his head affirmatively. "She's been held as a material witness. But I'm sure we can send her down South for a little rest until the trial begins."

She brushed back the tears. "I feel stronger already," she said. And looking at her he could see that inner strength.

The trial opened in the glare of the headlines that Dr. Farnsworth predicted. Additional space had to be arranged for the newspapermen and photographers. The syndicates were represented by gushing Lovelorn advisers and visiting sociologists. The columnists were there in force, seeking tomorrow's paragraphs. Only the stern attitude of Judge Haynes's gavel prevented the atmosphere from becoming hippodromish.

Pawlston, in his defense of Miss Kennedy, summoned all his adroit mannerisms to the scene.

He confused the coroner and the police repeatedly. The theme was reiterative. "But you did not see either of these girls actually strike the fatal blow? How do you know that some person or persons unknown, but bearing a grudge against the deceased, might not have struck him? Do you realize that Miss Kennedy weighs only one hundred and twenty-four pounds? Do you realize that her sister weighs a mere one hundred and eighteen pounds? Could either one have wielded a hammer weighing *forty-one* pounds?"

At the counsel table, Miss Kennedy fought to control the storm rising within her. She pleaded with Dr. Wayne. "Stop him, Larry. He's violating our agreement."

"Agreement?"

"Pawlston is casting doubt on my confession. I killed Mulgrew. They can't — they dare not pin it on Carol. Tell him to stop, Larry."

He patted her hand. "Hush, darling. We're here to help you."

"I don't want that kind of help!"

Judge Haynes glared at her. "The defendant will restrain her conduct," he warned.

The District Attorney was enjoying the performance. Here was a defendant so cooperative that all he had to do was place her on the stand and she assumed the entire guilt. The D.A. knew all the artifices in this arena, too. When to feint, when to lead, when to dodge. He was lenient with Carol; he was unctuous with Miss Kennedy.

The confession, as given to Lieutenant Decker, was admitted in evidence over the objections of Pawlston. The hammer became Exhibit S-2, over the further objections of Pawlston.

The testimony of the interne and that of Dr. Wayne followed. Their presence on the stand was brief. "What was the condition of Paul Mulgrew on the night he was brought into Mercy Hospital? What was the clinical picture? What was the hour he expired?"

"Dr. Farnsworth," the bailiff called out with the pride he felt in the Doctor's friendship. Bulbs flashed from the corners of the room.

Larry studied the face of Dr. Farnsworth. There was nobility of character and intellect in the way his preceptor placed his hand on the Bible and swore "to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Last night in Dr. Farnsworth's library this scene had been rehearsed.

"You see, Larry, one's presence on the witness stand is as sacred an endowment as a call to Holy Orders. The oath that you take is a direct communication to the All-Highest."

Larry knew the inward fires that must now be burning in Dr. Farnsworth's mind. They had recruited eight nurses from the Hospital, all of whom weighed the same as Miss Kennedy. And all of them had, with some effort and using both hands, lifted a forty-one pound bar and crashed it against the face of a skeleton.

It would be driving a stake in his heart when the D.A. would pin him down to the direct question. Dr. Farnsworth's expert, as well as eyewitness opinion, would influence any jury. Miss Kennedy's fate was sealed.

The voice of the D.A. boomed across the courtroom. "Dr. Farnsworth, I understand that you are a regularly licensed physician and surgeon of this state; that you hold a degree of Doctor of Medicine from Johns Hopkins University; that you are also a graduate of the University of Heidelberg, and have done postgraduate work at the University of Vienna; that you have specialized in neurology and traumatic surgery; that you are a consultant in neurology in the State Hospital; senior visiting surgeon at the local hospital; clinical professor at the Graduate School of Medicine, and attending neurologist at the Mercy Hospital?"

Dr. Farnsworth's hands were clasped during the recital of this introduction. He nodded at its conclusion. "And may I add, with pardonable modesty, that I am also a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons, and a member of the American Neurological Association?"

Pawlston had been on his feet during this ritual. "If Your Honor pleases, I do not think any of us could question either Dr. Farnsworth's eminent qualifications or his established sense of probity."

Dr. Farnsworth's eyes strayed toward the defense table. Miss Kennedy had a protective arm linked within her sister's.

The D.A. was now on the firing line. "I'm not going to bore the Court, nor you, Dr. Farnsworth, with repetitious medical history of one Paul Mulgrew, now deceased. Your associate, Dr. Wayne, and the attending interne have described the traumatic picture."

Dr. Farnsworth leaned forward. The Court Stenographer's pen dangled loosely in his hand.

"Doctor," continued the D.A., "you performed an emergency operation on the deceased? What was the cause of death?"

"Multiple blows in the tempero-occipital-parietal area of the skull. As Dr. Wayne testified, we usually find that at the point of impact fractures by irradiation — in other words, continued fractures — result." He looked toward the jury as though he had drawn up a chair in their living rooms for a fireside chat. "The fractures begin on the convexity of the skull and follow the shortest route from that point to the base of the skull. We call it Aran's Law."

"Thank you, Doctor. Now will you be specific in the injuries that resulted in Paul Mulgrew's death?"

"The fracture passed from a line between the parietal-temporal region toward the occipital, taking in the middle fossa of the skull between the wings of the sphenoid and the petrous portion of the temporal bone. There was extradural hemorrhage from the middle meningeal artery, as Dr. Wayne explained on the chart."

The D.A. edged in closer. Any minute now, a greater blow would fall. Dr. Farnsworth wet his lips nervously and for the first time since he began his medico-legal career he was uneasy. "Dr. Farnsworth, the deceased was a railroad section foreman. A hammer, weighing forty-one pounds, was found at his body. Could his death, could the injuries which you have just described, have been caused by such an instrument?"

The answer was slow and painful. "I . . . would . . . say . . . yes."

"Dr. Farnsworth," continued the D.A., "you have heard the defense Opening? Opposing counsel has inferred that the defendant, despite her confession to the police, Exhibit H-3, was physically unable to wield a hammer, Exhibit S-2, weighing forty-one pounds. Could the defendant, weighing one hundred and twenty-four pounds strike the deceased with this hammer, inducing injuries that resulted in death?"

A thousand imps were pounding in Dr. Farnsworth's ear. This is IT.

But Pawlston was on his feet. "I object, Your Honor! It's irrelevant and immaterial what the Doctor *thinks*. The District Attorney knows he can only get this into the record by asking the witness a hypothetical question."

The D.A. smiled. "I withdraw the question, Your Honor, and I shall abide by my learned friend's suggestion. Now, Dr. Farnsworth, assuming that the deceased, on the fourth day of December, was struck in the parietal and temporal region, sustaining a compound fracture as described, and assuming that the defendant weighs one hundred and twenty-four pounds, as has been testified, and that a hammer weighing forty-one pounds, admitted in evidence as Exhibit S-2, is assumed to be the weapon of death, would it be possible for the defendant to have wielded the hammer, Exhibit S-2, in such a way as to produce the injuries to the head that you described?"

The blood was coursing madly through his temples. Now his tongue was dry. He had to gulp before he could frame his answer. His fingers clutched at the chair for support. "No. I do not believe that the defendant was physically able to lift such a hammer."

There, the lie was out. And all the St. Pauls could not rebut what St. Augustine wrote to Consentius, could they? He who says some lies are just might also say that some sins are just, and therefore, some things are just which are unjust: what can be more absurd?

Zeus gives no aid to liars, so Homer said. Congreve had his measure, too: Thou liar of the first magnitude.

Dr. Farnsworth looked down from the witness chair toward the girl. Her handkerchief, now in threads, lay on the counsel table. There were two extra big tears ski-ing down her cheeks. "Gratitude's liquid," he mumbled to himself. But he would need more than tears to purge himself.

The D.A. was undaunted. He strode challengingly toward the box. "Isn't it possible, Dr. Farnsworth, that the close association of your assistant, Dr. Wayne, with the defendant may have obscured your judgment?"

The Judge frowned on the District Attorney. "Is it possible, sir, you are impugning your own witness?"

The D.A. bristled up. "If it pleases the Court, this testimony comes as a complete surprise to me."

Pawlston rose to object. Dr. Farnsworth motioned him to silence. "The District Attorney is sugar-coating his inference. If Your Honor permits, I would call Mr. Shakespeare as a witness. 'For my part, if a lie may do thee grace, I'll gild it with the happiest terms I have.' "

The Judge quelled the ripple of laughter with a light tap of the gavel. "The answer will be stricken from the record. Henry IV has no legal entity in this Court."

Dr. Farnsworth smiled at the jurist. But perhaps the jury had not yet been convinced. To tell a lie is bad enough; not to have it believed is worse. "Too regrettable, Your Honor. For I might also have added to the District Attorney, and quoting the same Bard, 'If I tell thee a lie, spit in my face; call me horse.' "

The jury joined in the laughter that swept the courtroom. Dr. Farnsworth sighed with relief. Miss Kennedy no longer was in danger.

He was in a half-doze when Midge ushered in Larry and the girl. Dr. Farnsworth sat up hurriedly. His hands extended toward Miss Kennedy. She sank her head in his lap while a gripping hysteria brought alternate tears and laughter. Larry shook her roughly. "Come, Del, snap out of it. You promised no scenes."

Delaine kissed the wrinkled hands fervently. "I shall never forget your kindness."

"Your testimony stopped them cold, Chief," said Larry admiringly. "The D.A. didn't know whether he was coming or going."

"I feel that way myself, Larry." He motioned to Midge. "Some tea, please, and I'm sure they'll like your cookies, Midge." He sat up in his chair and pointed to the writing table. "I've just one more letter to dash off, Larry. Suppose you tell me what happened after I left the courtroom."

Dr. Wayne began the recital with gestures. First he was the D.A. Then he was Pawlston. Midge spread the tea things just where the jury box should have been. They all chuckled.

Larry reached into the tray for a cup and passed it to Dr. Farnsworth. Below him on the table were the letters. "Haven't you paid your dues, Chief?"

"A different picture, Larry. I'm resigning from the State and County Medical Societies."

Larry stared at the letters. "And the

A.M.A.? Why Chief, you can't —"

"I'm unworthy, Larry. I feel soiled. I can't help it if that's my sense of ethics."

"But this is your life, Chief! The courtroom is your other surgery. You can't fold up like that. Forget what I said about your testimony today, Chief. It was Pawlston who convinced the jury that Delaine's confession was obtained by duress."

Dr. Farnsworth smiled wanly. He pointed to the pit of his stomach. "The seat of our emotions, Larry, is here in the viscera. And that's where I feel low. If Justice has been led away, I have no basin as Pilate had. But enough of that. Let's not be dispirited. No pall of gloom for this happy occasion. Midge, have Robert open a bottle of Pinet Noir. We must have a toast to these young people." He looked over his reading glasses toward Miss Kennedy. "And before we become exuberant, young lady, let's remember that you haven't a job any more."

Larry held up the girl's chin and planted a kiss on her lips. "She won't need one, Chief. As soon as we bundle sister Carol off to New York, Delaine and I are going to rhumba down the aisle."

Midge sniffed. "You don't dance in church, you heathen." She gathered up the tea dishes. Dr. Farnsworth was in a thoughtful mood. "I had some plans for her, Larry."

"Plans?" Delaine was curious. Dr. Farnsworth smiled her way. "Your application at the Hospital mentioned several years at the Conservatory of Music. I thought, perhaps, you might care to . . . return to the piano. The concert stage? Larry and I could underwrite the program."

Delaine fought the tears that seemed to come so easily now. "Oh, you're so generous, Dr. Farnsworth."

"Not at all, my dear. Purely selfish of me. I love the piano. It's an old Italian proverb that he who plays the piano keeps sane. That's my piano over there in the corner. Won't you play for us now?"

Larry added his coaxing. "Yes, Del, please do."

"If you wish." She stepped to the far end of the room and adjusted the bench. "I may be somewhat rusty. You'll be indulgent, I hope."

Dr. Farnsworth settled himself back in the easy chair. The river was quiet down there tonight. The sea-gulls were circling the harbor for their twilight whirl before nesting for the night. It had been a hectic day and now this repose was delightfully welcome. The music was flooding the room.

Ravel, eh? A real craftsman and not a sentimentalist as Dr. Farnsworth was. He recalled a visit he had made to Montfort l'Amaury, outside of Paris, while on a tour through Europe. He had found Ravel polite but inwardly cold.

Dr. Farnsworth's reverie continued. This girl's technique was flawless. H'm. The *Concerto For One Hand*. Difficult and intricate fingering even for two hands. And that night when

Miss Kennedy soothed the child in the Hospital . . . hm, . . . wasn't all this odd? He lifted his creaking limbs from the chair and quietly approached Miss Kennedy. Larry's eyes followed him.

Dr. Farnsworth stood over the piano. He watched her left hand weaving up and down, from treble to bass and from bass to treble. Her right hand rested motionless on the keyboard. Could it be that . . . ? He reached over and fastened both hands on her right shoulder. The music ended in her scream. "Stop, Dr. Farnsworth! You're hurting my arm."

Larry sprang forward. "What is it, Chief? You're trembling."

"I should have known, Larry! What a dullard I am." Miss Kennedy was sobbing softly. "Do you remember, Larry," Dr. Farnsworth continued, "that night when she quieted the little girl? I've told you about it so often. Not until I returned home did I learn what she had been playing on that tiny hospital piano. It was Richard Strauss's symphonic study, *Panathenaenzug*."

"I still don't know what you're driving at, Chief."

"Strauss composed it for Paul Witgenstein, the Viennese pianist *who lost an arm in the War*. And just now, while we listened, she was playing Ravel's *concerto for one hand*. Here, Larry, feel her deltoideus. The muscle is partially paralyzed. Look at the clavicle — how awkwardly it is set."

Larry's fingers ran up and down the girl's arm. "The deltoid and the triceps are certainly weak. What is it, Delaine? What have you been hiding from us?" Her sobbing continued.

Dr. Farnsworth raised her to her feet. "Lift your right arm, Miss Kennedy. Up — up — this high."

"I can't, Dr. Farnsworth, I can't."

Tenderly his arm went about her waist and he led her to the divan. "Now, let's have the story, my dear."

Midge handed her a table napkin and she dried her eyes. "I had to forego the concert stage," she spoke haltingly, "when I was thrown from my horse. That's the story. Simple, isn't it? I had to find some income. And . . . well, I had always loved chemistry."

"You loved Carol, too." A radiance had come over Dr. Farnsworth. "You loved her so much you were willing to die for her." He hugged her warmly. "My dear, you have no idea how happy this moment is. And say, Midge, where's Robert with that wine? I must drink to St. Augustine. I thought he had let me down. But now it's all so clear." He tapped the little black book on the table. "*Quid est enim fides, nisi credere quod non vides.*"

"There he goes again," said Midge, "with more of thim fancy words."

"Meaning what, Chief?"

"The Homilies on Saint John. Augustine asks what is faith save to believe what you do not see."

◆

It is no ordinary writer who can distill so grim and accurate a description as "a picture of the times — children in uniform and bankers in mourning" and then go on to a gay and witty account of Anthony Rowley, Crook versus Albert Campion and Superintendent Oates, Detectives. But we have long known that Margery Allingham is one of our modern shining lights — a detective-story writer who can successfully mix crime and whimsy, who can transform serious detection into a light-hearted business without resorting to wisecracks . . .

A MATTER OF FORM

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

"THE trouble with crime today," remarked Superintendent Stanislaus Oates seriously, "is that one almost gets too much of it, if you see what I mean."

"Absolutely," murmured his companion with solemn, not to say owlish, gravity. "The word you're searching for is 'common,' isn't it?"

The two men were sitting in the far corner of the long old-fashioned upstairs bar of the Café Bohème. Times had changed it since the grand gilt and red plush naughtiness of its youth, but it was still the centre of the town, and as Mr. Albert Campion, who was looking a trifle thinner and grimmer in these days, glanced across its smoke-festooned expanse, it seemed to him to present a picture of the times — children in uniform and bankers in mourning.

The superintendent snorted, and his long sad face took on an even more settled expression of gloom.

"There you are," he said. "Just because you're very overworked making yourself useful in some high and mighty hush-hush way, you think you can sneer at an old copper who has his hands full with more civil crime in every month than he used to see in a year. I hate this new ruthlessness. There used to be a time when I saw myself as a sort of sportsman cop. I'd bait my line, fling it out and watch. . . . "

"That's right," said Campion, echoing his philosophic tone, "and the sight of you gallantly throwing the little ones back used to bring tears to my eyes. It's no good, guv'nor. The sentimental, kindly old sleuth stuff doesn't become you. It's not convincing. Fisherman my foot! You always have looked like a leathery old tomcat sitting by a hole; about as sporting and about as gentle. I can see your whiskers twitching now. Where's the mouse this time?"

"Mouse be blowed," objected the superintendent. "That's a fine sleek young rat. Look at him. I wonder what he's calling himself now?"

Campion turned his head to follow the policeman's eyes, which, for all his kindliness, were as cold and bleak as a North Sea rock.

A man stood drinking alone at the round bar not a dozen feet from them. He was in early middle age, and the superintendent's description of him was not inapt. He was well-dressed, well-fed, and surprisingly handsome in that peculiar way which derives rather from general well-being than from any particular distinction of feature. At the moment he exuded happiness, confidence, and self-satisfaction. He drank deeply and with pleasure, and his flushed cheeks and dancing eyes smiled back at him with affection from the mirror behind the bar. In that anxious gathering, with its underlying atmosphere of brittle excitement, his contentment was noticeable, and Superintendent Oates, for one, was irritated by it.

"Someone's lost something, I bet a shilling," he said unpardonably.

The man at the bar recognised the voice, and turned round with raised eyebrows.

"Ah," he said, revealing a deep and by no means unpleasant voice, though his accent was far too good to be true, "the dear old inspector."

"Superintendent," rebuked the policeman stolidly. "How are you, Smith? Or isn't that the name now?"

"Well, as a matter of fact it's not, oddly enough." The stranger lounged forward with elaborate confidence and stood beaming before them. "Like you, I've got promotion. The name is Rowley. Smith is so usual, don't you think? I mean anybody might be a Smith. Anthony Rowley is the new monicker, and I fancy it suits me."

"What are you doing? Wooing?" put in Campion, amused in spite of himself.

The superintendent, who had never been sung to sleep either in childhood or at any other time by the tale of the famous frog, was mystified by the allusion.

"Oh, it's love, is it?" he said ungraciously. "I thought perhaps it was merely drink or an unguarded Chubb."

The man who had decided to call himself Anthony Rowley frowned.

"Vulgar, unkind, and not even accurate," he said. "Breams, not Chubbs, were my undoing. Or I theirs, of course. It depends on how you look at it. Dear me, I am inebriated, aren't I?"

"You are." The superintendent's tone was dangerously avuncular. "And if you can get such indecent happiness out of a double or two in these days, you have my profound respect."

A fleeting glimmer of caution hovered in Mr. Rowley's bright blue eyes, but his unnatural elation killed it all too soon.

"Well, as a matter of fact," he repeated perilously, "as a matter of fact, and not because you're a policeman, but because you're a dear old gentleman and I like you, as a matter of fact my glorious condition at this moment is caused neither by love nor alcohol, but by something very much better than either."

The superintendent's heavy eyelids flickered. "I'll buy it," he said.

Rowley laughed and winked at Campion.

"Isn't he an old duck?" he said. "A dear, harmless, friendly old duck. He's taken a fancy to me and he just wants to know why I'm so happy."

"That'll do, my lad. Not too much impudence, if I were you." In spite of the protest, Oates still maintained his unnatural docility.

Rowley turned away. "You almost break my heart," he said over his shoulder. "You almost spoil my celebration." The final word appeared to attract him, for he repeated it and suddenly wheeled round again. "I'll tell you," he said. "Do you know why I've been treating myself like a long-lost son all the afternoon? Do you know why I keep giving myself little drinks and jolly encouraging smiles in the mirror?"

"I'd make a darned good guess." Oates's earlier humour showed signs of returning. "Either you've just made an ungodly fool of yourself again or you're just going to."

"Wrong," said Anthony Rowley triumphantly. "Wrong. Prosaically wrong. Your mind leaps to material facts as usual. You wouldn't understand, so I shan't give you the whole low-down, but because you're an old acquaintance I'll let you in half-way. I'm gloriously happy because I have had a beautiful thought. This will be lost on you because, dear good chap though you are, you're not the sort of man who has really beautiful thoughts. Don't take offence and don't worry about it. You can't help it; you're just not that sort of person. You understand that, don't you, sir?"

His final remark was addressed to Campion, who made no attempt to hide his smile.

"A beautiful thought," Rowley repeated. "A peach. A delicate masterpiece of exquisite construction. An epic gem. Or, if you prefer it, a fizzler. Excuse me, I must go and brood over it again."

He drifted away, only a trifle uncertainly, and Oates looked after him with a dour and introspective eye.

"He'll never forgive himself when he sobers up, will he?" he said presently, and for the first time that afternoon a brief, satisfied smile passed over his face. "Poor chap, I'm almost sorry for him. That's my sporting instinct again. So he's on to something, is he? I'll get the lads to look him up at once."

Campion stirred in his chair, and his pale eyes behind his horn-rimmed spectacles were kindly.

"I wonder what it was," he remarked. "He seemed delighted."

"He seemed tight," corrected Oates drily. "He was a very different chap last time I saw him. Not nearly so chatty, believe me. He belongs to the type of crook I've no patience with at all. He's not even very good at his job. You heard him admit it just now. Damn it, he's almost proud of his incompetence. Bream safes, that's his line. No one else's safes, mark you; just Bream's. He served an apprenticeship with the firm when he was young, learnt just as much as he needed to know and no more, and now no Bream safe is proof against him.

"They say the modern crook has to be a specialist," he added, "but that lad overdoes it. It's rank incompetence in his case, and he's lazy. Whoever heard of a cracksman picking and choosing what safes he'll condescend to open? He gets on my nerves."

"I think you're unreasonable." Campion made the criticism mildly. "A man with a trade mark like that must play into your hands every time."

"Ye-es. So he does." Oates was strangely reluctant. "So he does," he repeated. "In a way. Yet he's slippery. Once or twice he's pulled a very fast one and we haven't been able to collect sufficient evidence to prosecute. We've known he was our man, and we've brought him in, and then he's wriggled out again."

"Infuriating chap," murmured Campion. "He had more brains than the average, I thought."

The superintendent got up.

"That's half his trouble," he said heavily. "He doesn't use 'em, or doesn't use 'em all. However, he's done it this time. He's opened his heart to the wrong man. That's why I think I'll just get back for half an hour or so. After all, when the mouse puts his head out of the hole it's silly not to pounce. You don't mind, do you?"

"Not at all," Mr. Campion was polite but tickled. "Our delinquents must be taught to be efficient at all costs."

Left to himself, it occurred to Campion that he might as well take a little food, and with this in mind he went downstairs to the restaurant and ordered a meal.

The big ugly room was full, as usual, with a fair sprinkling of people present whom nearly everybody else knew at least by sight. He nodded to young Lafcadio, the painter, avoided Mrs. Beamish, waved to Lily O'Dell, and was just settling down to half a dozen oysters when he caught sight of young Green.

Brian Green, whom Campion had last seen at the Oxford and Cambridge match, was in the uniform of a private in His Majesty's Territorial Army, and he was alone. He was also visibly depressed, but, on meeting Campion's eye, he brightened a little and came lumbering over, six-foot-three of yellow-haired good temper.

"Not so hot," he answered in reply to the inevitable question. "I'm on the lights, you know, down in the country. This is the first day of leave."

"Sounds all right to me," said Campion, waving him into the chair opposite. "Why the lonely state? Hasn't she turned up?"

Brian's smile vanished once more.

"Well, yes," he began awkwardly as he dug a small pattern on the tablecloth with a fork. "She came all right but — er — well, she's gone."

There was a brief silence between them, since Campion could not think of any comment which could possibly be considered helpful. The boy's depression increased.

"You're so tied, aren't you?" he observed at last. "When you're in the Army. I mean, you can't be on the spot." There was a wistfulness on his good-natured freckled face which made his host feel suddenly old. "Of course," he continued seriously, "she's very young. I lose sight of that at times."

Mr. Campion checked the impulse to inquire if the woman was out of the cradle, and did his best to look intelligently indulgent.

"I thought she would rather like the uniform," the boy added naively, "but apparently she's got bitten by the Ministry idea."

"The Ministry? What Ministry?"

"Oh, I don't know. She did tell me. Some awfully important Ministry, she said. Apparently all the intellectual lads have crowded into Supply and Defence and Economic and whatnot — at least that's her idea — and that's what's taken her fancy at the moment. It sounded too like the Post Office to me, and I told her so. She didn't like that. She's known me so long, you see, that she hasn't any illusions about my brain power. Anyway, that was why she couldn't go on to a show with me tonight. She had a date with one of these intelligent lads."

"She'll grow out of that," said Campion with conviction.

"Do you think so?" Brian was pathetically eager. "We've been running around together ever since we were at school. She's a wonderful girl. Dances like a dream. We used to get on marvelously before she got interested in brains."

"My dear chap, they recover from that. It falls from them like a cloak." Campion spoke with great earnestness. "Meanwhile, if you'll allow me to prescribe for the evening, food."

"Food? Do you think so? I rather thought . . ."

"Food," insisted his host. "As from one who knows. Vast quantities of beautiful food. Wait a moment, we'll consult George."

Three days later Campion met Brian again. To be exact, it was not so much a meeting as an ambush. He came hurrying into his own flat with a brief couple of hours in which to get through a month's correspondence, only to discover two young people sitting in suspiciously nonchalant attitudes, one on either end of his settee. The girl had been crying, and there was a damp patch on Brian's khaki shoulder. The soldier got up hastily.

"Oh, there you are," he said with relief. "I do hope you'll forgive us barging in on you like this, but you were the only person I could think of to come to in the circumstances. By the way, this is Susan. Miss Susan Chad; Mr. Campion."

Susan was a dear. As soon as Campion set eyes upon her he forgave Brian much of his youth and understood many of his problems. Changing fashions produce changing women, and years of progress and emancipation are thought to have altered the sex unrecognisably, but there is one type of girl who never differs. In tiger skins, crinolines, or A.T.S. uniform she remains herself, dear, desirable, and chuckle-headed as a coot.

Susan raised a small round face to Mr. Campion's own with a sweet dignity which had forgotten to take into account the tear-drop on the edge of her cheekbone, and said with devastating humility: —

"I've been so frightfully silly and just a little tiny bit dishonest. What would you advise?"

"If you could only convince her it won't mean the Tower it would be something," muttered Brian out of the corner of his mouth.

"The hopeless thing about it is that it wasn t really my fault," the girl protested. "It wouldn't be so bad, somehow, if I'd done anything. It was the man in the station cloakroom. I didn't even look, or at least hardly."

"I blame the fellow for saddling you with the responsibility in the first place," said Brian stolidly. "That was an unheard-of imposition to start with."

"No, Brian. You mustn't say that." Susan was very serious. "No, you can't blame him. I wanted the responsibility, and I was very honored by his confidence. That's why this is so absolutely awful. I simply daren't face him. I'd rather die."

"It's a code," said Campion, who had been listening for some time with his head on one side. "My bet is that it's a code. You've lost the secret password and the figures don't add up."

The girl blinked at him reproachfully.

"I don't know what it is," she said. "I haven't been so indiscreet as to look. It's all those seals which are going to cause the trouble."

"Seals?" muttered Campion, taken off his guard. "I give in. Mention a couple of whales and I fly screaming from the room."

Brian smiled apologetically at Susan before he eyed his host sternly.

"Perhaps we'd better explain," he suggested.

"Perhaps you had," agreed Campion huffily. "What's up?"

"I'll tell it, Brian," the girl put in firmly. "There's one side of it that you don't see, and that's the part which matters rather a lot from my point of view. Mr. Campion, I admire Tony tremendously, and that makes all the difference, doesn't it?"

"Oh, indubitably," said Campion, allowing the fog to close over his head. "Let's start from there."

"I'd like to." Susan was still quiet. "Tony is in a frightfully important Ministry. Consolidation of Defence, I think; I can't quite remember. But anyway, he's way up in it, and he's terribly responsible and utterly overworked. Last time I saw him we were going to a show, but he was suddenly called out of town on something he couldn't tell me about, and we had to dash back to his place and collect some things. It was all desperately urgent and, as he didn't know when he would be back, he gave me a small attaché-case containing some very secret papers and made me promise to take care of it for him. I swore I would, of course, and he left me on my doorstep with the case."

"Of very secret papers," echoed Mr. Campion stupidly.

She looked at him helplessly and he wondered if she was out of her teens.

"That's what he said, anyway," she protested. "Only, of course, it was more impressive than I've made it. I — I'm not impressive."

"My dear girl, forgive me." Mr. Campion was contrite instantly. "I was only assimilating the facts. I'm not too bright this afternoon. He gave you an attaché-case to mind and you've lost it. Is that right?"

"Oh, no," Susan grew crimson at the suggestion. "No, I've not lost it, thank heaven. It's not as bad as that."

"Here, let me tell it." Brian came forward protectively. "Susan isn't quite the little wet she sounds. She believes in this chap, you see, and evidently he realizes the sort of kid she is, absolutely dependable, and thoroughly first-class. Anyway, he wanted to leave this attaché-case in perfectly safe hands for a day or so. It was late at night, on that same evening when I met you, as a matter of fact, and there was no chance of shoving it in a bank or in his office, so he gave it to Susan." He hesitated and blushed. "You may think that unlikely," he went on stoutly, "but I don't, knowing Susan."

Campion accepted the rebuke meekly.

"Oh, rather not," he said with what he trusted was convincing enthusiasm. "That's as far as I've got. Where does the seal come in?"

"It was the seal which got broken. That's the trouble," murmured Susan "The cloakroom man did it — or rather he stood over me while I did it. It was too impossibly awkward. Tell him, Brian."

The young soldier sat down on the arm of the settee.

"It's a perfectly simple story," he said. "Susan kept the case that night and most of the next day, but then she got the wind up, as anyone might. You know how you keep shifting a thing that is terribly important. Wherever you put it, it never feels quite safe. Finally it got on her nerves, as it would on anybody's, and so, very reasonably, she thought she'd stick it in a station cloakroom. Well, that was all right, but she'd forgotten the I.R.A. scares and the new regulations at some of the stations, and when she got down to Waterloo or wherever it was, the fellow in the office asked her to open the thing. She objected rather guiltily and that made him awkward. You know how these things happen. Finally there was a bit of a row and people started to collect."

Susan looked at Mr. Campion appealingly.

"I didn't dare to hurry away with it. It would have looked so suspicious. It was terrible," she said earnestly.

"I can well imagine it," he agreed. "So you opened it, of course? Bursting the lock, no doubt. What did you find inside?"

"A package," cut in Brian. "This is the difficult part. There was a squarish package inside simply plastered all over with official seals. Frankly, the long and the short of it was that Susan had to break these. When the fellow saw that there was only a great wedge of forms and things inside he apologized, but that didn't help. For nearly two days Susan has been in agony waiting for this chap to turn up. When he does she'll have to explain, and she's afraid that he may get in a frightful row since the seals are broken. It's a jam, isn't it?"

"Jam indeed," consented Mr. Campion cautiously. "Er — if it isn't a foolish question, what exactly do you expect me to do?"

Susan looked at Brian, who had the grace to hesitate.

"It was I who thought of you," he said at last. "Susan came to me because she — well, she regards me as a sort of brother, so she says." He was blushing furiously, and Campion admired his chivalry. "We thought that if the seals could be somehow . . . replaced, I don't know how or who by, but . . . well, you're mixed up with all sorts of authorities, aren't you?"

His voice trailed away and his shoulders drooped dejectedly.

"It was a wild idea," he muttered apologetically, "but we're clutching at straws."

Campion had not the heart to agree with him as profoundly as he felt.

"Where is this incriminating bundle now?" he inquired.

Susan fished under the sofa on which she sat.

"I haven't dared to let it out of my sight since then," she said pathetically. "I wish I'd never seen it. I used to think I'd be pretty good at this sort of thing, responsibility and secrets and all that, but I'm not. I'm bad. I'm hopeless. I'd never take it on again."

In the face of this humility, any criticism which Mr. Campion might have felt inclined to offer was stifled at birth. He took the small attaché-case with becoming reverence and raised the lid. The package with the broken seals lay before him.

To do it justice, it was an impressive parcel with quite two pennyworth of red sealing-wax plastered about it and a length of green tape as binding. As he stood holding it in his hands, with the eyes of the two young people upon him, inspiration came to him as if from some psychometric source.

"Oh, by the way," he said, "and in strictest confidence, of course, what is Tony's name? I'm afraid you'll have to tell me that."

"Of course. I don't think that matters. You may even have heard of him." Susan spoke with a pride which seemed a little hard on Brian. "He's Anthony Rowley. *The* Anthony Rowley," she added hopefully.

Mr. Campion saved the parcel and his equanimity with an effort, and the girl who was watching him caught her breath.

"You *have* heard of him," she said. "Then you will do all you can for me, won't you?"

Campion set down the package. "All I may," he said seriously. "Tell me, did Mr. Rowley put these seals on this himself?"

"Oh, no, I don't think so." The idea was a new one to Susan, and she looked a little bewildered. "He might have, of course," she added presently. "He was away some time when he went up to the study to fetch it. That's an official seal though, isn't it?"

Campion studied one of the blobs of wax. There was certainly the imprint of a lion and a crown upon it, but many medallions bear this device, certain sixpenny pieces amongst them. He glanced up.

"All this happened on Tuesday, did it?" he said. "On the evening I met Brian?"

"Yes. That's why it's so frightfully urgent. Tony may come back any time now. It's going to be unbearable. I'd rather die than have to tell him."

Brian put an arm round her shoulders.

"Trust Campion," he said. "It's quite possible that he knows some important bug who will take a personal interest in the whole case, Rowley and all. Can you think of anyone like that, guvnor?"

Campion ran an easing finger round the inside of his collar.

"Someone does come to mind," he admitted. "To deny that would be wrong. Yes, definitely, someone very important does come to mind."

Forty minutes later Mr. Campion and Superintendent Oates sat looking at each other across the desk in the policeman's solid old-fashioned office. The attaché-case lay open between them, and a pile of buff-coloured forms which had been in the sealed package now rested on the superintendent's blotter. Oates, never an emotional man, was wiping his eyes.

"You can find the girl whenever you want her, can you?" he inquired when he could trust his voice.

"Oh, yes. She's being given ice-cream and faithful affection by the long-suffering Brian. They're waiting for me to do a spot of philanthropic lese majesty, bless them. What are you going to do?"

The superintendent placed a pair of shabby pince-nez across his nose, and picked up one of the forms. He read it through again until his feelings choked him.

"We'll have to have 'em both up together," he decided. "When I've got word that we've pulled the man in, you fetch the girl."

"No mental cruelty," warned Campion hastily. "I don't know if I want to be a party to this at all."

Oates blew his nose. "The party is mine," he said dryly. "Don't worry about the girl. I shall treat her as if she were my own daughter . . . exactly, the wretched little imbecile."

Leaning forward, he pressed the buzzer on his desk.

He was in much the same mood a little after eight that evening when a sober, but still mercurial, Mr. Gilbert Smith, alias Anthony Rowley, sat in the visitor's chair regarding him with the bland affability of one who feels completely at ease.

"Don't apologize," murmured Mr. Rowley when he felt that the silence had gone on long enough. "I don't mind coming along to see you, even at this impossible hour. I told your Watch Committee in the bowler hats that I should only be too pleased to come with them to look you up. I like you. Nice little place you have here."

Superintendent Oates glanced at Mr. Campion, who sat in a corner on the other side of the room. It was a quiet, satisfied glance, the glance of one who savors a delicate wine before tasting.

"It's nice to see your friend, too," added Mr. Rowley with increasing geniality. "It's pleasant to find you in such — forgive me — but such unexpectedly intelligent company. You may not believe it, but I find an evening like this very jolly. I am a man of few acquaintances and there's nothing I like better than a chat."

"You surprise me," said Oates with heavy politeness. "I should have thought you'd have had quite a busy life up at the Ministry. Let me see, you're in the Registration of Office Premises Department, aren't you?"

It was a hit. A shade, fleeting as a cloud shadow in a high wind, passed over Mr. Rowley's sleek and smiling countenance. His eyes wavered for an instant. However, when he spoke his voice was perfectly controlled.

"What a pity," he said. "What a frightful pity. You're confusing me with somebody else. I thought this was a personal call. I'm disappointed."

"Are you? Not nearly as much as you're going to be, believe me. I've got a form here, quite a number of 'em in fact. Perhaps I'd better read one to you."

He took a flimsy buff-coloured sheet from the pile before him.

"This is a masterpiece in a small way," he began condescendingly. "Any way, it has all the incomprehensibility and stultifying dullness of the genuine product. The printing is minute, and I doubt if many people would take the trouble to wade through it. I see the address is 'Controller, BQ/FT/359 (A) 43, Whitehall,' but that has been struck out and '25 Calligan Way, Wembley,' printed in. You've been evacuated, I suppose?"

"I don't quite follow you," murmured Mr. Rowley politely.

"No? Well, we'll come to that later," said Oates inexorably. "'*Dear Sir, — In compliance with the recent Order in Council, No. 5013287, Sec. 2 AB et seq., you are required to complete the following details concerning the office premises now occupied by you. As you are doubtless aware, it has become important for police and the other interested authorities to possess certain necessary information concerning office* *premises in vulnerable areas, in order that proper protection for goods and valuables may be ensured in all eventualities.*' "

He paused and looked over his glasses at the expressionless face before him.

"Bewilderingly ingenious," he said. "If there was an Order in Council No. 5013287 it would be even better."

Mr. Rowley yawned. "I find it tedious," he said frankly.

"I don't," said Oates. "It made me laugh. When I first read it I laughed till the tears ran down my face. It's the ultimate labor-saving device of all time. The preliminary questions are magnificently simple. '*Full Name of Occupier of Office. Address. Nature of Business. Number of Staff employed. Whether Night Watchman employed.*' I liked that. That delighted me. But towards the end it gets even better. After '*Number of floors, number of rooms, whether all rooms are accessible to a Fire Escape, How many doors between main staircase and each room, If said doors are locked and if so what locks are used,*' we come to the fascinating question of safes. That is Subsection C.4 B/F,I notice. Let me read you the headings. '*In which room is your safe? State type (wall or box, etc.). State make of safe. State number of safe. State approximate date when safe was fitted. State approximate size of safe over all.*' And finally, the ultimate pitch of consummate impudence, '*Are you in the habit of leaving valuables in safe overnight?*' "

Anthony Rowley shrugged his plump shoulders.

"I'm afraid I can't follow all that Government stuff," he said. "The only thing to do with an official form is to fill it in, not to try to understand it."

"Exactly." Oates was triumphant. "That's the general view. That's the fine fat-headed affectation adopted by half the great British public. That's why a pernicious document of this sort is so dangerous. The man who composed this banked on the astounding fact that the chances are that a man who has spent a small fortune on protecting his property would yet direct his secretary to complete anything of this type without hesitation, so long as it was printed on cheap buff paper and arrived in an official envelope."

"Very instructive," agreed Mr. Anthony Rowley languidly, "and to a psychologist probably entertaining, but I don't see the point of it myself."

"Don't you?" said Oates. "That's odd, because a number of these forms which I have here have already been filled in. They all come from smallish busy City firms, I notice; each one of them clearly a carefully chosen victim of the enterprising person who persuaded some small crook printer to set up the document. I should have thought you'd have been very interested."

"Me? My dear fellow, why me?"

The superintendent appeared to appreciate the performance, for a brief smile passed over his gray face as he took a small sheaf of the buff slips from the blotter.

"These are the forms which have been completed," he observed. "The rest are blanks. Do you know, it looks to me almost as though someone had been in a hurry, not to say in a funk, and has hastily collected everything connected with the Registration of Office Premises Department and packed it into a parcel for safety, after which he probably gave the parcel to some trustworthy and innocent person, some person who would never be suspected by the police, until his own premises should be safe from their attentions. I can imagine a man doing that on sobering up and remembering that he had opened his mouth far too wide when in conversation with a Superintendent of Police. Still, we'll let that pass. The interesting thing is that out of the twenty-seven forms which various misguided members of the public have been pleased to complete, nineteen have been scored across with blue pencil. The eight which remain have *one thing in common.*"

"Really?" Rowley still kept up his polite indifference. "And what is that?"

"They each record that the firm in question possesses a Bream safe, together with every conceivable detail concerning it." Oates made the announcement quietly, but all trace of his earlier sprightliness had vanished and his eyes were cold. "As you were so kind as to tell me," he added, "it was a very beautiful idea, but unfortunately it didn't wash."

There was a long pause, during which Mr. Rowley looked thoughtfully into the future. Presently he smiled.

"You're so ingenious," he said. "I've been working out your theory, and it's been an education to me. Now I know why ever since last Tuesday your troop of Boy Scouts have been paying me such a lot of attention. They've taken a very thorough look at my flat, and they've escorted me wherever I've gone with touching fidelity. Naturally, they've been disappointed to find me living in blameless and rather boring innocence. I can understand your zeal and their exasperation. But weren't you taking a little too much for granted? My dear chap, you know as well as I do that you can't hope to pin those forms on me simply because eight of them refer to Bream safes."

Oates did not answer him. Instead he glanced under his eyelashes at Mr. Campion.

"I wonder if I could trouble you to ask little Miss Susan Chad to step in here, my dear boy?" he murmured with the fine display of old-world courtesy abominably overdone which he was apt to adopt at particularly enjoyable moments in his career.

Campion experienced a sneaking sympathy for Anthony Rowley. Just for an instant he saw the whites of the man's eyes.

"She's something of a fan of yours, I gather," Oates observed mercilessly.

"Is she? Rare and intelligent woman," murmured his visitor cautiously. "The name is new to me. I shall enjoy meeting her."

When Campion returned with Susan clinging nervously to his arm he found himself hoping, most improperly, that she would live up to the testimonial. Oates rose at her approach and so did his visitor, who turned to meet her squarely.

Had Susan been an experienced accomplice, one glance at his blank, inquiring face would have given her the cue she needed. Unfortunately, at any rate from Mr. Rowley's point of view, Susan was hardly experienced in anything and her immediate reaction was disastrous.

"Oh, Tony," she burst out eagerly, "when did you get back?"

He did not respond at once, and she glanced down the room, catching sight of the attaché-case on the superintendent's desk. A wave of color spread over her face and she turned back to the man impulsively.

"Oh, have I got you in a frightful row by breaking the seals? I'm desperately sorry. I wouldn't have had it happen for worlds, but I couldn't help it. Honestly, Tony, I couldn't help it."

She turned to Oates.

"Does it matter so frightfully? Nothing has been stolen, you see. The whole package is just exactly as he gave it to me. Everything is there."

Mr. Campion always held it to Mr. Rowley's credit that in that moment of ruin he laughed.

"So true, my dear," he said suddenly, holding out his hands to her. "As you say, nothing has been stolen. That ought to make a lot of difference."

Oates sighed with satisfaction.

"Then you admit . . . ?" he began.

"Wait a moment." The man who called himself Anthony Rowley released Susan's hands, smiled at her faintly with an odd mixture of apology and regret, and wandered over towards the desk. "I should like to make a brief statement," he said.

Oates leant back in his chair.

"Oh, you would, would you?" he said. "You've got a nerve."

The crook shrugged his shoulders.

"I should like to make a statement," he repeated.

In the circumstances there was nothing else for it, of course, and Oates gave way ungraciously.

"We'll hear it first and take the shorthand note afterwards," he said. "Fire away."

Mr. Rowley walked away from Susan, who had planted herself beside him.

"It's a sordid little tale of vulgar vanity," he began. "I met Miss Chad, who lives in a rather different circle from my own, about a fortnight ago, and in order to ingratiate myself with her I regret to have to say that I represented myself as having some sort of important Government post."

"Tony!"

Susan's voice was small and horrified. He glanced at her briefly.

"I'm sorry, Beautiful," he said, "but this is a police station, and when in the hands of the law the truth has a nasty way of being the only touchstone."

"Yes?" inquired Oates grimly. "And so what?"

"So nothing," continued Mr. Rowley firmly. "Nothing of importance, that is, save that she believed me. I acquired quite a lot of fake prestige from this subterfuge. It went down very much better than the true story of my activities, which as you know are not very glorious, would have done. After all, an out-of-work motor car salesman twice convicted for burglary is not the romantic figure that a budding diplomat, I might almost say a blooming diplomat, appears."

"Tony," said Susan again, and this time he did not look at her.

"All went well," he continued clearly, "until — er — chance took a hand. On Monday evening I took a cab in the vicinity of Westminster, and in it I found a large manilla envelope, left, no doubt, by a previous fare. In the envelope were these forms in which you are so interested. Quite frankly I didn't bother to read them. I hate small print, and anyway I can hardly read, you know. I merely saw that they looked official, so I hit on the idea of packing them into a distinguished-looking parcel and giving them to Miss Susan to mind. I'm afraid I misjudged her. I took it for granted that feminine curiosity would be too much for her and that she would be bound to open the package, thereby receiving ocular proof that I was the important person I had set myself up to be. What I did not realize was that she would be so conscientious as to take the whole matter to the authorities."

"Tony, if this is true, I'll never speak to you again." Susan was pale with rage and humiliation.

"If it isn't true, which seems more than probable, you'll hardly have the opportunity," murmured the superintendent.

Mr. Rowley sat down.

"How embarrassing one's more childish follies always are," he remarked. "Truth is so naked, isn't it?"

"Tony, you're making this up. It doesn't sound like you. Tell me you're making it up." Susan went over to him as she spoke and, since he could not avoid her, he smiled into her face, albeit a trifle wryly.

"Life is full of vulgarity, my dear," he said. "Let this be an awful warning. One swallow doesn't make a summer and one portfolio, alas! doesn't make a Cabinet Minister."

Susan gaped at him for a moment and then disgraced herself.

"Oh, I hate you," she said indistinctly. "I think you're the meanest, most revolting little tick who ever lived. I never never want to see you again."

Oates glanced anxiously at Mr. Campion, who led her gently from the room. Mr. Rowley remained where he was, blinking at the superintendent, who leant across the desk.

"I suppose you think you've been very clever?" he demanded.

"No. Prudent," said Mr. Rowley.

"Prudent, and, in my own way, almost a gentleman."

"Prudent be damned!" exploded the superintendent unpardonably. "If you think I'm going to believe any cock-and-bull story about you finding these things in a taxicab, you're mad."

Mr. Rowley permitted a brief smile to break through the somewhat unexpected expression of resignation which had settled on his face.

"You misjudge me," he said. "It's not what I expect you to believe, is it? It's what I know you can prove. Did you send anyone down to the address printed on the form?"

Oates did not answer. The chit from a plainclothes sergeant reporting briefly "Accommodation Address: Wide Guy in charge: no change to be got here in a million years" lay open on the desk before him.

Mr. Rowley got up.

"I shall be hearing from you, no doubt," he said gently, "if it's only to pass the time of day. Meanwhile you'll want to confer with your legal advisers, won't you? I should like to congratulate you on that ingenious theory you put forward, but you see the facts were far more simple and far more degradingly human. The wiliest of us do silly things to impress a woman."

Oates laughed briefly.

"The wiliest of us don't escape every time," he said bitterly. "You wait, my lad."

"Oh, I shall," Mr. Rowley assured him. "You know my address."

Mr. Campion stood on the pavement looking after the cab which carried Brian and Susan out into the darkness. Having witnessed the grateful eagerness with which Susan had accepted his sheltering arm, Campion was inclined to bet that the young warrior's last day of leave was liable to prove more satisfactory than his first.

He was just turning back to have a word with Oates when another figure loomed up out of the dark gateway. It was Mr. Rowley, and he came up to Campion in the moonlight.

"You were with Oates at the café that night," he said. "Tell me, did I call him an old duck, by any chance?"

"Er — yes. Yes, I think you did."

"Fool," said Mr. Rowley. "Fool. I'm always doing it. It's bad luck. It's prophetic. The association of ideas. See what I mean?"

"No, I — I can't say I do, exactly."

"Why, the rhyme," said the man excitedly. "Don't you remember the rhyme? It was the 'fine fat duck who gobbled him up,' wasn't it? Fancy calling a Superintendent of Police a duck, anyway."

"Oh," said Mr. Campion as the light broke in upon him. "The frog, you mean?"

The other sighed.

"The frog who would a-wooing go," he murmured. "Ah, well, but such a nice girl. Such a very nice girl and such a beautiful thought."

They stood looking down the dark road.

"Heigh ho," said Anthony Rowley.

4 big collections of first-rate crime stories compiled by an editor whose opinion you trust

Ellery Queen

101 YEARS ENTERTAINMENT:

The Great Detective Stories, 1841-1941

"The best detective-mystery-crime anthology I ever have seen . . . the perfect bedside book, the perfect gift book for the man who reads for entertainment."—John Selby, *Associated Press.* $3.50

SPORTING BLOOD

The Great Sports Detective Stories

With an introduction by Grantland Rice

"Some of the stories have never appeared before in book form—and it should keep the victims of mysteries blissful for several evenings." —Will Cuppy, *New York Herald Tribune.* $2.50

THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES:

The Great Women Detectives and Criminals

A brilliant collection of 21 short stories by leading writers, with an historical introduction and explanatory sketches by Ellery Queen. $2.50

THE MISADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

33 short stories about Sherlock Holmes (not by Conan Doyle). Parodies, pastiches, exact imitations by famous authors. $2.50

ANY QUEEN YOU HAVEN'T READ IS A NEW QUEEN TO YOU

LITTLE, BROWN & CO., BOSTON

FOR CHRISTMAS

. . . share your enjoyment of

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

with as many friends as you can this year. They'll thank you again and again in the months ahead.

CHRISTMAS GIFT RATES

One Subscription	$1.50	Three Subscriptions	$4.00
Two Subscriptions	2.75	Each Additional Subscription	1.00

Your own subscription, new or renewal, may be included.

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine is published every other month

Send ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE *as a Christmas gift to:*

NAME____

ADDRESS____

CITY_________________________NO.______STATE___________

Gift card should read: *From*______________________________

NAME____

ADDRESS____

CITY_________________________NO.______STATE___________

Gift card should read: *From*______________________________

——————— (USE SEPARATE SHEET FOR ADDITIONAL NAMES) ———————

and enter my subscription . . . ☐ *new . . .* ☐ *renewal. I enclose $*______

DONOR____

ADDRESS____

Q20

CITY_________________________NO.______STATE___________

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, 570 LEXINGTON AVE., NEW YORK 22, N.Y.

THE *Crime Club*

brings you two new books by two masters of mystery . . .

MARGARET ECHARD

Penelope Jeffers, widow of the famous singer Lavagnino, walked in the shadow of fear, unwilling decoy of an unknown but dreaded force. Could the testimony she gave regarding her husband's death have loaded the dice against her? Rogue's Run, the home of her dead husband, furnished the clue to some international villainy.

A CRIME CLUB SELECTION. $2.00

IF THIS BE TREASON

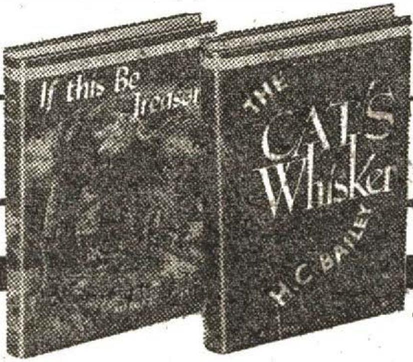
H. C. BAILEY

A man burned to death . . . a girl drowned . . . an armament factory blitzed . . . and Reggie Fortune still felt that these were minor incidents in a much bigger game. Follow him as he trails a killer whose worst crime was not murder!

A CRIME CLUB SELECTION. $2.00

THE CAT'S WHISKER

A REGGIE FORTUNE NOVEL



Something new—don't miss it!

A chess puzzle... Mr. Fortune in top form!

At your bookseller's **THE CRIME CLUB**

FREE 23 All-Star MYSTERY STORIES Selected by Ellery Queen

(continued from previous page)

of it FREE, to show you the kind of top-notch detective fiction you can get *every month* from the Detective Book Club.

How This Club Brings You The Best Mysteries

Each month this Club offers its members an attractive volume containing THREE modern detective books – for the usual price of only ONE! And EACH of the three is a complete, full-length, modern novel, by an author like Agatha Christie, Erle Stanley Gardner, Dorothy B. Hughes, William Irish, Frances Crane, or Anthony Abbot.

The selections of the Club are ALL books that sell everywhere for $2.00 each. Yet, as a member of the Club, you get three of them (a $6.00 value) for only $1.89! You do not have to take a volume a month – you may accept as few as four during the whole year and still save two-thirds the usual price on those you purchase.

You Enjoy These Four Advantages

(1) Every month you are offered the cream of the finest modern detective books—by the best authors. *(2)* You save two-thirds the usual cost. *(3)* Your books are delivered right to your door. Each book is fresh, clean, unopened, ready whenever you are in the mood to read as leisurely as you please. *(4)* You will receive volumes so attractive, that month by month they will grow into a handsome library of masterpieces of modern detective fiction.

Mail Coupon Now For Your Free Book

By ACCEPTING this FREE copy of *"Best Stories from Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine"* now, as a Charter Membership Gift from the Club, you will not be obligated to take every month's selection during the next 12 months. You may take as few as four. You may cancel your membership whenever you wish. A description of the next month's selection will be sent you each month, and you may reject in advance any volume you do not want.

Send no money with Reservation Card below. To get *"Best Stories from Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine"* absolutely free, AND the current triple selection, mail this postage-free card at once to: DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, One Park Avenue, New York 16, N. Y.

Contains All These Great Detective Stories

A careful sifting of the best stories appearing in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* during the last two years. Included are:

Introduction, by Ellery Queen

AMERICAN DETECTIVE STORIES

Fly Paper, Dashiell Hammett
The Cablegram, T. S. Stribling
His Heart Could Break, Craig Rice
P. Moran, Shadow, Percival Wilde
Dime a Dance, Cornell Woolrich
Crime Without Passion, Ben Hecht
Department of Impossible Crimes, James Yaffe
Blue Murder, Wilbur Daniel Steele
Dr. Sam: Johnson, Detector, Lillian de la Torre
QL 696, C9, Anthony Boucher
The Killer, Cyril Plunkett
About the Perfect Crime of Mr. Digberry, Anthony Abbott
Suspect Unknown, Courtney Ryley Cooper

ENGLISH DETECTIVE STORIES

The Third Floor Flat, Agatha Christie
The Ministering Angel, E. C. Bentley
The Mallet, James Hilton
The Good Friend, Michael Arlen
The Rubber Trumpet, Roy Vickers
The Turn of the Tide, C. S. Forester
The Question Mark, Margery Allingham

FRENCH DETECTIVE STORIES

The Case of Arnold Schuttringer, Georges Simenon
The Lady with the Hatchet, Maurice Leblanc

ANGLO-AMERICAN STORY

The Proverbial Murder, John Dickson Carr

SEND NO MONEY

MAIL THIS CARD NOW

•

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

D B
DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

YM

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
One Park Avenue, New York 16, N. Y.

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE "BEST STORIES FROM ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE." Also send me the current triple volume, containing three complete detective books.

This does not obligate me to take every monthly triple volume during the next 12 months. I may take as few as four during this period if I so wish.

It is also understood that I will receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and that I may reject in advance any volume that I do not wish to own. I need send no money now, but for each volume I accept I will send you only $1.89, plus a few cents postage, as complete payment, within one week after I receive my book.

MR.
MRS. } ....
MISS
PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY

ADDRESS..

CITY.. Zone No. (if any)........... STATE..................

CHILLS... THRILLS... KILLS...!

FREE This Big 400-Page Book of *MYSTERY STORIES* Selected by *Ellery Queen*

Rascals, Murders, Spies—All In This One Magnificent Detective Volume!

YES, YOURS FREE—a glorious feast of reading for detective story fans. Twenty-three of the cleverest stories ever written—SELECTED FOR YOU BY ELLERY QUEEN, from the very best of ALL the stories ever picked for *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.* And you can imagine what *this* means when you realize that the Ellery Queen library of detective stories, from which each was chosen, is *the largest and finest collection in the world!*

No wonder the stories in this great book are the cream of the cream. Masterpieces by Dashiell Hammett, Craig Rice, Agatha Christie—and twenty others, each a master of the gentle art of making your brain burn with curiosity and your blood run cold with fear!

This book is brand new, just published. But we want to give you a copy

(continued on next page)

Best Stories from Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
ECTIVE
OK CLUB
THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

FIRST CLASS
Permit No. 7
(Sec. 510 P L & R)
New York, N. Y.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD
No Postage Stamp Necessary if Mailed in the United States

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
ONE PARK AVENUE
NEW YORK 16, N. Y.

MAIL THIS CARD NOW

•

NO POSTAGE NEEDED