THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

JUNE 1966 50c

NEW

STANLEY ELLIN

CONTEMPORARY BEST

Death of an Old-Fashioned Girl

NEW

ANTHONY GILBERT

UNUSUAL CRIME STORY

The Dove and the Hawk

AGATHA CHRISTIE

PARKER PYNE, DETECTIVE

The Gate of Death

NEW

JOHN CREASEY

POLICE PROCEDURAL

The Greyling Crescent Tragedy

COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL

KELLEY ROOS

Murder Underground

Dark things happened in the grotesque labyrinth of caverns 450 feet below the earth's surface...

Don't Forget the New Ellery Queen's Anthology (1966 MID-YEAR EDITION, VOL. 11) Is Now on Sale at Your Newsstand

$1.25

If you call yourself a devotee of the world's finest mystery writers; if the works of Erle Stanley Gardner, Hugh Pentecost and Cornell Woolrich stir you; if you consider a relaxing evening one that is full of suspense; then you certainly will not want to miss this new Anthology.

It has everything . . . including John Steinbeck.

At your favorite newsstand now. Or use the coupon to speed your personal copy to you.

ELLERY QUEEN'S EQ 666
1966 ANTHOLOGY VOL. NO. 11
505 Park Avenue/
New York, N. Y./10022

Please send me_____copies of the new ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY—Vol. 11, 1966 Mid-Year Edition. I am enclosing $1.25 PLUS 25¢ for postage & handling for each copy.

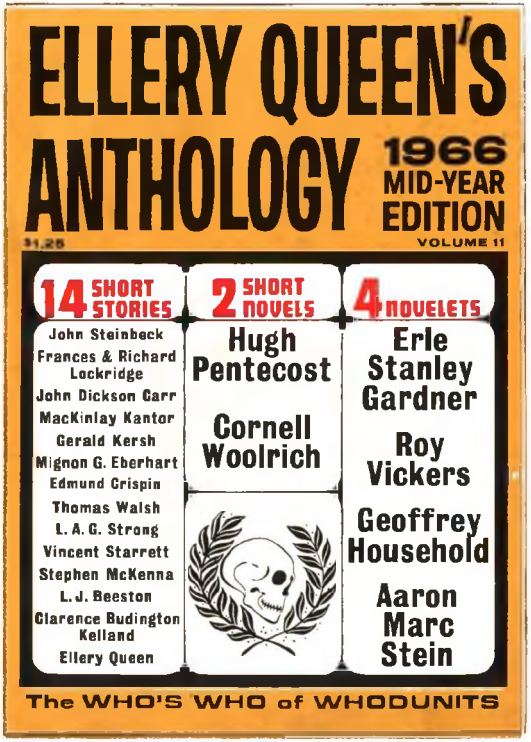
Name_____

Address_____

City_____

State_____ Zip_____

(Turn to page 105 for extra coupon)



NEXT MONTH . . .

NERO WOLFE *short novel*—

REX STOUT's

The Dazzle Dan Murder Case

The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

PUBLISHER: *B. G. Davis* — EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 47, No. 6, Whole No. 271, JUN., 1966. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at 50c a copy. Annual subscription $6.00 in U.S.A. and possessions and Canada; $7.00 in the Pan American Union; $7.00 in all other countries. Editorial and General Offices, 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022. Second-Class postage paid at Concord, N. H.

JOEL DAVIS, *Assistant Publisher* — CLAYTON RAWSON, *Managing Editor*

MELVIN FLAMM, *Business Manager* — CONSTANCE DI RIENZO, *Executive Editorial Secretary*

LEONARD F. PINTO, *Production Director* — IRVING BERNSTEIN, *Art Director*

the NEWEST short story by
STANLEY ELLIN

Here is Stanley Ellin's annual story written especially for EQMM—always a mystery-and-literary Event.

"Death of an Old-Fashioned Girl" offers all the qualities we have come to expect in the contemporary mystery short story—a plot of modern substance; a style solid and muscular in the modern manner; characters of dimension, clearly realized; and (no truly contemporary story can be lacking in it) psychological and intellectual content . . . a modern short story written by the man who, many critics believe, is the Number One writer of mystery short stories actively producing today . . .

DEATH OF AN OLD-FASHIONED GIRL

by STANLEY ELLIN

THE KNIFE WAS AN OLD CARVING knife pressed into service as an artist's tool, used for trimming canvas, for shaping wedges for stretchers, for a dozen other duties. Its blade, honed to a razor edge, had been driven up to the handle into the woman's body, the impact of the blow so unexpected and violent that she had not even had time to scream under it. She had simply doubled over and fallen, her face a mask of horror, and then she had lain still, her blood puddling on the floor.

She must have died almost at once. I had never seen death by violence before, but I needed no past experience to tell me that the abrupt relaxation of those limbs and the graying of that horror-stricken face meant death.

So, as the police knew at a glance, the knife had been the weapon. In view of that, one could hardly blame them for their skeptical manner toward us. And note as well that this was Greenwich Village, home of the emotional and irrational, that there was every evidence in the studio of a liberal consumption of alcohol, that the walls around were hung with paintings capable of baffling the canniest policeman —and there you have all the grounds you need for official hostility.

The one painting I would except was the huge nude on its slab of masonite hanging almost directly over the lifeless body on the floor, a

fleshy, voluptuous nude which even a policeman could appreciate, as all these so evidently did.

There was—although they did not know it yet—a relationship between that nude and the body on the floor. The model for the picture had been Nicole Arnaud, first wife of Paul Zachary, the man who had painted it. The blood-soaked body on the floor had been Elizabeth Ann Moore, second wife of Paul Zachary. I have known cases where a man's first and second wives managed a sort of amiable regard for each other, but they were the rare exceptions to the rule. The case of Nicole and Elizabeth Ann was not among the exceptions. Fearing each other desperately, they had naturally hated each other virulently. It was their misfortune that Paul Zachary was as talented and attractive as he was. One or another of those endowments should be enough for any man. Put them together so that you have a superb painter with an immediate and magnetic appeal for any woman in his ken, and you have the makings of tragedy.

There were five of us to be questioned by the police: my wife Janet and myself, Sidney and Elinor Goldsmith who ran the Goldsmith Galleries, and Paul Zachary. Five of us, any of whom might be regarded as capable of murder. We had motive, we had means, and we had certainly drunk enough to enter the necessary mood.

The officer in charge was a lieutenant of detectives, a sharp-featured man with cold gray eyes, who surveyed us with a sort of dour satisfaction. There on the floor was a dead woman. Nearby lay the knife that had butchered her, still stained with her blood. And here were the five of us, birds in a coop, one of whom was certainly due to be plucked and roasted very soon. The victim's husband, dazed and incoherent, sweating and blood-spattered, was the prime suspect, which made it that much easier. It was now four in the morning. Before sunrise our stories would be out, and the case would be closed.

Therefore, the lieutenant made it clear, the immediate objective was to separate us, to prevent any collusion, any conspiracy against the truth. There was a stenographer present to take our statements, but until they were dictated and signed we were not to communicate with each other. And, he added, with a bilious look at the litter of empty bottles and glasses on the scene, if we needed sobering up before the questioning, he would see to it that we were supplied with sufficient black coffee to do the job.

The studio was on the upper floor of Paul's duplex. Of the host of men in it, fingerprinting, photographing, and examining, two were delegated to accompany us to the apartment below. In the living room there they dispersed us well apart from each other and then

stood at opposite ends of the room, eyeing us like suspicious proctors.

The coffee was brought, steaming hot and acid strong, and because it was offered to us we drank it, the clink of cup against saucer sounding loud in the deathly silence of that room. Then a uniformed man appeared at the kitchen door, and Paul was removed.

Now there were four of us left to sit and look at each other numbly and wonder how Paul was describing what had happened. I had a part in that explanation. One hour ago Elizabeth Ann had been standing here before me, very much alive, and I had been the one to speak the words which started the clock ticking away her last minutes.

Not that I was entirely to blame for what had happened. There was in Elizabeth Ann a fatal quality. She was, as she herself chose to put it, an old-fashioned girl. This is a phrase which may have many meanings, but there was never a doubt about the exact meaning it held for her. During her brief lifetime she must have ingested enough romantic literature and technicolored movies to addle a much larger brain than hers, and in the end she came to believe that human beings actually behaved the way the heroine of a melodrama would. Perhaps—because whenever she looked into a mirror she saw how golden-haired and blue-eyed and beautiful she was—identification with her wish-fulfillment heroine came that much easier.

So Elizabeth Ann became that heroine and played her role, although neither she nor the times were quite suited to it. She should have given thought to that before the murderous knife-blade plunged into her—should have considered that times change, that poets no longer need to scratch their verses on parchment, nor painters smear their paints on canvas. Times change, and it may be dangerous to act out your little role as if they don't.

Across the room Sidney Goldsmith looked at his watch, and, involuntarily, I looked at mine. It had only been five minutes since Paul was closeted with his inquisitors. How much longer would it take? Sooner or later it would be my turn, and I could feel my stomach churn at the prospect.

From the room overhead came sounds of heavy-footed activity; from the dark street below, a radio in one of the police cars parked there squawked something unintelligible. Later, I knew, there would be newspapermen and photographers, avid curiosity seekers and inquisitive friends. Afterward, all our lives would be changed and redirected—as if Elizabeth Ann had the power to manipulate us even from the grave.

Would a policeman be interested in that? Not likely. Yet, if I were to tell the story my own way, that

would be part of it—a closing note, perhaps. As for the beginning, it would have to be the day, long, long ago, when I first met Paul Zachary.

We met that chill, damp Parisian day twelve years ago in Michelette's, the café on the corner of Rue Soufflot near the University where art students, especially homesick American art students, congregated. Possibly because we were so dissimilar, Paul and I took to each other at once. He was a big handsome, easygoing North Carolina boy, soft-voiced, slow-speaking, someone who, I suspected, would rather have cut out his tongue than say anything unkind to you, no matter how justified unkindness might be on occasion. I learned that, watching him under provocation. He had a temper which was slow to heat, but when heated it would roar up in a blaze of physical rage, an overturning of a table, a smashing of a glass against the wall, but never the spoken insult.

As for me, I was small and aggressive, a born New Yorker with, I suppose, the New Yorker's sharp tongue and touchy ways. To Paul this was as intriguing as his country ways were to me. More important, we honestly admired each other's talents, and that is not as usual among artists as you might think. Making pictures may be art, but it is also a brutally competitive business for those engaged in it. There are just so many patrons and fellowships to support an artist, just so much space on gallery walls to display his work, and until a painter's reputation is assured beyond a doubt he is the rival of every other painter, including masters long dead and gone.

The meeting in Michelette's led very soon to our sharing a combined bedroom-studio on Rue Raspail, since such sharing is a natural way of life for students with little money. But there was one thing I could not share with Paul, no matter what I would have offered for it in those days. That was Nicole.

He had met her at Au Printemps, the big department store on Boulevard Haussmann, where she was a salesgirl. How to describe her? The best way, I think, is to say that she was a true Parisienne. And there is in every Parisian woman I have known a special quality. Beautiful or plain, she is always fully alive, always mercurial. Opinionated, too, for that matter, but what she does succeed in communicating to her man is that he is the one who has quickened her spirit this way.

All this vivacity, this spirit, this tenderness Nicole brought to Paul with single-minded devotion. And more. Much more. She was no fool about art and no coward about expressing her opinions on it. Every artist worth his salt must have an egomaniac confidence in himself. But underneath this confidence

will always be one small lump of uncertainty, of self-doubt, which is waiting to flare up cancerously and destroy him. Why can't I sell, he wonders. Am I on the wrong track? If I fell in line with the vogue, wouldn't I do better for myself? And then he is lost, sunk in guilt if he does sell out, full of misery if he doesn't.

It was Nicole who, by acting as Paul's conscience, barred the way to retreat from the course he had set himself. Whenever he would throw up his hands in despair for the future, they would have furious quarrels which she always won, because, I think, he wanted her to win, wanted the constant evidence of her faith in him to keep him on his chosen course.

Like a good little bourgeoise, Nicole lived at home with her papa and mama, and, since they took a dim view of threadbare young American artists, she had a hard time of it with them after Paul entered her life. But she stubbornly held her own, until at last there was a wedding service at the Mairie of the XVIII Arrondisement followed by a banquet at which papa and mama, between mouthfuls, loudly discussed their daughter's cheerless prospects. That same evening, out of money but with the promise of a job in New York, I said goodbye to the newlyweds at Orly airport and went my way homeward to America. As a wedding present—the only one I could afford—I left them my share of the room that Paul and I inhabited on Rue Raspail.

I didn't see them again for two years, but during that time we corresponded regularly. Nicole did the writing for them, and somehow, despite her schoolbook English, she managed to express all her warmth and wit in those letters. She was still working at Au Printemps and had wonderful stories to tell about tourists. And stories about her family, and about old friends at the University. But no stories about Paul. Only occasional phrases about her happiness with him, her concern with his working so hard, her certainty that he would very soon be recognized as a great artist. Apparently, one does not write stories about God. He is there to be worshipped, and that is all.

Then came the momentous news of Mrs. Goldsmith in six crowded pages of dashing script. Nicole had fallen into conversation with this American woman at the store, the subject of Paul had come up—it never took Nicole long to introduce that subject into any conversation—and it seemed that this woman and her husband had recently opened a gallery in New York and were seeking works of art by newcomers. Naturally, she had introduced them to Paul, had shown them his work, and they were much impressed. When they left for New York they would be tak-

ing several of his pictures with them. They would also be calling on me as soon as they were home.

So they did, which was how I came to meet Sid and Elinor Goldsmith, and how I finally came into my own. At the time I had few pictures to show them—I was doing art layouts for a Madison Avenue agency at the time—but what they saw they liked.

They were not new at the game. They had worked for a big uptown gallery for years, but now had obtained financial backing sufficient to open their own place. With their wide acquaintance among people who bought art they had a head start over most, but they needed some new and exciting work to put on the market. Paul and I were not their first discoveries, but we were, within a few years, their most important. I sometimes think of what might have become of me if Nicole and Elinor had not met that day in Au Printemps, and it is not a pleasant thought.

As it was, not long after meeting the Goldsmiths I had made my first worthwhile sales and had left the agency to try my hand at painting full time again. Also, I had got myself married to one of the agency's loveliest secretaries. Very soon after meeting Janet in the office, I had visions of exchanging wedding rings with her some day in the remote future. When I had told her that, explaining we would have to wait because no wife of mine was going to work to help pay my rent, she smiled a Mona Lisa smile, and, somewhat to my surprise, I found myself married immediately afterward.

So there were the four of us to meet Paul and Nicole when they arrived at Kennedy one rainy night. Their appearance in New York was not unexpected. Nicole had mentioned the possibility to me in one of her letters, trying to sound lightsome about it but not quite succeeding, and Paul had written the Goldsmiths at length, saying that he was fed up with living abroad, and asking if they could not arrange some kind of part-time work for him, teaching art classes, perhaps. It would not be harder, Paul observed, than trying to get along on what Nicole earned at the store and on the few sales he had made.

As it turned out, there was no demand for art instructors, but there was a large demand among various chic Fifth Avenue stores for salesgirls just like Nicole. So at one of the most chic she took up where she had left off at Au Printemps, while Paul continued his eight hours a day at the easel. I found them a cheap flat in the Greenwich Village walk-up where Janet and I lived, and, as in my case, one room was set up as Paul's studio.

A man will work harder out of the compulsion to create art than for any other reason. That was

true of me during that period, and it applied to Paul in double measure. Because of that, because the time became ripe for us, and because the Goldsmiths were more apostles for us than agents, we made it.

There is a great divide between being an artist and being a successful artist. On one side is only hard work. On the other side is still the hard work, but now there are collectors attending your shows, reviews in the press, places on the panels of Sunday television shows. And suddenly there is money, more and more of it, the feel of it in your hand assuring you that all this is real. A great divide. And crossing it can sometimes change a man greatly.

Up to the time Paul and I made the crossing, he had been submerged in his work with fanatical dedication. And he had leaned heavily on Nicole, sustained by her encouragement, grateful for the paycheck she brought home each week, for the housekeeping she did, for the role of wife, mother, and mistress she played so devotedly. She had also been a convenient model for him, and it used to enrage Janet that Nicole, after a hard day at the store, would pose for Paul until all hours of the night, holding some bone-racking position until she must have been ready to collapse.

From Nicole, however, there were few complaints, and those few always delivered with wry self-mockery. Having art as a rival for your husband's affections was not so bad, she would point out. There were more dangerous rivals. The unscrupulous two-legged kind with an eye for a handsome man.

Did she have a foreboding of the future when she said that? Or was it only the expression of the fear in every wife as her youth fades, especially a wife whose husband has removed her so far from homeland and family and who is that much more dependent on him? Whichever it was, when Paul's success brought about the great change, it was clear that she had spoken prophetically.

At first, the change was superficial. Nicole left her job, as Janet had already done, to become the complete housewife. Paul leased the duplex off Sheridan Square. There was a glossy new car parked in front of it. Then there were parties every week-end, and very good and plentiful liquor to ignite the social spirit.

And there were women. There were always women at those parties, and where they came from and where they went to when the party was over was often a mystery to me. I do not mean the usual wives and mistresses. I mean those unescorted young charmers who appeared from nowhere to sit at your feet, a drink in their hands, and look up at you meltingly. There were so many of them, all

strangely resembling each other in their vacuous prettiness, all apparently available to any man who cared to stake a claim. Certainly they were available to Paul. The fact that his wife was on the premises eyeing them with loathing only seemed to amuse them.

More than once I saw Paul make a fool of himself with them. On his behalf I can only say that it would have been hard for him not to. For all his years in Paris and New York, he was still the country boy, and this alluring breed of female drawn his way by the smell of money and success was new to him. And its rapt, odalisque adoration of him, so unlike Nicole's strong-minded partnership, was unsettling. Why not? Give any healthy man a few drinks and face him with a lovely young creature who, eyes limpid with emotion and lips parted, strains toward him, offering him the luscious fullness of her décolletage, and he is likely to make the same kind of fool of himself. Face him with Elizabeth Ann Moore, and he is in real danger.

In the kaleidoscope of those week-end gatherings, Elizabeth Ann remained a constant. Others came and went, finally disappearing for good, but she remained. I believe that from the time she first met Paul she had decided that he was to be hers, and slowly, inexorably, like an ameba flowing around its prey and ingesting it, she devoured him.

She had the means for it. As an artist I can say that she was almost too flawlessly beautiful to make a good model, but, of course, she was not offering herself to Paul as a model. And she conveyed an air of childlike innocence, of wide-eyed, breathless rapture with life. That was the role she must have set herself long before; by now she played it to perfection. She was not one for furs and jewels either. A shrewd child, she dressed, as Janet once remarked, like a sweet little milkmaid who had $200 to spend on a dress.

In matters of the intellect she was totally ignorant. And here there was no pretense about her. She evidently lived on a diet of sickly romantic novels, lush movies, and popular music played in a slow, dreamy tempo, and when she was charged with that she would say, smiling at her own naivete, "Well, I guess I'm sort of old-fashioned, aren't I?"

But she said that—she uttered all her banalities—in a soft little voice, a honeyed, insinuating whisper, which suggested that you weren't really annoyed with her, were you? How could you be, when you were such a great big strong man, and she was such a helpless little girl?

She was as helpless as Catherine de'Medici. And she had a skin thick enough to withstand any blow. That, of course, is essential

equipment for the woman invading another woman's territory. Not only Nicole, but Janet and Elinor detested her and let her know it. For all the effect their remarks had on her, Elizabeth Ann might have been getting compliments on her new hairdo. To the intent of the remarks she was deaf, dumb, and blind, sweetly smiling, more childlike than ever.

Then one night we were shocked witnesses to a scene in which Nicole could no longer restrain herself. Paul and Elizabeth Ann had left the room together, and had been gone so long that their absence became embarrassing. When they returned, absorbed in each other, slightly disheveled, Nicole burst out and told them in the idiom of Rue Pigalle what they were. Then she fled to her room while Paul stood there, ashamed and angry, hesitating about following her, finally taking the first step after her.

That was the deciding moment for Elizabeth Ann. Another woman told off in public this way would have left. She might have done it with bravado, but she would have left. Elizabeth Ann remained. And wept. It was not the ugly, helpless weeping that Nicole had given way to as she fled the scene; it was a pathetic weariness, a whispered sobbing. Face buried in her hands in the approved melodramatic style, she whimpered like a stricken child. And when Paul stopped in his tracks, when he turned to take her in his arms and soothe her anguish, we knew it was all over for Nicole.

It was Janet who went with her to Juarez a month later to arrange the divorce. The night before they left for Mexico, Nicole stayed with us at our new apartment uptown, and we were up till dawn while she talked in a nerveless, exhausted way of what was happening to her. She seemed past the point of tears now, suddenly much older and stouter, her face bloated, her eyes sunk in her head. Only when she described the great confrontation scene that Elizabeth Ann had finally contrived, the performance Elizabeth Ann had given in it, did a spark of the old animation show.

"They were together," Nicole said, "but he did not speak a word. What a coward he is. How contemptible to let her be the one to tell me. And she? I swear she was like a diva in an opera performance. She was like Tosca preparing to die for her lover. She stood like this—" Nicole pressed a fist between her breasts and raised her head with jaw proudly outthrust "—and told me about their love, their undying passion for each other, as if someone had written the lines for her. And he never spoke a word. Not one. I don't understand, I cannot understand what she has done to him."

What Elizabeth Ann had done to Paul might be bewildering. What

she did to Nicole was very simple. After the divorce Nicole settled down in a hotel room near us. She had intended to return to Paris, she said, but the thought of facing her family after what had happened was too much. So she lived in her hotel room, visiting us sometimes at Janet's insistence, growing a little stouter, a little blowsier, a little more apathetic at each visit. And then one night she put an end to her misery with an overdose of sleeping pills.

The scene at the cemetery was one I will never forget. It was bad enough that Paul should appear at the services, although meanly rewarding to see from his drawn and haggard look how hard he had been hit. Much worse was the sight of Elizabeth Ann at his side. There may be more obscene demonstrations of bad taste on record, but her presence in genteel mourning, a handkerchief pressed to her lips, a pitiful moaning forcing Paul's attention her way while Nicole's body was being lowered into the grave, will stand me well enough the rest of my life.

It was the last I was to see of Paul and Elizabeth Ann for a long time. But since they were topics of conversation when Janet and I were with the Goldsmiths, we were kept very much in touch with their affairs.

As Elinor put it, it seemed that Elizabeth Ann had a job cut out for her. Paul was obviously morbid about Nicole's death, so Elizabeth Ann now lived with the ghost of the first wife always beside her. To exorcise it, she was, said Elinor, giving her cute little all to Paul's career. Of his work she knew nothing and cared less, but in the art of career making she had set herself up as an expert. There were no more unattached and alluring females at the parties; not for Elizabeth Ann the mistake her predecessor had made. Now in attendance were only those who could add luster to an artist's reputation. Museum curators and rich collectors, critics and celebrities—these were the grist for Elizabeth Ann's mill.

When I asked how Paul took to this, Sid said, "With bile. His manner, if you know what I mean. He drinks too much for one thing, and then there's this ugly way he has of baiting Elizabeth Ann into talking about things she's completely blank on. After which he apologizes for her with elaborate sarcasm while she blushes and looks prettily confused."

"Darling little bitch," said Elinor. "She has what to blush for. My guess is that she and Paul hate each other like poison now, and nothing is going to be done about it. He wouldn't know how to get rid of her, and she won't get rid of him because he's a winning horse. So there they are."

How much a winning horse became painfully clear to me not long

after that, because, as it happened, I was the other horse in a race he and I were to run.

It was Sid who broke the news to me. As part of its cultural exchange program, the State Department was going to pick an artist to represent America in a one-man show in Russia. The artist would be in attendance for interviews, and, Sid pointed out, his eyes alight, he would be accompanied not only by State Department bigwigs, but by reporters from every important newspaper and by a photographer and writer from *Life*. Back in America the show would be taken across the country for a year, starting at San Francisco and winding up at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

He didn't have to explain what this prize could mean to the one who drew it. But when he confided that I was a leading contender for it—the leading contender, in fact—I was actually left weak-kneed and sick with a sense of anticipation.

It was Paul Zachary who won the race. I am not decrying his talent when I say that with a jockey like Elizabeth Ann handling him he could not lose. Among those she entertained and charmed were State Department people very much concerned with making the final choice. They must have been keenly interested when she repeated to them some scathing remarks about our national leaders and their handling of international affairs I had incautiously made before her in the dim past. She gave me due credit as the author of the remarks, of course. More than enough to settle matters for me then and there.

When the Goldsmiths reported this, I could have killed Elizabeth Ann on the spot, while Janet, I think, would have preferred to slowly torture her to death, which was the only difference between our reactions. As for Sid and Elinor, they could hardly be expected to take it too hard since Paul was as much their client as I was, and they were winners either way. Which was why they could be insensitive enough to invite us to the celebration party the Zacharys would be giving.

"You're out of your mind," Janet said. "Do you really think we'd go after all this?"

Elinor shrugged. "I know. But everybody who is anybody will be there. If you don't go, you'll look like the worst kind of bad losers."

"We are bad losers," Janet said. "Under the circumstances, I think we're entitled to be."

"And under the circumstances," Elinor said shrewdly, "aren't you the least bit anxious to look Elizabeth Ann right in the eye and tell her what you think of her?"

So we went. Angrily and vengefully, which is hardly the right approach to a celebration—but we went. And throughout the evening,

while Janet and I drank to get up courage for the showdown with Elizabeth Ann, Sid and Elinor drank for conviviality. And Paul drank for his own dark reasons.

Only Elizabeth Ann remained sober. She never drank much, because, I am sure, she never, not even for a moment, wanted to risk losing control of herself in any situation. And she knew that there was a situation brewing here. It was obvious from our manner that something unpleasant was going to happen before the party ended.

Elizabeth Ann did everything possible to forestall it. Even in the small hours when all the rest of the company had gone and Paul had disappeared somewhere so that we four were left alone with her, she maintained a sprightly poise, an air of amused patience. She wanted us out of there, but she wasn't going to say so. Instead, she darted about, bright and quick as a hummingbird, intent on straightening a table cover, arranging a chair, placing empty glasses on a tray.

"Oh, sit down," I told her at last. "Stop playing parlormaid and sit down. I want to talk to you."

She didn't sit down. She stood before me regarding me with pretty bewilderment, fingertips pressed to her cheek. "Talk? About what?"

So I told her. Loudly, angrily, and not too coherently, I let her know my feelings about the peculiar tactics she had used to get her husband his prize. As I spoke, her bewilderment deepened to incredulity. Then she pressed the back of her hand to her forehead in a gesture meant to express mortal suffering.

"How can you say such things?" she whispered. "Someone like you —jealous of Paul's success? I can't believe it."

Sid hooted raucously. "Marvelous," he said. "Three sentences, three clichés. A perfect score."

"And you," said Elizabeth Ann, wheeling on him, "posing as Paul's friend and telling stories behind his back. Well, if that's the kind of friend you are, I'm glad he's decided—"

She stopped short in simulated panic, but she had both the Goldsmiths frozen to attention now. The silence grew until it started to ring in my ears.

"Go on, dear," Elinor said in a hard voice. "He's decided what?"

"To change dealers," Elizabeth Ann said in a rush. "To let the Wedeking Galleries represent him from now on. It's all settled. After we get back from Russia, Wedeking is handling all his work."

Wedeking was the biggest and the best. It had few modern artists on its list, but if you were a millionaire in a buying mood, its marble showroom on 57th Street was the place to buy a Rembrandt or a Cézanne. And now an original Paul Zachary. It must have been hard for the Goldsmiths to comprehend that. Paul was their boy.

They were the ones who had discovered him, who had beat the drums for him, who had helped carry him through the hard times, and who should now share his triumphs with him. They and Nicole. Now they were getting the same medicine she had got, and it stuck in their throats.

Sid lurched from his chair. "I don't believe it." He looked around the room. "Where's Paul? Where is he, damn it? We're going to settle this before I get out of here."

"It is settled," said Elizabeth Ann. "Anyhow, he's in the studio. He doesn't like people going up there."

"Since when?" Sid demanded.

"For a long time," Elizabeth Ann said with hauteur. "I've never been in the studio at all. Not ever. I don't see why you should have special privileges."

I thought Sid was going to hit her. He took a step forward, his hand upraised, then managed to restrain himself. His hand, when he lowered it, was trembling; all color had drained from his face. "I want to see Paul," he said thickly. "Now."

Elizabeth Ann knew the voice of authority when she heard it. Nose in the air, she led the way disdainfully up the staircase to the studio, tried its door, flung it open.

It was brilliantly lighted, and Paul in shirt sleeves, dinner jacket flung on the table beside him, was touching up what seemed to be a completed nude on the wall. When he turned to us, I saw that he was very drunk, his eyes glassy, his brow furrowed by frowning incomprehension. From the accumulation of empty bottles and glasses on the premises, it was obvious that for quite a while the studio had been not only a workroom but a private saloon.

He swayed on his feet. "My dear friends," he said, enunciating each word with painstaking effort. "My —dear—wife."

Like Elizabeth Ann, I had never been in that studio. It was a large room, and on display in it were a number of Paul's experimental works. But more than that, and startling to behold, the room was a shrine to Nicole.

One whole wall was covered with the early portraits of her, the life studies, the charcoal sketches. On a stand in the middle of the floor was a bust of her done long ago in our room on Rue Raspail. And the nude Paul had been working on was of Nicole. A splendid picture I had not seen before, where the image of Nicole, vibrant and warm and fleshy as the living woman had been, sat poised on the edge of a chair, looking into the eyes of the viewer as if he were a mirror, loving him because he was her husband.

Before he had entered the room, Sid Goldsmith had been fuming aloud with rage. Now, taking in

the scene with wondering eyes, he seemed struck dumb. So were we all. And drawn magnetically by that inspired nude, the fresh streaks of oil glistening on its surface, we gathered before it in silence. There was nothing to be said about it that would not sound fatuous. It was that good.

It was Elizabeth Ann who broke the silence.

"I don't like it," she suddenly said in a tight voice, and I saw that for once the mask had slipped, and what showed beneath it was the face of the Medusa. "I don't like it. It's ugly."

Paul focused on her blearily. "Is it?"

Elizabeth Ann pointed around the room. "Can't you see what she looked like? She was just a plain, sloppy woman, that's all she was!" Her voice rose shrilly. "And she's dead. Don't you understand? She's dead, and there's nothing you can do about it!"

"Nothing?" Paul said.

The siren of a police car sounded outside the living-room windows. I had been so deep in my thoughts that I had forgotten where I was and why I was there. Now as the sound faded and the car raced off down the street, I looked up with a start, realizing where I was, realizing that the policeman standing at the kitchen door was beckoning to me that it was my turn for questioning. The Goldsmiths were watching me with concern. Janet tried to smile at me.

I got to my feet with an effort. How much of this, I wondered, would the lieutenant want to hear. Very little, perhaps. Only the final scene in that room upstairs, because scene in that room upstairs; that was all that was needed for the records.

"Nothing?" said Paul, and Elizabeth Ann said venomously, "That's right—nothing. So stop thinking about her and talking about her and living with her. Get rid of her!" The long-bladed knife was close at hand on the table, invitingly close, and she snatched it up. "Like this!"

She was, as I have said, addicted to playing the heroine out of melodrama, so I knew what was in her mind then. It was that familiar scene in which the outraged heroine slashes apart the canvas on which the image of her hated rival is painted. And she was ignorant. Tragically ignorant. How could she know that this picture was not on canvas, but on masonite which is as smooth and resistant as a polished sheet of steel?

She raised the knife high as we stood watching in stupefaction; then with all her strength she drove it downward into the painted flesh of her rival. And in that last stroke of folly and ignorance, the blade, clutched tight in her hand, slid in a flashing arc over the impenetrable surface of the painting and plunged full into her own body.

It happened on the bus to Baghdad. There were twelve of them besides the driver—eleven tourists and the tour director. And one of the tourists was Mr. Parker Pyne ("Are you unhappy? If so, consult Mr. P. P."), and one was a murderer . . .

THE GATE OF DEATH

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

" *Four great gates has the city of Damascus . . .*"

Mr. Parker Pyne repeated Flecker's lines softly to himself.

" *Postern of Fate, the Desert Gate,*
Disaster's Cavern,
Fort of Fear,
The Portal of Bagdad am I, the Doorway of Diarbekir."

He was standing in the streets of Damascus and drawn up outside the Oriental Hotel he saw one of the huge six-wheeled buses that was to transport him and eleven other people across the desert to Baghdad on the morrow.

" *Pass not beneath, O Caravan, or pass not singing.*
Have you heard
That silence where the birds are dead yet something pipeth like a bird?
Pass out beneath, O Caravan, Doom's Caravan,
Death's Caravan!"

Something of a contrast now. Formerly the Gate of Baghdad *had* been the gate of Death. Four hundred miles of desert to traverse by caravan. Long weary months of travel. Now the ubiquitous gasoline-fed monsters did the journey in 36 hours.

"What were you saying, Mr. Pyne?"

It was the eager voice of Miss Netta Pryce, youngest and most charming of the tourists. Though encumbered by a stern aunt with the suspicion of a beard and a thirst for Biblical knowledge, Netta managed to enjoy herself in many frivolous ways of which the elder Miss Pryce might have not approved.

Parker Pyne repeated Flecker's lines to her.

"How thrilling," said Netta.

Three men in Air Force uniform were standing near and one of them, an admirer of Netta's, said, "There are still thrills to be got out of the journey. Even nowadays the bus is occasionally shot up by bandits. Then there's losing yourself—that happens sometimes. And we are sent out to find you. One fellow was lost for five days in the desert. Luckily

he had plenty of water with him. Then there are the bumps. Some bumps! One man was killed. It's the truth I'm telling you! He was asleep and his head struck the top of the car and it killed him."

"In a six-wheeler, Mr. O'Rourke?" demanded the elder Miss Pryce.

"No—not in a six-wheeler," admitted the young man.

"But we must do some sightseeing," cried Netta.

Her aunt drew out a guide book.

Netta edged away. "I know she'll want to go to some place where St. Paul was lowered out of a window," she whispered. "And I do so want to see the bazaars."

O'Rourke responded promptly. "Come with me. We'll start down the Street called Straight—"

They drifted off.

Parker Pyne turned to a quiet man standing beside him, Hensley by name. He belonged to the Public Works Department of Baghdad.

"Damascus is a little disappointing when one sees it for the first time," Mr. Pyne said apologetically. "A little too civilized—buses and modern houses and shops."

Hensley nodded. He was a man of few words.

"Not got—back of beyond—when you think you have," he jerked out.

Another man drifted up, a fair young man wearing an old Etonian tie. He had an amiable but slightly vacant face which at the moment looked worried. He and Hensely were in the same department.

"Hello, Smethrust," said Hensley. "Lost anything?"

Captain Smethrust shook his head. He was a young man of somewhat slow intellect.

"Just looking round," he said vaguely. Then he seemed to rouse himself. "Ought to have a beano tonight. What?"

The two friends went off together. Parker Pyne bought a local paper printed in French.

He did not find it very interesting. The local news meant nothing to him and nothing of importance seemed to be going on elsewhere. He found a few paragraphs headed *Londres.*

The first referred to financial matters. The second dealt with the supposed destination of Mr. Samuel Long, the defaulting financier. His defalcations now amounted to the sum of $3,000,000 and it was rumored that he had reached South America.

"Not too bad for a man just over thirty," said Mr. Pyne to himself.

"I beg your pardon?"

Parker Pyne turned to confront an Italian General who had been on the same boat with him from Brindisi to Beirut.

Parker Pyne explained his remark. The Italian General nodded his head several times.

"He is a great criminal, that man. Even in Italy we have suffered. He inspired confidence all over the

world. He is a man of breeding, too, they say."

"Well, he went to Eton and Oxford," said Parker Pyne cautiously.

"Will he be caught, do you think?"

"Depends on how much of a start he got. He may be still in England. He may be—well, anywhere."

"Here with us?" The General laughed.

"Possibly." Parker Pyne remained serious. "For all you know, General, *I* may be he."

The General gave him a startled glance. Then his olive-brown face relaxed into a smile of comprehension.

"Oh, that is very good—very good indeed. But you—"

His eyes strayed downward from Mr. Pyne's face.

Parker Pyne interpreted the glance correctly.

"You mustn't judge by appearances," he said. "A little additional —er—*embonpoint*—is easily managed and has a remarkably aging effect."

He added dreamily, "Then there is hair dye, of course, and face stain, and even a change of nationality."

General Poli withdrew doubtfully. He never knew when the English were serious.

Parker Pyne amused himself that evening by going to a cinema. Afterward he was directed to a "Nightly Palace of Gaieties." It appeared to him to be neither a palace nor gay. Various ladies danced with a distinct lack of verve. The applause was languid.

Suddenly Parker Pyne caught sight of Smethurst. The young man was sitting at a table alone. His face was flushed and it occurred to Parker Pyne that he had already drunk more than was good for him. He joined the young man.

"Disgraceful, the way these girls treat you," said Captain Smethurst gloomily. "Bought her two drinks—three drinks—lots of drinks. Then she goes off laughing with someone else. Call it a disgrace."

Parker Pyne sympathized. He suggested coffee.

"Got some araq coming," said Smethurst. "Jolly good stuff. You try it."

Parker Pyne knew something of the properties of araq. He employed tact. Smethurst, however, shook his head.

"I'm in a bit of a mess," he said. "Got to cheer myself up. Don't know what you'd do in my place. Don't like to go back on a pal, what? I mean to say—and yet—what's a fellow to do?"

He studied Mr. Pyne as though noticing him for the first time.

"Who are you?" he demanded with the curtness born of his potations. "What do you do?"

"The confidence trick," said Parker Pyne gently.

Smethurst gazed at him in lively concern.

"What, you, too?"

Parker Pyne drew from his wallet a newspaper clipping. He laid it on the table in front of Smethurst.

"*Are you unhappy?* (So it ran.) *If so, consult Mr. Parker Pyne.*"

Smethurst focused on it with some difficulty.

"Well, I'm damned," he exclaimed. "You meantersay—people come and tell you things?"

"They confide in me—yes."

"Pack of idiotic women, I suppose."

"A good many women," admitted Parker Pyne. "But men also. What about you, my young friend? You wanted advice just now?"

"Shut your damned head," said Captain Smethurst. "No business of anybody's—anybody's 'cept mine. Where's that blasted araq?"

Parker Pyne shook his head sadly. He gave up Captain Smethurst as a bad job.

The bus to Baghdad started at seven o'clock the next morning. There was a party of twelve. Mr. Parker Pyne and General Poli, Miss Pryce and her niece, the three Air Force officers, Smethurst and Hensley, and an Armenian mother and son by name of Pentemian. And, of course, the director of the tour.

The journey started uneventfully. The fruit trees of Damascus were soon left behind. The sky was cloudy and the young driver looked at it doubtfully once or twice. He exchanged remarks with Hensley.

"Been raining a good bit the other side of Rutbah. Hope we shan't get stuck."

They halted at midday and cardboard boxes of lunch were handed round. The driver brewed tea which was served in paper cups. Then they drove on again across the flat interminable plain.

Parker Pyne thought of the slow caravans of old and the weeks of journeying . . .

Just at sunset they came to the desert fort of Rutbah.

The great gates were unbarred and the six-wheeler drove through them into the inner courtyard of the fort.

"This feels exciting," said Netta.

After a wash she was eager for a short walk. Flight-Lieutenant O'Rourke and Mr. Pyne offered themselves as escorts. As they started the tour director came up to them and begged them not to go far as it might be difficult to find their way back after dark.

"We'll only go a short way," O'Rourke promised.

Walking was not, indeed, very interesting owing to the sameness of the surroundings. Once Parker Pyne bent and picked something up.

"What is it?" asked Netta curiously.

He held it out to her. "A prehistoric flint, Miss Pryce—a borer."

"Did they—kill each other with them?"

"No, it had a more peaceful use. But I expect they could have killed with it if they'd wanted to. It's the *wish* to kill that counts—the instrument doesn't matter. *Something* can always be found."

It was getting dark, and they ran back to the fort.

After a dinner of many courses of the tinned variety they sat and smoked. At twelve o'clock the six-wheeler was to continue the journey.

The driver looked anxious.

"Some bad patches near here," he said. "We may get stuck."

They all climbed into the big bus and settled themselves. The elder Miss Pryce was annoyed not to be able to get at one of her suitcases.

"I should like my bedroom slippers," she said.

"More likely to need your boots," said Smethurst. "If I know the look of things we'll be stuck in a sea of mud."

"I haven't even got a change of stockings," said Netta.

"That's all right. You'll stay put. Only the stronger sex has to get out and heave."

"Always carry spare socks," said Hensley, patting his overcoat pocket. "Never know."

The lights were turned out and the big bus started out into the night.

The going was not good. They were not jolted as they would have been in a smaller touring car, but nevertheless they got a bad bump now and then.

Parker Pyne had one of the front seats. Across the aisle was the Armenian lady shrouded in wraps and shawls. Her son was behind her. Behind Parker Pyne were the two Miss Pryces. The General, Smethurst, Hensley, and the R.A.F. men were in the rear.

The bus rushed on through the night. Mr. Pyne found it hard to sleep. His position was cramped. The Armenian lady's feet stuck out and encroached on his preserve. She, at any rate, was comfortable.

Everyone else seemed to be asleep. Parker Pyne felt drowsiness stealing over him, when a sudden jolt threw him up toward the roof of the bus. He heard a drowsy protest from the back of the six-wheeler. "Steady. Want to break our necks?"

Then the drowsiness returned. A few minutes later, his neck sagging uncomfortably, Parker Pyne slept . . .

He was awakened suddenly. The six-wheeler had stopped. Some of the men were getting out.

Hensley spoke briefly. "We're stuck."

Anxious to see all there was to see, Mr. Pyne stepped gingerly out in the mud. It was not raining now. Indeed, there was a moon and by its light the driver could be seen frantically at work with jacks and stones, striving to raise the wheels. Most of the men were helping.

From the windows of the six-wheeler the three women looked out, Miss Pryce and Netta with interest,

the Armenian lady with ill-concealed disgust.

At a command from the driver the male passengers obediently heaved.

"Where's that Armenian fellow?" demanded O'Rourke. "Keeping his toes warm and comfortable like a cat? Let's have him out too."

"Captain Smethurst too," observed General Poli. "He is not with us."

"The blighter's still asleep. Look at him."

True enough, Smethurst still sat in his seat, his head sagging forward and his whole body slumped down.

"I'll rouse him," said O'Rourke.

He sprang in through the door. A half minute later he reappeared. His voice had changed.

"I say. I think he's ill—or something. Where's the doctor?"

Squadron Leader Loftus, the Air Force doctor, a quiet-looking man with graying hair, detached himself from the group by the wheel.

"What's the matter with him?" he asked.

"I—don't know."

The doctor entered the car. O'Rourke and Parker Pyne followed him. He bent over the sagging figure. One touch was enough.

"He's dead," he said quietly.

"Dead? But how?" Questions shot out. "Oh! how dreadful!" from Netta.

Loftus looked round in an irritated manner.

"Must have hit his head against the top," he said. "We went over one bad bump."

"Surely that wouldn't kill him? Isn't there anything else?"

"I can't tell unless I examine him properly," snapped Loftus. He looked round him with a harassed air. The women were pressing closer. The men outside were beginning to crowd in.

Parker Pyne spoke to the driver, a strong athletic young man. The driver lifted each female passenger in turn, carrying her across the mud, and setting her down on dry land. Madame Pentemian and Netta he managed easily, but he staggered under the weight of the hefty Miss Pryce.

The interior of the six-wheeler was left clear for the doctor to make his examination.

The men went back to their efforts to jack up the car. Presently the sun rose over the horizon. It was a glorious day. The mud was drying rapidly but the bus was still stuck. Two jacks had been broken and so far no efforts had been of any avail. The driver started preparing breakfast—opening tins of sausages and boiling water for tea.

A little way apart Squadron Leader Loftus was giving his verdict.

"There's no mark or wound on him. As I said, he must have hit his head against the top."

"You're satisfied he died naturally?" asked Parker Pyne.

There was something in his voice

that made the doctor look at him quickly.

"There's only one other possibility."

"Yes."

"Well, that someone hit him on the back of the head with something like a sandbag." His voice sounded apologetic.

"That's not very likely," said Williamson, the other Air Force officer. He was a cherubic-looking youth. "I mean, nobody could do that without our seeing."

"If we were asleep?" suggested the doctor.

"Fellow couldn't be sure of that," pointed out the other. "Getting up and all that would have roused someone or other."

"The only way," said General Poli, "would be for someone sitting behind him. He could choose his moment and need not even rise from his seat."

"Who was sitting behind Captain Smethurst?" asked the doctor.

O'Rourke replied readily. "Hensley, sir—so that's no good. Hensley was Smethurst's best pal."

There was a silence. Then Parker Pyne's voice rose with quiet certainty.

"I think," he said, "that Flight Lieutenant Williamson has something to tell us."

"I, sir? I—well—"

"Out with it, Williamson," said O'Rourke.

"It's nothing, really—nothing at all."

"Out with it."

"It's only a scrap of conversation I overheard—at Rutbah—in the courtyard. I'd got back into the six-wheeler to look for my cigarette case. I was hunting about. Two fellows were just outside talking. One of them was Smethurst. He was saying—"

He paused.

"Come on, man, out with it."

"Something about not wanting to let a pal down. He sounded very distressed. Then he said, 'I'll hold my tongue till Baghdad—but not a minute afterwards. You'll have to get out quickly.' "

"And the other man?"

"I don't know, sir. I swear I don't. It was dark and he only said a word or two that I couldn't catch."

"Who among you knows Smethurst well?"

"I don't think the words—a pal—could refer to anyone but Hensley," said O'Rourke slowly. "I knew Smethurst, but very slightly. Williamson is new out here—so is Squadron Leader Loftus. I don't think either of them ever met him before."

Both men agreed.

"You, General?"

"I never saw the young man until we crossed Lebanon in the same car from Beirut."

"And that Armenian?"

"He couldn't be a pal," said O'Rourke with decision.

"I have, perhaps, a small addi-

tional piece of evidence," said Parker Pyne.

He repeated the conversation he had had with Smethurst in the café at Damascus.

"He made use of the phrase—'don't like to go back on a pal,'" said O'Rourke thoughtfully. "And he was worried."

"Has no one else anything to add?" asked Parker Pyne.

The doctor coughed.

"It may have nothing to do with it—" he began.

He was encouraged.

"It was just that I heard Smethurst say to Hensley. 'You can't deny that there is a leakage in your department.'"

"When was this?"

"Just before starting from Damascus yesterday morning. I thought they were just talking shop. I didn't imagine—" He stopped.

"My friends, this is interesting," said the General. "Piece by piece you assemble the evidence."

"You said a sandbag, Doctor," said Parker Pyne. "Could a man manufacture such a weapon?"

"Plenty of sand," said the doctor dryly. He took some up in his hand as he spoke.

"If you put some in a sock," began O'Rourke and hesitated.

Everyone remembered two short sentences spoken by Hensley the night before.

"*Always carry spare socks. Never know.*"

There was silence. Then Mr. Pyne said quietly. "Squadron Leader Loftus, I believe Mr. Hensley's spare socks are in the pocket of his overcoat which is now in the car."

Their eyes went for one minute to where a moody figure was pacing to and from on the horizon. Hensley had held aloof since the discovery of the dead man. His wish for solitude had been respected since it was known that he and the dead man had been friends.

Parker Pyne went on, "Will you get them and bring them here?"

The doctor hesitated.

"I don't like—" he muttered. He looked again at that pacing figure. "Seems a bit low down—"

"You must get them," said Parker Pyne. "The circumstances are unusual. We are marooned here. And we have got to know the truth. If you will fetch those socks I fancy we shall be a step nearer."

Loftus turned away obediently.

Parker Pyne drew General Poli a little aside.

"General, I think it was you who sat across the aisle from Captain Smethurst."

"That is so."

"Did anyone get up and pass you?"

"Only the English lady, Miss Pryce. She went to the wash place at the back."

"Did she stumble at all?"

"She lurched a little with the movement of the bus, naturally."

"She was the only person you saw moving about?"

"Yes."

The General looked at him curiously and said, "Who are you, I wonder? You take command, yet you are not a solider."

"I have seen a good deal of life," said Parker Pyne.

"You have traveled, eh?"

"No," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "I have sat in an office."

Loftus returned carrying the socks. Mr. Parker Pyne took them from him and examined them. *To the inside of one of them wet sand still adhered.*

Parker Pyne drew a deep breath.

"Now I know," he said.

All their eyes went to the pacing figure on the horizon.

"I should like to look at the body if I may," said Mr. Pyne.

He went with the doctor to where Smethurst's body was covered with a tarpaulin.

The doctor removed the cover.

"There's nothing to see," he said.

But Parker Pyne's eyes were fixed on the dead man's tie.

"So Smethurst was an old Etonian," he said.

Loftus looked surprised.

Then Parker Pyne surprised him still further.

"What do you know of young Williamson?" he asked.

"Nothing at all. I only met him at Beirut. I'd come from Egypt. But why? Surely—"

"Well, it's on his evidence we're going to hang a man, isn't it?" said Parker Pyne cheerfully. "One's got to be careful."

He still seemed to be interested in the dead man's tie and collar. Then he uttered an exclamation.

"See that?"

On the back of the collar was a small round bloodstain.

He peered closer at the uncovered neck.

"This man wasn't killed by a blow on the head, Doctor," he said briskly. "He was stabbed—at the base of the skull. You can just see the tiny puncture."

"And I missed it!"

"You had your preconceived notion," said Parker Pyne apologetically. "It's easy enough to miss this —you can hardly see the wound. A quick stab with a small sharp instrument and death would be instantaneous. The victim wouldn't even cry out."

"Do you mean a stiletto? You think the General—"

"Italians and stilettos go together in the popular fancy— Hello, here comes a car!"

A touring car had appeared over the horizon.

"Good," said O'Rourke as he came up to join them. "The ladies can go on in that."

"What about our murderer?" asked Mr. Pyne.

"You mean Hensley—"

"No, I don't mean Hensley," said Parker Pyne. "I happen to know that Hensley's innocent."

"You—but why?"

"Well, you see, he had sand in his sock."

O'Rourke stared.

"I know, my boy," said Parker Pyne gently, "it doesn't sound like sense, but it is. Smethurst wasn't hit on the head, you see, he was stabbed."

He paused a minute and then went on. "Just cast your mind back to the conversation I told you about—the conversation we had in the café. You picked out what was, to you, the significant phrase. But it was another phrase that struck me. When I said to him that I did the confidence trick he said '*What, you too?*'

"Doesn't that strike you as rather curious? I don't know that you'd describe a series of peculations from a Department as a 'confidence trick.' Confidence trick is more descriptive of someone like the absconding Mr. Samuel Long, for instance."

The doctor started. O'Rourke said, "Yes, perhaps . . ."

"I said in jest that perhaps the absconding Mr. Long was one of our party. Suppose that is the truth."

"What—but it's impossible!"

"Not at all. What do you know of people besides their passports and the accounts they give of themselves. Am I really Mr. Parker Pyne? Is General Poli really an Italian General? And what of the masculine Miss Pryce senior who needs a shave most distinctly."

"But he—but Smethurst—didn't know Long!"

"Smethurst is an old Etonian. Long was also at Eton. Smethurst may have known him although he didn't tell you so. He may have recognized him among us. And if so, what is he to do? He has a simple mind, and he worries over the matter. He decides at last to say nothing till Baghdad is reached. But after that he will hold his tongue no longer."

"You think one of *us* is Long," said O'Rourke, still dazed. He drew a deep breath. "It must be the Italian fellow—it *must* . . . Or what about the Armenian?"

"To make up as a foreigner and get a foreign passport is really much more difficult than to remain English," said Parker Pyne.

"Miss Pryce?" cried O'Rourke incredulously.

"No," said Parker Pyne. "*This* is our man!"

He laid what seemed an almost friendly hand on the shoulder of the man beside him. But there was nothing friendly in his voice, and the fingers were vice-like in their grip.

"Squadron Leader Loftus or Mr. Samuel Long—it doesn't matter which you call him!"

"But that's impossible—*impossible*," spluttered O'Rourke. "Loftus has been in the service for years."

"But you've never met him before, have you? He was a stranger to all of you. It isn't the *real* Loftus naturally."

The quiet man found his voice.

"Clever of you to guess. How did you, by the way?"

"Your ridiculous statement that Smethurst had been killed by bumping his head. O'Rourke put that idea into your head when we were talking in Damascus yesterday. You thought—how simple! You were the only doctor with us—whatever you said would be accepted. You'd got Loftus' kit. You'd got his instruments. It was easy to select a neat little weapon for your purpose. You lean over to speak to him and as you are speaking you drive the little weapon home. You talk a minute or two longer. It is dark in the bus. Who will suspect?

"Then comes the discovery of the body. You give your verdict. But it does not go as easily as you thought. Doubts are raised. You fall back on a second line of defense. Williamson repeats the conversation he has overheard Smethurst having with you. It is taken to refer to Hensley and you add a damaging little invention of your own about a leakage in Hensley's department.

"And then I make a final test. I mention the sand and the socks. You are holding a handful of sand. I send you to find the socks *so that we may know the truth.* But by that I did not mean what you thought I meant. *I had already examined Hensley's socks.* There was no sand in either of them. You put it there."

Mr. Samuel Long lit a cigarette.

"I give up," he said. "My luck's turned. Well, I had a good run while it lasted. They were getting hot on my tail when I reached Egypt. I came across Loftus. He was just going to join up in Baghdad—and he knew none of them there. It was too good a chance to be missed. I bought him. It cost me twenty thousand pounds. What was that to me?

"Then, by cursed ill luck, I run into Smethurst—an ass if there ever was one! He was at Eton with me. He had a bit of hero worship for me in those days. He didn't like the idea of giving me away. I did my best and at last he promised to say nothing till we reached Baghdad. What chance should I have then? None at all. There was only one way—to eliminate him. But I can assure you I am not a murderer by nature. My talents lie in quite another direction."

His face changed, contracted. He swayed and pitched forward.

O'Rourke bent over him.

"Probably prussic acid—in the cigarette," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "The gambler has lost his last throw."

He looked round him, at the wide desert. The sun beat down. Only yesterday they had left Damascus—by the gate of Baghdad, the gate of Death.

"Pass not beneath, O Caravan, or pass not singing.
Have you heard
That silence where the birds are dead yet something pipeth like a bird?"

A story that is destined, we predict, to become a popular anthology choice . . .

LOVE LETTERS

by C. B. GILFORD

THE SHOCK CAME TO HIM, NOT suddenly, like a jolt of electricity through the body, but slowly, almost imperceptibly, a creeping, numbing paralysis. He sat, or rather crumpled, onto the old trunk. Perhaps he was unconscious for a time, his brain stunned into a state of non-thinking, his senses dulled, recording nothing.

When he came back to the world, it was gradually, through painful degrees of re-awakening. His eyes wandered, trying to identify his surroundings. He was in the attic, dusty, dark, except for the single bulb which gleamed directly above his head. Why was he here?

Yes, he had come up here for something. Something in this trunk he was sitting on. Something—a reminiscence—an album—yes, the album—because of today's occasion. The anniversary—yes, the anniversary.

Now it was clearer. It was Saturday. He'd been up early as usual, letting Elizabeth sleep. This day wasn't to be any different from other days. But it was their wedding anniversary, and there would be a celebration of sorts.

So when he awoke in the morning, his mind somehow went back to the past. And he thought of the album. Why, they hadn't even looked at it lately! Yet suddenly he had wanted to. That was what had brought him up to the attic, rummaging around in the semi-dark, in the past.

He'd found the letters accidentally. How else, since he hadn't known they'd existed. Letters—scattered bits of folded paper, all over the floor now, where his nerveless hands had dropped them.

Letters to Elizabeth. Love letters —no doubt of the content of them. Old letters, yes, but not quite old enough.

He shook his head, trying to rouse from his torpor. A bad dream. But no, not a dream. He was up here in the attic, and the morning sun of this June day was already beating on the roof, making it stuffy here under the rafters. He wiped a sleeve across his forehead.

He bent, laboriously, to pick up the scattered letters. His hands were unsteady, they fumbled at the job, and the letters got soiled from contact with the dusty floor. But he retrieved them all finally, and took them downstairs with him.

As he passed the bedroom where Elizabeth was still sleeping, he could hear no sound from within. He went down to the kitchen, where he began to make coffee. He drank it black and scalding, two cups, without tasting it.

She must have smelled the coffee brewing. He heard sounds from upstairs, water running in the bathroom, Elizabeth's bare feet padding on the floor. His hearing had become suddenly acute, although the thinking center of his brain was still confused, puzzled.

He heard her coming downstairs. He waited. She came straight to the kitchen, and from the doorway she greeted him. "Dear, happy anniversary!"

That was as far as she got. She saw him sitting there, looking at her, hearing her, but not responding.

For a long moment he stared back at her. This was his wife, he thought dimly. He had loved her enough to marry her. Did he still love her? He couldn't answer that. So he kept on staring at her. He had thought her beautiful, hadn't he? But she was beautiful to him no longer.

"Matt—"

Then she saw the letters. He had dropped them there on the table. They had scattered, like refuse from an emptied wastebasket. Yet she sensed they were not that, but something else, something much more important.

She came closer, and he watched her every movement with a sort of objective curiosity. She was wearing a clean dress. Her hair was combed. But she had always been a fastidious woman, not one to come to breakfast in curlers and an old robe. She looked at the letters, and then at him, and gradually she seemed to realize there was a connection between his strange manner and those scraps of paper.

She didn't come quite close enough to touch the letters. Instead she asked, "What are those?"

"Old letters." There was no anger in his voice, no accusation. Only a hollowness.

"Whose are they?"

"Yours."

"Mine?"

"From Paul Hammond."

She appeared to be organizing her thoughts. "Paul Hammond?" There was no evidence of guilt as yet in either her voice or manner. "Paul Hammond?"

"Don't you remember him?"

His own thoughts went back. Now that his brain was clear again, he could remember more accurately. They had been married in June, and the following Christmas they had met Paul Hammond. A large man, good-looking in a virile way. And very self-assured. He had paid a great deal of attention to Elizabeth. Matt could recall that now, and how rather pleased he had been, flattered that another man could be so smitten by his wife. But

never worried. Confident, in fact. After all, they'd been married only six months. Paul Hammond.

"I found them accidentally," he said. "Maybe I shouldn't have read them, but I did."

He didn't know whether he was glad that he had read them. It was too late for that. But probably it was better for a man to know the truth, at whatever cost.

"What does a man do," he went on, "when he sees a packet of letters—in a strange handwriting—and on the top letter there's a salutation—addressed to his wife?"

She had a stricken look now. She gazed at him. It was he who looked away. She wasn't beautiful any more.

"'My dearest darling Elizabeth.' That was the way it began."

"But they're old letters!"

He nodded. "You didn't even know Paul Hammond before our marriage. So they couldn't have been written to you then. They couldn't have been written till after—till after you were my wife."

She sat down. He sensed rather than saw the movement. But she didn't touch the letters.

"Read them," he said.

"No."

He nodded again. "I don't suppose you need to."

"I don't want to." She spoke slowly, with difficulty. She was sitting there at the table with him, but her voice seemed to come from far away. "I don't remember the exact words. But I know what's in the letters."

There was a long silence between them. And a great distance, growing.

"Have you read the letters often?" he asked after a while. He was not interrogating her, merely voicing the random thoughts that came to his mind. "Is that why you know what's in them?"

"No. I just remember."

Yes, naturally. "You loved him, of course."

"No—never—not really. Not the way I loved you."

"But you let him—be your lover?"

Somehow he was aware that she nodded affirmatively.

"He made love to you?"

She nodded again.

He stared at the opposite wall. At the wallpaper. At the fat little cooks in their white chef hats, at the puffing little wood stoves, at the steaming little pots, at the little chefs stirring the contents of the little pots on the little stoves. This was their wallpaper, his and Elizabeth's, their kitchen.

"This is our home," he said dreamily. But which was the dream, and which the reality? The life he'd imagined he'd led with Elizabeth? Or the discovery he'd made this morning? "We've lived here together. We've shared this place. I've been happy. But you—"

"I've been happy too, Matt."

"You loved someone else."

"No. I told you. I didn't. I loved you—I always have."

"In a man's life everything builds on what has gone before. Today builds on yesterday, and tomorrow builds on both of them. Life isn't just a succession of days—it's a structure of days. Everything hangs together—or else it falls apart. My life isn't what I thought it was. It was a mirage, an illusion. It didn't really exist. There was no foundation."

She ran away from him. He heard her footsteps climbing the stairs, still running, as if pursued. The bedroom door slammed.

But he continued to sit there for a long time, with the warm June sunshine streaming through the windows, with the little cooks in the wallpaper stirring whatever was in the little pots on the little stoves. Frozen in time, just as he was. Not really alive, not ever having been alive—merely a fantasy, a dream.

When he finally rose from the table, it was slowly. He felt empty, dry, worthless. A man without a life, and therefore without an identity. But the empty, dry shell of him moved somehow. He climbed the stairs laboriously. Elizabeth had run, but her pursuer went at a measured, relentless pace, an automaton in motion.

He stopped just outside the bedroom door, stopped and stared silently at the varnished panels. A memory had jostled into his brain, and he waited for it to take form. This door had once been locked against him. This same door. When? When had it happened?

Yes, of course—not too long after the wedding. Less than a year. It had remained locked for several months. And he had never known exactly why. Because of something he had done? Because he had somehow not measured up to Elizabeth's ideal of a husband?

He had groped for the answer, heartbrokenly, in a state close to despair. Then, again without his knowing why, the rift had healed. But he'd been grateful. And gradually, though the hurt had lingered, he'd managed to forget. Now when precisely had all this been? Yes, from around Christmas, through winter, and into the spring.

The time of Paul Hammond.

He opened the door. His wife was lying on the bed, face up, dry-eyed, gazing at the ceiling. He walked to the foot of the bed, looked down at her.

After a while, after he had stood there a long time, she said, "I'd forgotten the letters were up there. Just as I'd forgotten Paul Hammond. Oh, my God, why did I ever keep them at all?"

He heard her only vaguely. "You locked me out of this room."

"Oh, Matt!"

"While Paul Hammond was your lover."

"Oh, Matt, I never loved anybody but you."

"But then you took me back. I was so happy. I thought you were forgiving me—for whatever I'd done. *You* were forgiving *me*—when all the time—"

"But it ended, Matt. Try to remember that it ended. Paul wanted me to run away with him. I was tempted. Paul had a way with women. But then I woke up. I didn't love him. Just you."

She was lying, of course. She had come upstairs to think up this lie. If she hadn't loved Hammond, why had she saved his letters?

"I wanted to tell you, Matt. But I didn't have the courage. I was afraid I would lose you. But I'm glad now that I didn't tell you. Because we've been happy."

This room so full of their little history. His bureau there—in it were his shirts and handkerchiefs that she had always ironed. Her dressing table—on it the fragile lamps that he had bought for her, tiny perfume bottles—he had liked to buy her perfume.

There were the pictures on the walls—flowers mostly—they were both fond of flowers; and the walls themselves, friendly and encompassing, shutting out the world of strangers; and the windows, facing east and south to let in the sun and warm breezes. Brightness and warmth—happiness—their room, his and Elizabeth's. A very special room, intimate and private.

"Where did Paul Hammond make love to you?"

She didn't answer. She didn't have to. He found her answer in the voiceless, motionless terror that he neither heard nor saw, but which he knew was in her now.

He walked around the corner of the bed. He took the nearest pillow, poised it in both his hands, then placed it over her face. Finally then she spoke, but the words were muffled. Her hands touched his wrists, more to caress than to resist. But then they fell away, like autumn leaves dropping from their branches.

At last he was there in the room —alone.

The June day was warm, incredibly lovely. The grass, the flowers, the trees, luxuriated in the sun's embrace. Life, indestructible, always renewing itself, defying death, pursuing eternity, emanated from everywhere, in sights, in sounds, in smells, in its own pure ecstasy.

But Matt remained aloof from all of it. He sat quietly on the front porch, rocking, gently rocking.

They came by all day, the well-wishers. They hailed him from the gate, or sometimes came part of the way up the path, stayed a moment or two.

"How does it feel, Matt?" they asked him. "How does it feel to be celebrating your Golden Wedding Anniversary? How does it feel to have been married to a woman for fifty years?"

We confess to a special fondness for stories in which two (or more) strangers meet in a train compartment—meet briefly and perhaps never see each other again; and in this brief (and strange) interlude a revelation comes to pass—preferably the solution to a long-unsolved mystery . . . .

You share our fondness? Then join us in eavesdropping. Meet a young man and an old man in Compartment 813 of the Côte d'Azur Express—and enjoy yourself. For there is something "extra" in this little tale of crime and detection . . .

IN COMPARTMENT 813

by ARTHUR PORGES

THERE WERE TWO MEN IN COMpartment 813 of the Côte d'Azur Express as that famous train sped through the night. One was very old, with a halo of fluffy, bone-white hair. His body was small and shrunken, but his blue eyes glowed and sparkled as if the last of his vital energy was concentrated in those two crannies of his head.

The other man was young, almost a boy; he had a short thickset body, and seemed well pleased with himself, smiling for no apparent reason, and once even chuckling softly to himself. He didn't seem to notice his companion's scrutiny, so steady and intense that it bordered on the impertinent.

Then the old man spoke. His voice, if slightly thin, was steady, and still had a note of authority.

"Pardon, Monsieur," he said. "If I am to judge by the unusual lobe of your ear and the gold speckling of your eyes, you must be related to the Marquise de Monsoreau."

The young man raised his eyebrows, studied the old man for a moment, then replied, "A very creditable deduction. She was my grandmother. I am Bertrand de Monsoreau. And you?" he added pointedly.

"I was—I am Monsieur Sernine. Perhaps Cécile mentioned me."

The young man reflected for a moment. "I seem to recall the name. But grandmother died when I was quite young. So you see . . ."

"I knew her well," Sernine murmured. "She was a lovely woman." Then in a sharper voice: "If *Le Temps* is not in error, surely you were one of those at the Baron Duclaux's dinner—when the famous Tiger's Heart ruby vanished so mysteriously."

"That is so," Bertrand said, a little stiffly.

"Then there was a reconciliation?"

The young man gave him a swift glance of surprise.

"How did you know—?"

"I recall that the Baron treated your mother very badly at one time. He thought that as a De Tournay she married below her station."

"That is true," Bertrand admitted. "I do not think," he added, with a wry smile, "that I was a welcome guest on that occasion. I came, one might say, under the aegis of Monsieur Valind, whom the Baron is disinclined to offend."

"Ah—the matter explains itself, then." The blue eyes were smoldering. "I wonder if you would indulge an old man. We have some hours to dispose of, and I've never been one for reading. I should like to hear your account of the crime. It might even be that I could suggest a solution."

The young man cocked his head, his eyebrows rising again. He didn't know that the mannerism had once made his grandmother even more devastating than her gamine smile and charming grace.

"If you can do that," he said, mildly ironic, "you are better than the Sûreté, since they admit to being quite baffled."

"In my prime—now, *hélas*, long gone," Sernine told him, "I knew something of criminal tactics. Well, *tout lasse, tout casse, tout passe*. My spirit still burns strongly, but the flesh is feeble indeed."

Surely a petty clerk of some kind, Bertrand told himself. But I shan't ask any questions; they easily become garrulous, these old ones. Then he said politely, "I am happy to oblige a friend of grandmother's, Monsieur. As you say, we have time on our hands. Where shall I begin?"

"According to *Le Temps* it was a small group—six people, I believe. The servants had gone, and the Duclauxs, of course, have no children."

"Ah, no human children, but how they dote, the imbeciles, on pets—a parrot, a cat, and a poodle. I love animals, myself, but there is a limit. However . . . there were, as you say, only six persons present. After dinner somebody—I forget who—urged the Baron to give us a glimpse of the Tiger's Heart, a fabulous ruby which he had just bought for two million francs. He was only too glad to oblige; he has always been vain and purse-proud.

"Well, the magnificent ruby was passed from hand to hand; the light was pleasantly dim, you understand; there was lively talk; and *voila!*—all at once no one had the ruby! It was gone."

"Ah!" the old man said, nodding wisely. "I know that trick well. One should never allow a valuable gem to circulate so carelessly. But I interrupt you, Monsieur; please go on."

"There is really so little to tell. One moment the ruby was there, the next moment it had disappeared. Naturally we were all requested to remain in the room while the Baron phoned the Sûreté. Experienced detectives came quickly, such is the power of the name Duclaux. They searched us—a matron came, too—and the room itself with the greatest of care, but found nothing. The ruby had utterly vanished."

"The theft of the Tiger," Sernine murmured.

Bertrand gave the old man a crooked smile. "Quite classical, *n'est-ce pas*? A small group of people, none of whom had left the scene, yet the priceless jewel was gone. Obviously one of the six took it, but how could he hope to bring his prize away from the house? That is what so infuriated the gentlemen of the Sûreté."

"Whom you do not admire," Sernine remarked shrewdly.

"Definitely not. They had the audacity to consider me their leading suspect, an honor I was more than willing to forego." He chuckled. "Well, Monsieur Sernine, do you still think you can solve the mystery?"

"Perhaps," was the reply, spoken in a level voice. "Permit me to ask a few questions."

"I am at your service."

"You spoke of certain pets in the household. It is perhaps only the logic of probability, but I should like to begin with the cat. One does not allow a dog the same freedom as a cat. You take a poodle out for air—and other canine needs; but *le chat*, he promenades alone."

Bertrand was sitting stiffly upright, his face pallid.

"Mon dieu!" he exclaimed. "Just like that! Why?"

"This cat, perhaps he has long hair?" Sernine persisted, apparently oblivious of the young man's reaction. "And possibly an old one—lazy, slow, amiable—they get that way after many years."

"What are you suggesting?" Bertrand demanded, regaining control of himself. "I don't follow this logic of yours."

The old man sighed.

"People like the Baron—I know the type—a jumped-up *petit bourgeois* with a purchased title, *hein?* They never change. With a cat, one has a little swinging door—a cat-hatch, I believe it is called—that permits the pet to go out at all hours. The thief is aware of the situation; all is carefully planned. He fondles the creature, either on his lap, or possibly out of sight under the table. With gum or something similar he sticks the ruby deep into the long fur. Eventually the old cat will lick it out, but this is no active kitten; it never hurries; there is time. In all the excitement—people being searched, loud *flics* talking—no cat worthy of the name stays; they are fastidious creatures. This one leaves the room—and the

house—by its little private door. And outside—ah, outside the thief's accomplice—wife? sweetheart?—is waiting to appropriate the gem. Perhaps she has a bit of fish for puss; maybe no bribe is needed; the cat is old and friendly."

Bertrand was staring at him open-mouthed.

"This is quite incredible," he muttered finally. "In ten minutes, without even seeing the place, he knows—he knows! Yes," he said excitedly, "I admit it. That's how the thing was done. But how did you know?"

"Cécile helped me more than once," the old man said gently. "Heredity may explain much; like her, you are quick-witted and ingenious."

"Who are you?" Bertrand demanded.

"Your grandmother knew me as Paul Sernine," the old man said, a note of pride in his voice. "But I was once known far more widely as—Arsène Lupin."

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Ames, Delano	THE MAN IN THE TRICORN HAT	Henry Regnery Co.	$3.95	5/16
Ballinger, Bill S.	THE HEIR HUNTERS	Harper & Row	4.50	5/11
Baxt, George	A QUEER KIND OF DEATH	Simon & Schuster	3.95	5/13
Bell, Josephine	NO ESCAPE	Macmillan	3.95	5/2
Berckman, Evelyn	STALEMATE	Doubleday	3.95	5/6
Black, Gavin	YOU WANT TO DIE, JOHNNY?	Harper & Row	4.50	4/27
Bonett, John & Emery	THE PRIVATE FACE OF MURDER	Doubleday	3.50	5/20
Coxe, George Harmon	THE RING OF TRUTH	Alfred A. Knopf	3.95	5/16
Creasey, John	THE TERROR	Walker & Company	3.50	5/16
Creasey, John	THE TOFF IN WAX	Walker & Company	3.50	4/29
Fair, A. A.	WIDOWS WEAR WEEDS	Morrow	3.50	5/4
Harris, John	THE OLD TRADE OF KILLING	Morrow	4.95	5/19
Holton, Leonard	OUT OF THE DEPTHS	Dodd, Mead & Co.	3.50	5/16
Hough, S. B.	DEAR DAUGHTER DEAD	Walker & Company	3.50	5/9
Keating, H. R. F.	INSPECTOR GHOTE'S GOOD CRUSADE	E. P. Dutton	3.95	5/11
Leasor, James	SPYLIGHT	J. B. Lippincott	3.95	4/21
Marlowe, Hugh	A CANDLE FOR THE DEAD	Abelard-Schuman	3.50	4/27
Morrow, Susan	THE MOONLIGHTERS	Doubleday	3.50	5/20
Moyes, Patricia	JOHNNY UNDER GROUND	Holt, Rinehart & Winston	3.95	5/9
Nielsen, Helen	AFTER MIDNIGHT	Morrow	3.50	5/25
Orvis, Kenneth	NIGHT WITHOUT DARKNESS	Coward-McCann	4.50	4/13
Pentecost, Hugh	THE EVIL THAT MEN DO	Dodd, Mead & Co.	3.50	5/16
Short, Christopher	THE BLUE-EYED BOY	Dodd, Mead & Co.	3.75	5/16
Simenon, Georges	THE PREMIER/THE TRAIN	Harcourt, Brace & World	5.75	5/18
Stanford, Alfred	THE MISSION IN SPARROW BUSH LANE	Morrow	3.95	5/18

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

"first story" number 300

In this, our 271st issue, EQMM scales a new peak: here is the 300th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine—more stories by new writers (many of whom have become famous in the mystery field) than have been published by all our competitors put together; and to celebrate the occasion we give you, in this 300th "first," a first-rate detective story by a new author who has obviously read the great books of The Golden Age of the mystery story. If, perhaps, you identify some influences from the glorious past, you will also identify the style, substance, and shape which are wholly the author's own—what might be called "pure Elliot L. Gilbert"—thus adding a new and American Gilbert to the other contemporary Gilberts so prominent in the modern mystery . . .

Mr. Gilbert was born in New York City in 1930 and has lived and worked there ever since—except for one summer of study at Oxford in 1954, three years at Cornell graduate school, and one year in Germany with the army. Mr. Gilbert has a B.A. and M.A. from New York University, and a Ph.D. in English from Cornell. He has been a teacher at Cornell and Columbia, and presently teaches at Brooklyn College.

*Reading mysteries ("especially in EQMM") is one of his hobbies—but Mr. Gilbert failed to mention his other hobbies. We might guess one of them from the nonfiction book he edited—*KIPLING AND THE CRITICS *(published by New York University Press, 1965), containing 15 critical essays that give a balanced and comprehensive appraisal of Kipling's stature as a literary artist; the essays are by (among others, including Dr. Gilbert himself) Henry James, T. S. Eliot, George Orwell, Lionel Trilling, C. S. Lewis, Max Beerbohm, Oscar Wilde, and Randall Jarrell.*

But getting back to detective stories . . . We have suggested to Mr. Gilbert that he turn the protagonist of his "first story" into a series character, and Mr. Gilbert has indicated receptivity to this idea. So we have high hopes—towering hopes—for more fine stories from this really promising new talent in the mystery field . . .

DEATH WORE A BEARD

by ELLIOT L. GILBERT

THE DOORS OF THE MAIN LOUNGE of the *Fleur-de-lis* clattered open and light shot across the deck. A thin voice calling good night accompanied the clatter, and the rather stout, middle-aged woman who turned for a moment to listen in the doorway replied with a wave to the few remaining card players. Seconds later the door had slid shut, and once again the only sound was the sigh of water past the prow as the cruise ship cut northeastward through the moonless night.

Though it was nearly three a.m., the gentle Mediterranean darkness was too seductive to be lightly abandoned, and the woman moved off for one last turn around the ship. The deck was not much in use at this hour. Once, a figure lounging in a canvas chair shifted in the deep shadows. In another dark corner the tip of a cigar glowed, then faded, then glowed again.

The woman walked on, entering a part of the promenade that was wholly deserted. Though there was no moon, the sea seemed to generate a phosphorescence of its own. Occasionally, a bulkhead on one hand and a ventilator on the other framed a piece of sky, and the patch almost glowed against the dead black of the ship's superstructure. In one of those strangely luminescent patches the woman thought she saw movement. Only slightly curious, she stepped closer, and suddenly a massive silhouette reared up in the brighter darkness.

A faint glow from somewhere caught the edge of metal in an upraised hand. The next instant, the bulky shadow split into two figures scuffling noiselessly against the far railing. For a moment the raised hand hesitated; then it came down hard, and again the two figures blended into one dark bulk—a bulk which seemed to grow curiously taller and then, at the last moment, split once more into two, one half poised against the sky above the other for several seconds before tipping backward over the railing into the sea . . .

Captain Freneau sat glumly erect behind the large chart table in his stateroom. It was six o'clock in the afternoon; he had slept only two hours in the last 34, and the irony of his situation caused him—not for the first time—to frown ruefully. A dozen years before he had been chosen, on the strength of decades of varied experiences at sea, to be Master of the Gallic Line's *Fleur-de-lis,* a cruise ship on which nothing ever went wrong to test his knowledge and skill. And then, on

the one occasion when everything *did* go wrong, he found all his training inadequate.

Nothing, for example, in his three war-time years of hunting submarines in the North Atlantic could possibly have prepared him for a Mediterranean sunshine cruise, eleven days out of New York, on which the sun stubbornly refused to shine, or for the shocking and wholly unprecedented looting of the ship's beauty salon—or, for that matter, for murder.

Captain Freneau looked up as the stateroom door opened, and when he saw that his visitor was the stout, middle-aged lady again, he rose and politely motioned her to a chair. He was pleased to note that she still appeared calm. At the time of the "incident" she had screamed, of course, and had actually begun to shout a rather hysterical description of the assailant, but such a reaction had been quite normal. During the first interview with the captain, however, some fifteen minutes after the event, she had kept her head and told her story straightforwardly, and her coolness then had made a good impression.

"So good of you to come promptly, my dear Mrs. Enderby," Captain Freneau said with elaborate old-world courtesy. "I beg you to let me introduce M. Genet, the ship's purser." A lean, handsome man glided out of the shadows.

"Oh, I've met M. Genet. Oh, yes." Mrs. Enderby touched her white hair, somewhat too exuberantly blued. M. Genet bowed stiffly, remembering very well the all-night *bon voyage* party in New York Harbor.

"You must forgive this further annoyance, dear madame," the captain continued, "but it is necessary to clarify one or two points in your story."

Mrs. Enderby looked anxiously at the two men. "I can't think what I might have left out this morning," she said.

"A matter of *my* questions, madame, not *your* answers," the captain reassured her. "We knew rather less then than we do now. Besides, M. Genet would be happy to hear the whole story from your own lips."

"Exactly," said M. Genet. He was just a bit brusquer than the captain. "Could you explain again, for instance, Mrs. Enderby, how you happened to be on deck to witness the incident? It took place, I believe you have told us, at three o'clock in the morning."

Mrs. Enderby seemed a little embarrassed at having been caught out so late. "We simply didn't know where the time was going, really we didn't," she said, almost apologetically. "The Alcorns were getting wonderful cards, for the first time, you know, and it seemed a shame to interrupt their lucky streak. So it wasn't till nearly three o'clock that we totaled the scores.

The others wanted to talk over the last hand, but I decided to take a turn around the deck before going to my cabin."

"Did you see many people about at that hour?" M. Genet asked casually.

"Just one or two lying in deck chairs," Mrs. Enderby said. "And none at all where I saw the—the murder."

"Now you told the captain," Genet went on, "that when you saw the two figures fighting, the one with the knife had a beard. Is that true?"

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Enderby nodded. "Just for a second I saw the profile of the man with the knife. He definitely had a beard."

"And his victim?"

"I never saw him clearly. I wouldn't even try to describe him."

"You should know, madame," the captain interrupted, "that a good deal depends on this beard. Tomorrow we dock at Naples and many passengers are booked on the overland excursion." He spread his hands. "We could not possibly have detained everyone, so your seeing that beard was a great piece of luck for us. Still, a number of people are going to be inconvenienced, and we must be sure you really saw it."

"I saw it," Mrs. Enderby said, very solemnly. "I'm quite sure."

"Well, that at least is settled." The captain sounded relieved. "Now, Genet, perhaps madame would care to hear of our progress so far."

Genet made a slight bow to the captain. "You'll note, madame," he began, "that the incident occurred while we were at sea—while we were, so to speak, a self-contained little world. This is an important point. We've searched the ship thoroughly, of course. There's no one aboard who shouldn't be, no one who can't be identified. Therefore, the moment we learned from you that the killer had a beard, our way was clear. Our first task was to prepare a list of all bearded men on board. If your observation was accurate, the name of the murderer would necessarily appear on that list."

"Did you—did you consider the possibility of a false beard?" Mrs. Enderby spoke with the air of someone who is always asking foolish questions.

"Excellent," the captain cried. "My dear Mrs. Enderby, you delight me. My own first reaction. Genet, however, does not consider it likely."

"I suggested," Genet explained, "that a false beard would imply elaborate premeditation, but that a man who had carefully planned to meet his victim in a deserted corner of the ship at three a.m. would hardly feel the need for such a disguise. He was not, after all, planning to be seen. Your happening along was the sheerest bad luck for him."

"He was planning to be seen by

the victim," Mrs. Enderby pointed out.

"Ah, there is something in that, Genet," said the captain.

"Besides," Mrs. Enderby continued, "mightn't the murderer have decided to shave off his beard the moment he realized he had been seen and could be described? Then he wouldn't be on your list."

"But this is a list," M. Genet said triumphantly, "of men who had beards *before* the murder. I don't know about you, Mrs. Enderby, but under the circumstances, if I were a murderer, I would infinitely prefer to be one of a dozen bearded suspects than to be the one man known to have shaved his beard off in the past fifteen hours. That's only logical."

Mrs. Enderby frowned and the captain noticed. "You don't approve of logic, madame?" he asked.

"You can't exactly *dis*approve of logic," Mrs. Enderby conceded, "but I'm afraid it's always made me uneasy. It's so—well, so unavoidable."

M. Genet looked smug.

"Besides," Mrs. Enderby went on, "it's been my experience that when a man feels he has logic on his side, he stops thinking."

"At any rate, madame," said Genet, "all the people listed as having had beards yesterday still have them. So at least in this case logic is helpful."

Mrs. Enderby yielded the point reluctantly.

"Among the passengers there are precisely four bearded men. Needless to say, we have spoken discreetly to all of them about their activities last night and early this morning. Two of them claim they were at the bar from two a.m. until nearly three thirty, and the bar steward confirms their story. The third over-indulged in the midnight supper. The log of the ship's hospital shows that at three a.m. he was being treated for acute indigestion by nurse Albiser. The fourth, a Mr. William Kiley, says that he was playing cards in the lounge until approximately two thirty, that he then went for a walk on deck, and returned to his cabin before three. His story cannot, I'm afraid, be corroborated for the critical period. Do you recall, Mrs. Enderby, seeing a tall, distinguished-looking bearded man in the lounge last night playing cards?"

Mrs. Enderby thought for a moment, then brightened. "Of course. Gray hair, cut short. I don't remember seeing him leave."

"His friends do," M. Genet said. "They agree that he left at about two thirty. We must certainly keep an open mind about Mr. Kiley."

"He is one of the passengers," the captain explained, "who is to leave the ship at Naples. He will, if I am not mistaken, be meeting his wife there. That is one reason why we must make such haste with our investigation."

"Do any members of the crew

have beards?" Mrs. Enderby asked.

"Seven," M. Genet said. "For a variety of reasons six of them can be eliminated as suspects. They were either working with people or were seen with people at the crucial time. The seventh is a seaman named Philippe Menton who happened to be standing watch on deck last night at three. We don't know much about him. He's been with the ship for nearly two years but he keeps to himself a lot." M. Genet smiled slyly. "Well, madame, what do you think of our suspects? If we eliminate stowaways and—ahem—false beards, we must conclude that our murderer is either a mysterious French seaman or a respectable American businessman. Would you care to choose?"

Diplomatically, Mrs. Enderby changed the subject. "You know," she said, "I don't believe I know who was murdered."

"Nor did we, at first," said Genet. "But once more logic came to our aid. There are a fixed number of people aboard ship. We had only to check that there was a person for each name on our passenger list and on our crew's roster. Then, when we found one name to which no one answered, the inference was plain that we had discovered the missing man. Would you not say so?"

Again Mrs. Enderby looked doubtful. She did not, however, challenge the purser's logic.

"And there is, in fact," Genet went on, "one name, and one name only, for which we can find no owner. Can you guess it?" M. Genet paused dramatically. Then he said, "That name is Philippe Menton."

Mrs. Enderby drew in her breath sharply. For the first time since the previous night she felt a sense of shock. "Why, then that means—" she began.

"Ah," said the captain, "but that is precisely why I have called you in again, dear madame. I am going to ask you a question of the gravest importance, and you must be absolutely sure before you answer. A man's freedom and even his life may hang in the balance. You have told us that the man with the beard was the man holding the knife. Thus, the inference is that the bearded man was the murderer.

"But you have also told us that in the last moment the two figures were indistinguishable. What is the chance, my dear Mrs. Enderby, that in this last-minute struggle the man *with* the knife—the bearded man—became the victim and that it was the bearded man—Philippe Menton—who was thrown overboard?"

The captain held up his hand to forestall a too-hasty reply. "Consider, dear madame, the significance of this question. If the bearded man was the victim and not the killer, and if you can really give us no description whatever of the second person in the struggle—the killer—then half the men and wom-

en aboard are suspects. If, on the other hand, you are *certain* that the bearded man was the murderer—" The captain finished his sentence by spreading his hands and elevating his eyebrows.

Mrs. Enderby did not speak for a full minute. In her mind she saw again the bearded silhouette and the raised knife, saw again the knife stabbing into its victim—a victim she could not describe but whose face, in the final moment, she knew with terrible certainty was separate and distinct from the face with the beard.

When she spoke at last, Captain Freneau turned grimly to M. Genet. "I think," he said, "we must have Mr. Kiley in now."

Mr. William Kiley was a lean, serious-faced man with brush-cut, iron-gray hair, a full, nearly black beard and mustache, and cruise clothes that seemed somehow uncharacteristic of him. When he entered the stateroom he seemed very definitely under a strain.

The captain half rose but, significantly, did not extend his hand. "You must forgive, monsieur, this further call on your time," and the captain indicated a chair directly facing Mrs. Enderby's.

"I quite understand, Captain." Kiley's voice was deep but subdued.

"Permit me to introduce Mrs. Enderby," the captain continued. "She is the lady who was so unfortunate as to witness the incident M. Genet spoke to you about earlier today."

Mrs. Enderby examined the face before her. She had, after all, witnessed the crime, and it was even now not impossible that she might be able to make some sort of identification.

Mr. Kiley acknowledged the introduction with a short nod but said nothing. He seemed to be very consciously containing himself.

"Mrs. Enderby," the captain said quietly, "you perhaps have seen Mr. Kiley before during the cruise?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, her manner somewhat brighter than she intended it to be. "A number of times at dinner or on deck, and last night in the lounge. He was playing bridge, I believe."

"And at no time after that?" the captain persisted.

"I can't say," she replied hesitantly, knowing how much depended on her answer.

"I see. Mr. Kiley," said M. Genet, "I think you have a right to know why you have been asked to come here. Since our interview this morning, we have received some new information, and we are anxious to verify it. You will cooperate?"

"As well as I can."

"Good. Now first, there is the matter of personal information which the captain may care to hear from you himself. You are, I understand, married?"

"Yes."

"And may I ask you to explain again how you happen to be traveling alone?"

Mr. Kiley shrugged. "My son's in the army, stationed in Germany. My wife flew to visit him three weeks ago, and because my health has been rather poor this winter, it was decided that I should take this sunshine cruise—" he spoke the words wryly and the captain, in spite of himself, lowered his eyes "—and meet her in Naples. There is, you see, no mystery about it."

"My dear sir," the captain assured him, "there was never any question of a mystery. It is only that we must, so to speak, keep the record straight. For instance, about last night and early this morning: would you tell us what you did from dinnertime on?"

"Of course. After dinner I rested for an hour or so. Then at ten o'clock I met some friends in the lounge for bridge."

"This was the first time you played with them?"

"Oh, no. We've played together nearly every night."

"I understand. Go on."

"The game ran a little late. I left the table at about two thirty, strolled for a few minutes on the deck, and then went to my cabin."

"You were not on deck when Mrs. Enderby screamed?" the captain asked.

"No," said Mr. Kiley.

"And you knew nothing of the—the incident?"

"My cabin is on the other side of the ship. I knew nothing about it until I woke this morning."

"Mr. Kiley," the captain said hesitantly, "I must ask you if you are being entirely candid with us. There has been laid before us now certain conflicting testimony."

"Conflicting?" Kiley said weakly. He seemed even more uncomfortable than before.

"There are, as you know, two stewards in every corridor," the captain continued. "One of them is always on duty. Last night the steward named Paul—you know him, perhaps?—was sitting at the head of the corridor that leads to your cabin, Mr. Kiley. He had arrived at two a.m., the time he normally relieves the other man. Naturally, we have questioned Paul, and he assures us that he did not see you going to your cabin between two a.m. and the time the noise began on deck."

"He might have missed me," Mr. Kiley suggested.

"Impossible. You would have had to pass within two feet of him, and he says he never left his post."

"Then he was not at his post. I certainly don't recall seeing him."

"That is conceivable, of course," the captain agreed, without conviction. "On the other hand, why should the man lie? There are half a dozen legitimate reasons why he might have left his place. He would

not need to excuse himself at the expense of another man's—er—reputation."

Mr. Kiley caught the menace hidden in the last word. "May I ask what this steward Paul did when the excitement began?"

"Of course. A good point. He says that he remained at his station for about five minutes and then slipped away to investigate."

"Then I might have reached my cabin without being seen after he left. Is it not possible, Captain, that your steward has exaggerated the account of his patience? That, in fact, he ran out on deck the moment the shouting began and that I came along only a few moments later?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Kiley. It is not possible. One of your fellow passengers in that corridor, Mr. Nicholson, was disturbed by the commotion and stepped out of his cabin to see what was wrong. He remembers he was angry at having been awakened and glanced at his little bedside clock with the luminous dial. The time, he assures us, was exactly six minutes after three, and when he stepped out into the corridor, Paul was still at his place." The captain drew in a deep breath, then let it out slowly. "Thus a question is also raised about your statement that you heard nothing of the excitement. Are you sure, monsieur, that you have no further information to give us?"

Mr. Kiley sat grimly silent. To Mrs. Enderby he seemed now openly desperate.

"There is one other fact," the captain continued, "which may be significant. We learned of it only an hour ago. M. Genet?"

"Yes. Naturally, when I heard Mrs. Enderby's description of the murderer, I requested that all information about men with beards be passed along to me at once. Now I have just learned from the radio operator that two days ago, while the ship was on its way from Lisbon to Casablanca, William Kiley made a radio-telephone call to one Armand Petri in Casablanca. Petri, it seems, is a private detective. Then, at eleven o'clock last night, just as we were preparing to get under way, M. Petri himself came aboard the *Fleur-de-lis,* having only that afternoon made arrangements to take passage with us to Naples. There may, of course, be no connection whatever between this detective and the events of last night, but we will only know that after we have spoken with M. Petri. Indeed, he has already been sent for"

For a moment more Mr. Kiley retained his composure. Then, with frightening suddenness, his face seemed to collapse. "My God!" he cried, his voice almost strangled.

"Now, Mr. Kiley." The captain's voice had a practiced smoothness. "We will be happy to listen to anything you have to tell us, and, if I may say so, to understand."

"I was an idiot," Kiley blurted out, seeming almost relieved to talk. "I got into some trouble in Lisbon. Not with the law. I pray to God you'll never have to know what it is. I was desperate until I thought of getting in touch with a private detective. I called Petri, as you know, told him about my problem, and asked him to come aboard."

"And what did you tell him when you saw him?" Genet wanted to know.

"I never did see him. I have a regular bridge game, as I told you, and I was afraid that if I suddenly begged off, someone might get suspicious. Oh, I must have been crazy! On the phone I described myself to Petri and told him I would meet him at three a.m. on the promenade. I thought it would be safe." He laughed with a touch of hysteria.

"When I left after the game, I found a deck chair in the shadows and sat in it to wait. I saw Mrs. Enderby come out about twenty minutes later and walk past me. Then a few minutes after that I heard her scream. You can imagine how I felt when I heard that the killer had been described as a man with a beard. I behaved foolishly, I suppose, but I only knew that I had to get out of there. I sneaked down to my cabin and had what I thought then was a stroke of luck. The steward was gone and the corridor was deserted. When I got to my cabin, I stayed there.

"About half an hour later I pulled myself together long enough to remember Petri, so I called his stateroom. He was there and from the tone of his voice, a little suspicious. He knew what had happened, and knowing that I have a beard, was probably wondering what I was trying to get him involved in. I didn't blame him; my God, how could I? I told him to look around but not to try to get in touch with me; then I took a couple of tranquilizers and tried to sleep. And that's all I know, Captain, I swear it! I had nothing to do with whatever happened up there on deck last night, nothing. Nothing." And as if exhausted by his recital, Mr. Kiley slumped in his chair.

The captain and M. Genet had just time enough to exchange glances when there were three soft taps on the door. Immediately afterward the head of a steward appeared.

"M. Petri," the steward announced, and at a sign from the captain swung the door open to admit a slender man, of middle height, in his early thirties. His face, like the captain's and like the faces of the other members of the crew—but significantly unlike the pasty, slug-like countenances of the passengers on this sunshine cruise—was deeply tanned from what

Mrs. Enderby supposed was the strong French Moroccan sun.

"The captain wishes to see me?" he said, his voice noncommittal.

"Yes, M. Petri," said the captain, "I did ask you to come. I hope I do not inconvenience you. Permit me to introduce Mrs. Enderby and M. Genet, our ship's purser, and Mr. William Kiley." The look which M. Petri gave Mr. Kiley was openly suspicious, and Kiley did not meet the glance. "You have perhaps heard that there was an incident aboard ship early this morning, M. Petri?"

"Yes."

"And you know something of its nature?"

"Yes." Again, a suspicious glance at Mr. Kiley.

"Then you will know that we are not merely engaged in idle prying, monsieur, if we ask you a few questions. For instance, Mr. Kiley has already told us that he called you on the ship's radio-telephone two days ago, that he told you his problem and made an appointment to meet you on the promenade at three this morning. Did you not consider these arrangements somewhat unusual?"

M. Petri's smile was hard and humorless. "In my profession, Captain, we make many unusual arrangements."

"Yes, well I can quite understand that. But when, at the very moment of the appointment a murder was committed by a man whose description fitted your client, did you not become suspicious?"

"I am always suspicious, Captain," M. Petri said, "but you are quite right. My first thought was that I was being used in some way."

"Yet you did not immediately communicate your suspicions to me, but came only when you were summoned, some sixteen hours later?"

M. Petri shrugged. "I don't know what you mean, Captain," he said. "I have no—how shall I put it?—no abstract interest in justice. My client's interests must come first."

"Very commendable, I'm sure," said the captain soothingly, "but now that your client has revealed his arrangements with you, there seems no reason why you should not tell us all you know."

Mr. Kiley was suddenly on his feet, almost out of control. "Captain, I beg you! Do we have to go into the details here, in front of everyone?" He seemed almost distracted with shame and horror. "I swear to you they can't have any bearing on the murder."

The captain tried to calm him. "My dear Mr. Kiley," he said, "surely you must see that all the facts will have to come out now."

For a moment Kiley continued to glance wildly around the room. Then he subsided into his chair, the picture of a ruined man, and did not speak again.

The captain returned to M. Petri.

"You are willing to tell us what you know, then?" he asked.

Petri shrugged. "If you wish."

"Good," the captain said with satisfaction. "A very wise move on your part, M. Petri." He adjusted some papers on his table. "Perhaps we can begin with Mr. Kiley's reason for getting in touch with you."

"He was being blackmailed." Petri said laconically. "The oldest game in the world." He shot a contemptuous glance at his client. "In Lisbon he got sucked into one of those places down by the quay. They put something in his drink, got him into a bedroom with one of the girls, then took pictures. Later they started to squeeze him. He was meeting his wife at Naples, so I suppose that was the deadline. Either he paid up by then or the pictures would be given to his wife."

"Is that when he called you?" M. Genet asked.

Petri nodded. "He said it wasn't so much the money—which was plenty, by the way—but that he was afraid they'd keep on squeezing him—you know, making new pictures from the negatives. He wanted me to try to get something on them, I suppose, maybe even use a little force, if necessary. My impression was he didn't much care what I did so long as he didn't have to know about it."

"I'm curious, M. Petri," the captain said, "how they managed to maintain contact with him after the ship left Lisbon."

Petri's smile was not pretty to see. "Through a member of the crew, of course." He spoke directly to the captain.

"A member of *this* crew?" The captain seemed genuinely shocked. "But who?"

"A man fairly well known to the police and to private detectives in this area, though not, I regret to say, to ship's captains. He is, of course, in with the crowd at Lisbon. Once the ship has sailed he becomes, so to speak, the collector.

"I recognized him immediately when I came aboard last night. The ship was preparing to sail, and he was working on deck. I thought I might make something of the opportunity by going below and searching his belongings. I had no particular hope, you understand. A careful man would carry everything with him. But I was in luck. His bunk had his name on it, and it was out of sight behind a bulkhead.

"I found them easily—the negatives, I mean. The pictures weren't there, of course. He was planning to sell them that night. So I waited. At about two o'clock things had settled down and the blackmailer was still on watch. I approached him and we had quite an interesting little chat. I knew a good deal about his activities by now, and I promised to forget everything in exchange for the pictures. I didn't tell him about my having the nega-

tives, so in the end he gave up the prints quite willingly.

"Naturally, I was elated. Through a porthole I could see M. Kiley playing bridge in the lounge, and for a moment I even thought of interrupting him. But his orders had been very explicit, and there was after all less than an hour to go.

"I settled down comfortably to wait. I may even have dozed off because suddenly I realized that a woman was screaming and that people were running about. I heard enough, of course, to set me thinking—especially about the beard; so I went to my cabin where M. Kiley called me at about three thirty. I said nothing about the pictures. Frankly, I didn't want to be connected with the business at all until I understood it better. I stayed in my cabin until you sent for me"—he made a slight bow—"and here I am."

"A remarkable story, M. Petri," the captain acknowledged, "but one which omits a most important fact. I refer, of course, to the name of the collector—the member of my crew."

"But my dear Captain." M. Petri smiled another mirthless smile. "I felt sure you would have guessed by now. The man's name was Philippe Menton."

Without a sound William Kiley tipped forward out of his chair and onto the floor.

When Mr. Kiley had been taken to the ship's hospital, with orders that he be closely watched, the stateroom was silent for several moments. Mrs. Enderby, looking thoughtful, remained motionless in her chair. The captain and M. Genet stood behind the chart table and gazed down at a number of photographs and negatives which M. Petri had wordlessly spread out for them.

"Filthy business," the captain said at last. "I'd like to burn every trace of them, the poor devil. But I suppose we've got to keep them as evidence." Reluctantly, he swept the pictures into a neat pile, and with a glance at M. Petri for his approval, put them into an envelope and dropped the envelope into one of the drawers of the table.

"Such a terrible irony," said M. Genet. "With the pictures already in M. Petri's pocket, poor Mr. Kiley, only a few minutes from safety, becomes a murderer."

"Then there is no doubt?" the captain asked.

"Ah, doubt." M. Genet shrugged. "How can there be in the face of the evidence?"

"We still do not know *exactly* what happened." The captain frowned.

"But we can put the facts together," said M. Genet. "Let us place ourselves in Mr. Kiley's position. Imagine it is nearing three o'clock. Mr. Kiley is beginning to grow anxious about his appointment with M. Petri. Will they be

seen? Overheard? Will Petri be of any help? He gets up from his deck chair and begins to wander nervously along the promenade. After a minute he turns a corner and his heart nearly stops. Fate has delivered his enemy into his hands. Here, in this dark, deserted angle of the deck is his tormenter, Menton.

"Mr. Kiley whips out his knife—acquired as a precaution since Lisbon, perhaps? It is a point to be checked. There is hardly time for deliberation—just an instant to think 'Who can ever connect me with this crime?' Then, before he even realizes it, the deed is done, the body dumped into the sea. Only"—M. Genet paused over the word—"only, God help him, the deed has been witnessed."

In the silence the soft tap at the door startled them. A steward entered quickly, delivered a folded sheet of white paper to the captain, and withdrew. For a moment the captain held it without glancing at it, as if afraid of what it might contain. But the next minute, as he read the neat script, he began to smile.

"Always," he said, finishing the note and passing it along to his purser, "always, Genet, the comic relief, eh?"

Genet also smiled as he read. "Yes, I'd forgotten all about it. When there is a murder to be solved, I suppose one can hardly worry about a burglary."

For the first time since the stateroom door had closed on Kiley, Mrs. Enderby looked up, her eyes full of interest. "I beg your pardon, Captain," she said, "did I hear you mention a burglary?"

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Enderby." The captain became once again the effusive leader of a sunshine cruise. "Yes, yes, a small matter. Nothing to be alarmed about. With unusual generosity fate has arranged, for the edification of our little sunless sunshine cruise, both murder *and* burglary, though, I'm afraid, in somewhat anticlimactic order."

"May I ask you where and when the burglary took place?" Mrs. Enderby said, her manner so extraordinarily eager that M. Petri, who had for some time been looking for a way to make a graceful exit, paused in his movement toward the door.

"You may ask anything of me, my dear madame," the captain replied. "It seems the beauty salon was broken into at about five this morning and was looted. I asked one of the stewards to prepare an inventory of what was missing. That was the note you just saw delivered."

"May I know what was in it?"

"Certainly, if you wish." However, the captain had begun to look a little suspiciously at the woman. "It's a curious potpourri, as if the thief had simply taken anything he could get his hands on. Remarkable. I've never seen the like of it.

Half a dozen bottles of Chanel Number Five—the cologne, mind you; the perfume wasn't touched. Several boxes of soap, of really negligible value. A dozen bottles of liquid make-up, half light, half dark—there you see the randomness of the affair. Now let me see . . . yes, several jars of deodorant, a shoulder-length brunette wig, a jar of cold cream, some rather expensive tortoiseshell combs, and four bottles of hand lotion. That's the lot. Quite a mixed bag. What do you think, Genet? Can you employ some of your famous logic on this minor mystery?"

"I hesitate," said M. Genet, "in view of Mrs. Enderby's well-known distrust of logic." He smiled gallantly.

"M. Petri," the captain turned to the slender detective, "do you care, perhaps, to take the busman's holiday?"

M. Petri looked sardonic. "I have always found, Captain," he said, "that my deductive faculties work best when they have been stimulated by the promise of a fee. If you will excuse me, gentlemen, madame?"

"I had hoped, M. Petri," Mrs. Enderby said with somewhat unexpected coyness, "that you would be willing to defend me against M. Genet."

"Madame?"

"He's been so unchivalrous all afternoon, and now I'm sure he's going to try to make me admit that he has successfully solved a great mystery with the aid of what he likes to call logic."

"Can you doubt it, my dear lady?" said M. Genet expansively. "By a simple process of elimination we have found the only man who can be the murderer and the only man who can be the victim. What's more, the former had a strong motive for killing the latter. Surely there is nothing more certain in this world than that, at approximately three o'clock this morning, William Kiley killed Philippe Menton. And for that certainty all credit must go to logic."

"Bravo, Genet," cried the captain, beaming. "Really, madame, you must acknowledge yourself beaten. There is no disgrace. Your own help has been invaluable. What do *you* say, Petri? Come, make the judgment."

"I'd be happy to admit defeat, Captain," said Mrs. Enderby, "if it weren't for two facts, both of which, I'm afraid, are going to come as something of a shock to you. There *was* a murder committed aboard ship this morning at three o'clock. I saw it myself. But the murder victim was *not* Philippe Menton, and the murderer was *not* William Kiley."

The captain was the first to recover. "Madame has been playing detective, then," he said archly, "from the armchair?"

"I've just been *thinking*, if that's

what you mean," Mrs. Enderby replied.

"Then you must have been doing some serious thinking indeed to reject so completely the self-evident."

"Impossible," Genet added in great agitation. "Logic, madame, logic."

"Yes, M. Petri." Mrs. Enderby turned to the detective. "I've been quarreling all afternoon with M. Genet about logic. And I suppose by now he must think me a thoroughly foolish old woman. It's always the woman who mistrusts logic, of course, and what can be more exasperating for a man than such a woman?"

"At least, madame, you admit it," Genet was almost curt.

"But it is not that I really mistrust logic, M. Genet—just *your* kind of logic."

"My kind of logic?"

"Yes. For you, logic is a machine, smiling and clicking. It is, to use one of your favorite expressions, a process of elimination. The machine stops, we open the magic window, and there's the name we've been looking for."

"And your kind of logic?"

"Less mechanical, let's say. The logic of people, for instance. Take this William Kiley you've decided is a murderer. How did you come to that conclusion? By collecting some names, crossing them out one by one until only Mr. Kiley's remained, and then announcing that you had your man. Never once did you lift your eyes to look at the man himself. But doesn't logic have something to tell us about Mr. Kiley?"

"At any rate, *you* have something to tell us about Mr. Kiley, madame," the captain said, smiling.

"Mr. Kiley is no murderer, Captain. He is, I would say, if I had to guess, too much of a coward. He's the sort of man who hires another man to face his danger for him. He might kill in self-defense, I suppose, if he were attacked suddenly. But the man who had the power over him—Philippe Menton—wouldn't have had any reason to attack him. I ask you, M. Genet, can you look at William Kiley and say with confidence, this man is a murderer?"

"Then it comes to this, madame," Genet replied patiently, "that you 'guess' William Kiley did not kill Philippe Menton?"

"No, not 'guess.' Far from it. When you were reconstructing the murder a few minutes ago, you imagined Mr. Kiley thinking to himself, 'Who can ever connect me with this crime?' But logic—yes, logic—gives us the answer to that question. Armand Petri would connect William Kiley with the crime—isn't that true, M. Petri? I don't believe you think Mr. Kiley is a fool, M. Genet. Yet who but a fool would tell another man, in detail, how he is being blackmailed,

and then go out and murder his blackmailer? How could he hope to get away with it or hope—please forgive me, M. Petri—to avoid the possibility of more blackmail?"

"Madame has a point," said the captain slowly.

"Then there's the matter of the looting of the beauty salon. Murders and burglaries don't happen very often aboard ship. Yet when both take place on the *Fleur-de-lis* —and within a few hours of each other, too—no one draws the logical conclusion that they are probably related to each other."

"Are you saying that such a relationship exists?" Genet demanded.

"I leave that to you, M. Genet. You are the logician."

"You seemed very interested in the inventory of the theft, madame," said the captain.

"Because it confirmed what I had already begun to suspect." And Mrs. Enderby very self-sufficiently poured herself a drink from the captain's heavy water bottle.

"Madame, I am being placed in a false position here," M. Genet spoke quietly. "It must not be allowed to seem that I am more concerned with a theory of logic than I am with the truth. If you have really deduced something that the captain and M. Petri and I have not, I humbly beseech you to tell us what it is."

"That's fair enough, M. Genet, and very generous." Mrs. Enderby's fingers were toying, almost unconsciously, with the heavy cut-glass bottle stopper. "Listen and I'll try my best to explain. When you were compiling your list of bearded men and eliminating everyone but Mr. Kiley, I objected. I said, you remember, that the killer might have been wearing a false beard, but you dismissed the idea. However, now that we've agreed that there is some question about Mr. Kiley being the murderer—"

"Wait!" M. Genet's interruption was explosive. "I know now! Of course!" Taut with excitement, he was directing a state of pure menace at Armand Petri. "My dear Mrs. Enderby, you were right all the time. Of course. And I was too blind to see."

"Genet, what are you talking about?" the captain demanded.

Petri had taken one step back under the pressure of the purser's accusing gaze.

"The answer," Genet went on feverishly. "I'm talking about the answer. It was here for us to see all the time. Mrs. Enderby knew it, only I was too pig-headed to listen. Remember, Captain, when I asked why the killer should have wanted to wear a false beard? Mrs. Enderby told us. 'He was planning to be seen by his victim,' she said, 'by Philippe Menton.' Logical. All so logical. Menton was expecting to meet William Kiley at three o'clock on the promenade—Kiley, a man with a beard. But who really kept that appointment, wearing a false

beard so as not to alarm the blackmailer until the last moment, until it was too late? Who but the man who was hired—*hired to use force if necessary*—to solve Mr. Kiley's problem for him?"

Suddenly everyone in the room was in motion. The captain and M. Genet were advancing on M. Petri; the detective's right hand had flashed out of sight for a moment, to reappear holding an elegant little black automatic; and Mrs. Enderby was out of her chair with more agility than anyone could have imagined.

"Gentlemen!" It was the lady's voice that froze them. "Gentlemen, you're making a serious mistake." They were all looking at her now. "Armand Petri is not the murderer."

The captain's face, having in the last sixty seconds registered both shocked surprise and grim resolve, now flushed with exasperation. "What are you saying, madame?" he spoke hoarsely. M. Petri had returned his gun to its holster and Genet remained motionless. "If M. Petri is not the killer, why have you once more brought up the matter of false beards?"

"Only to dismiss it," Mrs. Enderby said calmly, "though I didn't count on M. Genet being so—so excitable. I assure you, Captain, the looting of the beauty salon entirely eliminates the possibility of false beards."

The captain stalked back to his desk and flung himself irritably into his chair. "I understand none of this," he said. "But presuming, madame, that you are right, where does it leave us? With Genet's list of bearded men and with Mr. Kiley. May I remind you that it was never *I* who objected to that solution."

"You're quite right, Captain," said Mrs. Enderby, "it was I who objected. I suggested that the killer, knowing he could be identified by his beard, might shave it off. But I was told that if he were to do that he would become a marked man, that the fact that there were eleven bearded men before the murder and only ten after would lead us directly to him. Simply find the man who had shaved off his beard and lock him up."

"If I may say so, madame, the logic thus far seems impeccable."

"But suppose, Captain, that in spite of the danger, our murderer had to shave off his beard. Suppose he realized that when the identity of the victim was discovered, he, the murderer, would not be—to use M. Genet's useful expression—just one among eleven bearded suspects, but instead the only bearded man on the ship with the motive and the opportunity for the killing? What then?"

"Then we have him," cried M. Genet promptly. "Eleven beards before the crime, ten after. We'd stick into him like an arrow."

"Even if he found a way of ar-

ranging things so that you would be satisfied with ten beards after the crime?"

"Impossible!"

"Impossible? But my dear M. Genet, he has done it! Weren't there eleven bearded men aboard the *Fleur-de-lis* last night? And aren't there only ten now? And aren't you perfectly satisfied?"

"Come, come, Mrs. Enderby," the captain protested, "surely you have forgotten something. The eleventh beard belonged to the victim."

"How do you know that, Captain?"

"What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I said. How do you *know* that the victim was a man with a beard? Did anyone tell you he was? Did anyone see him? I certainly didn't, and I am the only person, besides the killer, who would have had any way of knowing."

"But of course, through the process of elimination we assumed—"

"Exactly, you assumed. But what a remarkable assumption to make. Is it usual, do you think, to assume that murder victims have beards? If there had been no list, would you ever have thought of making such a strange assumption in the absence of witnesses? Then why *did* you make it? So that the list would come out right. There were eleven beards on the list, but only ten aboard ship. How to balance the books with the least possible thought? Why, beard the victim, of course. I warned you, M. Genet, that the moment a man believes he is being logical, he stops thinking."

"But we did not rely on the list of beards alone," Genet said. "There was also the ship's passenger list and the roster of the crew."

"Oh, yes, another process of elimination." Mrs. Enderby smiled. "What was this one supposed to have proved?"

"It *did* prove that the only person missing from the *Fleur-de-lis* was seaman Philippe Menton—incidentally, a man with a beard."

"But it didn't prove anything of the sort, M. Genet. All it proved was that no one answered to the name of Philippe Menton. A man, however, can be aboard ship without answering to his name."

"But Menton would have had to answer to *some* name. Our search of the ship was very thorough. He could not have been hiding."

"Of course he would answer to some name."

"And which one, may I ask?"

"Why, the only one that wasn't in use. The name of the man he had murdered and thrown overboard—Armand Petri."

Whatever else a dozen years on a luxury liner had done to Captain Freneau, it had not appreciably slowed his reflexes. He was out of his chair, swinging, almost before Petri-Menton could draw his gun.

But it was Mrs. Enderby who brought matters to a sudden conclusion—with the heavy water bot-

tle she had earlier arranged to have within reach. Indeed, so quickly was everything over that the two stewards who crashed into the stateroom moments later found themselves rather foolishly striking belligerent poses with nothing belligerent to do.

It was quite late. Captain Freneau had invited Mrs. Enderby to his cabin for a nightcap and had asked M. Genet to be present. The cruise ship slid gracefully through the Mediterranean night toward Naples, a landfall which the captain no longer dreaded.

"What is the news of Mr. Kiley, Genet?" the captain asked as the three settled themselves.

"The doctor says he will be all right," M. Genet replied.

"Excellent. I know you will be interested to hear, Mrs. Enderby, that because you so cleverly arranged to have Menton expose his true identity before us all, I was able to conclude that nothing so specific as the photographs would be needed to condemn the man, and so I have conveniently managed to mislay them. Mr. Kiley was very gratified when he was informed."

"That was kind of you, Captain." Mrs. Enderby's smile was warm. "I *had* hoped that something like that might happen if I kept Menton here. Still, perhaps I had no right to endanger us all."

"But you were here with the water bottle, dear Mrs. Enderby," M. Genet laughed. "Surely there was never any danger."

"It is not only Mr. Kiley who is in your debt, madame," said the captain, and then seeing the woman begin to blush, he simply raised his glass in a silent toast. "Yet even now," he went on, "there are things I do not understand."

"Exactly," said M. Genet, now willing to admit his curiosity too.

"It's really simple enough," Mrs. Enderby said, sipping her sherry. "In fact, only a simple plan had any real chance of succeeding. In this one there was just one little delicate piece or misdirection; everything else was true. Take Mr. Kiley, for instance. Everything he told us about himself, and in particular everything that Menton, alias Petri, told us about him was correct. Under no circumstances could Menton afford to arouse the suspicions of the man who had hired a Moroccan private detective but had never seen him. Kiley *was* being blackmailed, he *did* phone Casablanca, he *did* arrange to meet Petri on the promenade at three o'clock."

"Yes, that is evident now," Genet agreed.

"In matters Kiley knew nothing about, however, Menton could tell any story he liked. As it happened, the real Petri *did* spot Menton as soon as he came aboard and *did* go below to search his belongings. But he didn't find any negatives. There wasn't anything careless

about Menton. He was a shrewd, ambitious man who left nothing to chance. The negatives and prints were on his person all the time.

"Also, the meeting between Petri and Menton really did take place, and I suppose that's when Menton learned enough about Petri's assignment to make the masquerade work. He also learned something else, while listening to Petri threatening to expose him. Menton knew enough about blackmail to know that if he let Petri scare him off this time, the detective would be back for more. Mr. Kiley had his scruples. Menton didn't. I think it was then he decided to kill Petri.

"There were problems, of course. Petri would be missed very soon, especially by Kiley. Then Menton would be a marked man. Kiley might keep quiet to save himself, but there was no way of knowing what Petri had told his office in Casablanca. The ship was on the high seas and there was no place to hide. And then Menton had his wonderful, simple idea. He would kill Petri and *take his place.*"

The captain stirred uneasily. "He was not worried about the problem of resemblance?"

"It was not really a problem. Kiley had never seen Petri. He had seen Menton, of course, but shaving off a beard can be as effective a disguise as growing one. Menton knew that Petri had come aboard late at night and that few people would have noticed him. Those who did had probably been so envious of his sunburnt face that they'd remember nothing else about him and be perfectly satisfied next day with the sunburnt, beardless Menton as a substitute. Besides, Menton didn't plan to leave Petri's cabin any more than he had to."

"That is admirably clear," said M. Genet.

"The scheme had a special feature, M. Genet. Philippe Menton would be missed, of course, but the disappearance would probably be treated as an accident. Menton was alone in the dark, people would say, and he slipped. However, if there *were* any hint of murder, Kiley—regretfully exposed by M. Petri—would be the ready-made suspect. And who would want to go any further into the whole sordid mess of blackmail and murder than was absolutely necessary? So one way or another, Philippe Menton would leave the ship in Naples as Armand Petri, give himself a new name, and start his business again."

Mrs. Enderby sighed. "I can imagine most of this going through Menton's head while he was listening to Petri, and he must have made rather a good show of giving up slowly and promising to bring the pictures to the detective on the promenade deck when he came off watch at three o'clock. Poor Petri never had a chance. He was killed before he could make a sound.

Menton took his papers and keys, hoisted him up to the railing, and pushed him overboard.

"That's when I came along, of course, and started screaming about murder and a murderer with a beard. You might think that would have frightened Menton, but actually I think he was pleased. Kiley had a beard and Kiley would be on deck at the exact time of the murder, so the job of implicating him would be that much easier. I think Menton enjoyed the idea of being able to pay Kiley back for calling in the detective. Down in Petri's cabin there was nothing to do but to get rid of some of the more obvious seaman's clothing through a porthole and, of course, to shave. At three thirty the phone rang. It was Kiley telling M. Petri, the detective, not to try to meet him. Nothing could have suited Menton's plans better, so he stayed right where he was until he was sent for at six o'clock in the afternoon. The rest, Captain, M. Genet, you know."

M. Genet was shaking his head ruefully as Mrs. Enderby came to the end of her explanation. "My dear Mrs. Enderby," he said at last, with a twinkle, "how can I express my admiration? And to think that you did it all merely by looking at Mr. Kiley and knowing by intuition that he was not a murderer."

"Not by intuition, M. Genet. Just the opposite. By *thinking* about Mr. Kiley," Mrs. Enderby said sweetly, "and, of course, by thinking about the burglary."

"Precisely what I was about to mention myself," said the captain. "The burglary. I thought you'd forgotten about it and frankly, for me that is the most puzzling part."

"It was for me, too," Mrs. Enderby admitted. "I simply couldn't make myself believe that it was a coincidence. But what could it possibly have to do with the murder? Could the murderer have needed something, needed something desperately enough to break into the beauty salon for it and take the chance of calling attention to himself? If he did, of course, he would have taken many other things at random to conceal what he was really after. But what *was* he after?

"I ran over the list in my mind again and again. 'Cologne, soap, combs, light make-up, dark make-up . . .' And then I knew. Of course. Into my head popped the picture of a man standing in front of a mirror in his cabin and shaving off a heavy, matted beard. He finishes the job, dries his face, and then stares at himself in horror—stares into his mirror in horror at the one fact he hasn't taken into account.

"For from his lips up, his face is as brown as a seaman's or a Moroccan detective's ought to be. But from the lips down, he is as pale as any paying guest, my dear Captain, on your famous sunshine cruise."

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **TALMAGE POWELL**

TITLE: ***Lorna's Back in Town***

TYPE: Crime and Detection

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Jim Brooks was certain that his second wife, Imogene, had taken the bad taste of Lorna out of his life, that he had Lorna out of his system forever . . .*

"CALL FOR YOU, DARLING," IMOgene called from the kitchen where she was brewing her usual wonderfully aromatic pot of eye-opening coffee.

"I'll take it in the bedroom, sweetheart." I gave the after-shave lotion a final pat, ducked out of the bathroom, and picked up the extension phone on the bedside table.

"Jim Brooks speaking," I said.

I heard a thinly drawn breath at the other end of the line. "This is Vince Ingram, Jim."

The once-familiar voice disinterred three buried years, exposed the bones of memories I'd wanted very much to forget. With Imogene's help I'd just about succeeded in forgetting—until the ringing of the phone on this bright and lovely morning showed me how thin and brittle the scabs really were.

My hand was a hard knot on the phone. "You slimy worm," I said.

"Still putting all the blame on me, Jim? None on Lorna? I was your friend, Jim, three years ago. I tried to fight it. I swear I did."

"Save the hearts and flowers," I said. "Three years ago I could have broken your neck, if I'd got my hands on you. Now I wouldn't want to dirty my fingers."

"Don't you want to know why I came back, Jim?"

"Not interested. Just keep away from me, Vince. I warn you."

Vince sighed wearily. "I can't blame you for the way you feel. But I thought—well, at least I thought you'd ask if Lorna is with me."

The detachment in my words came harder this time. "I'm not interested in that either."

"She left me, Jim."

"Tough. You stole another man's wife. Now you know how it feels."

"Yes, I know." He sounded as if his very soul were tired. He gave a short bitter laugh. "But maybe I haven't got your pride, guts, or manhood, Jim. I want her back badly enough to come crawling after her. I want her back on any terms."

"Then take her back," I said.

"I will—when I find her. Have you heard from her, Jim?"

"No. What makes you think I would?"

"We were at the end of our string, Jim. I tried to make it big, the way Lorna wanted. But I fell flat on my face. Even our phone had been disconnected."

"I'm crying for you," I said coldly.

"I'm just telling you," he said, "so you'll know how I learned where she went. While I was out of the apartment she had to go next door to phone about bus schedules. When I returned and found her gone, the neighbor told me . . . Jim, Lorna's back in town."

"She can go where she chooses. It's a free country."

"Not for me it isn't," Vince said in a grim tone. "There's only one reason she'd return to a small town she used to consider dull. You, Jim. You're the only reason."

The image of Lorna was quick and searing through my mind. The old wild excitement strained against its burial shroud.

I took a slow deliberate breath. "It's a little late for that. I've developed a good business, I have a comfortable home, an orderly life, an untroubled future. My second wife is a jewel—she knows the meaning of love and devotion for a man. I have everything a man could want, in full measure. Lorna, you see, really did me a favor when she walked out."

"I'm glad to hear it, Jim. Maybe it will make it easier for me. Lorna never gives up easily, you know, once she changes her mind or decides on something. But maybe you can convince her that the past three years haven't been a mistake she can undo like she was snapping her fingers."

"Why should I help you, Vince? If you want her convinced, do it yourself!"

"For your own sake, Jim—unless you're afraid. Unless you're whistling in the dark with the happy home and devoted wife stuff."

"I'm not afraid," I said, my voice on the edge of a quavering shout.

"Then I'll keep in touch, Jim. The two of us—we'll leave no doubt in her mind."

I hung up and sat a moment by the phone. *Lorna's back in town.* The air seemed touched with prickly heat.

"Breakfast, darling."

The warm sweet words from the kitchen jerked me back to my surroundings.

"Right with you, dear." Quickly,

I slipped into a shirt, knotted a tie, moving to the kitchen while I was putting on my suit jacket.

Imogene's nice brown eyes questioned me briefly about the call. I didn't meet her gaze as I sat down to a neat clean table where the linen was crisply white and the flower centerpiece fresh.

Imogene's good, sturdy figure was cloaked in a starched cotton housedress in the best American tradition. Her brown hair was bunned—no stringy hair or curlers at the breakfast table for Imogene. Her nice, average, everydayish face beamed as she poured coffee.

Sunlight streamed through sparkling windows, and my morning paper was folded beside my plate.

But for the first time in a year and a half of marriage to my second wife, I noticed that Imogene had let the eggs get slightly overdone . . .

Fortunately, there were problems at the store to occupy the whole morning. The Credit Manager needed additional personnel; the men's-wear buyer was having delivery troubles with a manufacturer; the Advertising Department came up with a couple of ideas for a promotional campaign that seemed dubious and required discussion.

At one o'clock there was a lull. I realized that the activity of the morning had been mere motions to avoid the thought at the back of my mind. A trifle guiltily, I decided to call Imogene and see if she could meet me for lunch.

Instead, there was a call for me.

"Vince again, Jim."

"I'm very busy," I said stiffly. "I was on my way out."

"I've located Lorna," he said. "Spent the morning around the bus station showing a photo of her to taxi drivers. Finally rang the bell. She arrived early this morning. Took a cab to a cheap motel on Fremont."

"Give her my worst regards," I said.

"I hope you mean that, Jim. I hope she believes you mean it. I'm right across the street. Waiting for you, Jim."

In three years Vince Ingram had changed. He was thinner. His dark, lean good looks had taken on a certain gauntness. His old quick way of carrying himself, of using his hands, had lost its vitality.

His eyes brooded as he also noted the changes in me—the pleasant, comfortable huskiness, the normally placid affability and sense of well-being that he knew were being withheld from him. He suffered a little as he saw the results of my new life with Imogene.

He smoked incessantly as we drove out to the motel which a taxi driver had named for him. Almost before I stopped the car on the gravel-surfaced parking area, Vince was out and hurrying to the motel office.

I got out of the car slowly, my gaze moving down the row of

numbered doors. Three years since I'd seen her. My palms were damp.

Vince came out of the office, motioned to me with his head.

"Room Six," he said. "The manager recognized her picture immediately. She checked in just before eight o'clock this morning."

We bumped shoulders as we reached Room 6, but we didn't look at each other. Vince knocked. There was no answer. He knocked again.

"Lorna?" he said as if his throat were very dry.

He glanced at the doorknob, then took hold of it and found it unlocked.

The door opened on a small gloomy room furnished sparsely. "Lorna?" Vince called out.

Then a sudden deep moan of despair and horror ripped out of him. He plunged across the room and fell on his knees beside Lorna. The mewing sound that came from him brought no response. Lorna's eyes were fixed sightlessly on the ceiling. A red tinge had seeped from the back of Lorna's head to discolor the fake tile of the carpetless floor.

Vince rose and stumbled backward from her. He raised his fist to his mouth and began biting on his knuckles.

I caught his shoulder, spun him, slapped him on the cheek with my open hand.

"You killed her," I said.

"No . . . no . . ."

"A real dirty trick, you slimy worm. You killed her, then pretended you were coming here for the first time with me."

"Kill her?" he began sobbing suddenly. "How could I kill Lorna?"

"We'll let the police find out," I said. I looked around the room. There was a phone on a small scarred table beside the bed.

While I made the call, Vince sank onto the single chair in the room and sat cowering like a frightened mouse surrounded by tomcats. He stared continuously at Lorna with a catatonic glassiness in his eyes.

Waiting for the police, I took a look around the room. The events that had occurred here seemed obvious. The bureau was at an angle from the wall, as if a person had slammed against it. A lamp lay on the floor, beside an overturned table.

Words had led to a fight. And the fight had ended when Lorna had been shoved hard, with the edge of the bathroom doorjamb providing the point of collision for the back of her head.

In my mind's eye I saw her features contorting in quick pain. The life leaving her eyes. The slow sliding of her body down the jamb. The forward pitch of her shoulders, finally. The loose impact of her on the floor. The final motion as she rolled to rest on her back.

I kneeled slowly beside her, and she was a stranger, and I knew that I hadn't been really afraid at all. Merely afraid that I would be

afraid. I was sorry she was dead; but it was the pity for a remote person I'd once known but who no longer meant anything personal to me.

Her right arm was outstretched, the slim, long-fingered hand like a talon. A clawing talon.

No more clawing, Lorna. You won't have to claw anyone ever again.

A police car arrived outside with siren discreetly silent. I rose from Lorna's side as I heard the footsteps of two officers entering the room.

Calmly and dutifully, I told the police the story in detail. They said I could go. The last sight I had of the room was of Vince's face as he began to realize that he was the focal point for two officers of the law.

The store could run itself for the rest of the day. I drove home rapidly. There were many things I wanted to say to Imogene. It was as if for the first time I was aware of all the wonderful little details of the past eighteen months.

She heard me enter the house and called from the bedroom. "That you, dear?"

"Yes," I said.

"Be right with you. Just showered. Pruned the rose arbor this morning and I was all sticky and dusty."

Instead of waiting for her, I headed directly for the bedroom. She was standing midway in the room, clad in her slip, putting on a blouse. A cotton skirt was lying on the bed.

She gave me a smile, turning slightly, and quickly buttoning the high collar of the blouse.

But not quickly enough to keep me from glimpsing the side of her neck where it joined the collarbone. Where I saw the long red scratches made by a talonlike hand as Lorna had tried to defend herself.

INDEX TO VOLUME FORTY-SEVEN—JANUARY-JUNE 1966

(Continued from page 162)

Most mystery readers have a special affection for code and cipher stories —perhaps ever since that stupendous first reading of Edgar A. Poe's "The Gold-Bug" (and how long ago that was for some of us!). In the early years of EQMM, new code and cipher stories were quite plentiful, but they seldom come along these computerized days. Perhaps all the changes and variations have been rung—no, here is a new code story with a fresh wrinkle, and we think you'll like it . . .

CODE OF THE CLASSICS

by HELEN MABRY BALLARD

CLASS PAPERS SPILLED OVER THE living-room table, mutely demanding attention. Professor Appleby eyed them balefully, then pushed them aside. He was in no mood for the effusions of his students in Mythology 1A, and he was wrathfully considering the imbecility of policemen who had linked an elderly retired physician—an octogenarian with a creaky heart—to a bank robber in white coveralls and a Halloween mask.

"Blind idiots!" His undersized body quivered with oversized indignation, his thin fingers curled into fists. "Gibbering lunatics!"

Dr. Holmes had been his friend. Evening after evening they had talked of cabbages and kings, of liquid versus pulverized manures, of books, of the amorous antics of Olympian deities. Dr. Holmes was a modest, unassuming old gentleman, full of book learning but not boasting of it. Certainly he was not one to associate with a ruffian in coveralls and a preposterous Halloween mask.

It had happened the previous day. Professor Appleby had been standing at the long desk writing a check when the two men entered the bank, the doctor close on the heels of the man in the coveralls. ("A coincidence. Whatever the numskulls said afterward, merely a coincidence").

The man in coveralls carried a satchel. He held a handkerchief to his face as if to blow his nose. Then he quickly bent his head, and when he lifted it again, the mask was in place and there was a gun in his hand. The Professor, no hero, nimbly dived under the desk.

Coveralled legs strode by. A gruff voice made demands, a clerk squealed. Coveralled legs, running now, flashed back again. Appleby cautiously poked out his head. He saw Coveralls speeding toward the door, but it was Dr. Holmes, speeding ahead of him, who carried

the satchel. Appleby noted this without conscious thought; he was concerned only about the probable effect of excitement and over-exertion on Dr. Holmes's faulty heart.

Police rushed in, summoned by the alarm bell. Reports conflicted. The bandit was short, tall, thin, fat, medium. Dr. Holmes had snatched the bag; he was a hero. Dr. Holmes had been handed the bag; he was an accomplice. On one point only was there unanimity: the bandit had already disappeared when Dr. Holmes, with the bag, jumped into his car and raced off *that* way. The police jumped into their own cars and also raced off *that* way.

They had caught Dr. Holmes on a cross-country road beyond town. The satchel had disappeared and as the old man stubbornly refused either to reveal its whereabouts or to explain his actions, they had clapped him in the city jail and belatedly taken up the hunt for the coveralled gunman. And that night the old doctor's heart had fluttered for the last time.

The Professor sighed for his lost friend. "A mistake, a tragic and irremediable blunder. He did *not* steal that money. He took it because—because—the gods alone know why but it was *not* to steal it. If he had lived he would have explained. Now—" The Professor sighed again, and reached for a student's paper.

Ironic comments sprouted redly in white margins. "You have the wrong lady. Aphrodite was not the faithful wife who waited twenty years for her husband. Aphrodite waited for no man, she chased 'em." "Your definition of Chiron as 'a horse-y sort of—' "

A bell rang. Appleby pattered to the door and glowered at the uniformed man at the threshold.

"Murderer!"

"Don't talk that way," remonstrated the Chief of Police. "If he'd come through with a reasonable explanation he could have gone home. Could we help it if he chose to clam up?"

"You could have—oh, let it pass. Come in, Reynolds. Sit down. Not there, that chair belongs to Plato. Toss the books off the other one."

Reynolds sighed and stretched out his long legs. "My feet hurt, it's been a tough day. About Dr. Holmes. I wasn't there when they brought him in, so I didn't know about it until it was too late. If I had, I'd have told him to go home and rest up in bed. He couldn't have gotten away, the roads were blocked.—Who's Plato? A dog?"

"Certainly not. A wise and most philosophical cat."

"So you keep a cat. I might have guessed. I have a grudge against cats. One dug its claws into me when I was a kid, and I still have the scar. See, here above the wrist. Looks like three spikes on a post. The damn thing festered and hurt like hell."

"I weep for you. However,

doubtless you were torturing the poor beast. Did you come here to discuss the habits of domestic animals or to tell me that you have found the gunman? The one," added the Professor with malice, "who got away because of all the time wasted in the asinine pursuit of a harmless old man?"

"The harmless old man, you may remember, was the one with the loot. No, we haven't found the gunman. We did find the coveralls and the mask stuffed in a garbage can in the alley back of the bank, but they're no help. The coveralls are brand-new—no laundry mark. The mask is an old one—it could be one of hundreds left over from last Halloween. I'll anticipate the next question. Have we located the satchel? No, but you are going to tell us how."

"*I* am?"

Reynolds fished in his pocket and drew out a folded paper. "Dr. Holmes left you a letter—he was writing it when that attack hit him. In it he—"

"Is that it? Let me have it."

"—in it he gives directions how to find the satchel."

"In that case why aren't you and your underlings out finding it? Hand over the letter."

"We aren't out finding it because the directions are in code, and we can't read them. Professor, why would Dr. Holmes send you that? Why not a letter in plain English? To Gresham, the banker? Or to the police?"

"Because Gresham has a wart on his nose. Because the police couldn't find anything smaller than an elephant. Because—Oh-h-h, the light flashes. I'm supposed to be one of a bold bad triumvirate, is that it?"

"I haven't said so."

"But you thought it. Well, perhaps I am. Give me my letter!"

He unfolded the paper and read the penciled scrawl.

"Appleby, my friend,

The next play must be yours. Find the bag in the field north of town—

No, the wrong eyes might read. Unriddle my riddle: South from Dionysus to the limniades. Dodona spies Themis. Follow the Archer.

A word of warning: Poseidon's scepter—"

The last ended in a sudden downward stroke.

"Well, Professor, do those names mean anything to you?"

"Would I be teaching mythology if they didn't? Dionysus, god of vineyards. Limniades, fountain nymphs. Dodona, an oracle—in an oak grove. Themis, goddess of law. The Archer, either Apollo or Artemis—they both used bows. Poseidon, ruler of the waves. If you doubt, read Gayley's *Classic Myths.*"

"Now, will you tell me how in hell those whatsits could help anybody find a satchel?"

"Tell you from here? Without visiting the terrain? You flatter me. However— Is there a vineyard?"

"There's an old grapevine."

"It'll do. Trusting soul, aren't you! Or is naive the better word? How do you know I won't deliberately lead you astray?"

"If you do it'll shoot you right to the top of the list of suspects."

"Too true. Give me a page from your notebook. I'll write down the possibilities, then you pick the ones that fit."

The Professor scribbled, muttered, grimaced, and finally handed over the paper. "Mostly guesswork, and don't say I didn't warn you. I can't see around corners and over hillocks."

"I'll bear that in mind," said the other drily. "Anyhow I'm taking you along. If there are any gaps, you could fill them in better than I could."

"Jason in search of the Golden Fleece! When do we go on this treasure hunt? Now?"

"Uh-uh. Let's see. Tomorrow's Sunday, so you'll have no classes. I'll pick you up tomorrow morning at ten."

At ten the Chief of Police found waiting for him not only the Professor but also District Attorney John Arnold, plump and smiling, and Sheriff Hugh Martin, lean and saturnine.

"Witnesses," said Appleby. "Under the circumstances it seemed advisable. And they have copies of the directions, so they won't have to knock out their brains wondering what we're up to."

They drove to the edge of the field north of town, climbed through barbed wire, and trudged over tough bunch grass.

Sheriff Martin threw back his head and sniffed the air. "It's real country. Know what I mean? Even with the city just over yonder it's real country. Smells like it. I was raised on a farm, did I ever tell you? It gets in your blood. Had my own little farm up to a few months ago, before I moved to the city."

"Why did you move?"

"Too far from the office—I thought. Here's the grapevine."

Reynolds nodded to the Professor. "You take over—it'll be quicker."

"It won't be unless somebody tells me which way is south. That way? Then ho, for the limniades. Watch out for a spring."

It turned out to be a scummy pond.

"Hmm. Not much fun for the nymph maidens. What comes next?"

"'Dodona spies Themis,'" read the District Attorney. "Look at the shadows on those mountains! I'm glad you thought of me, Appleby;

I stick in the office too much. I'm enjoying this."

"You and Sheriff Martin," scoffed the Professor. "Just simple country boys at heart. Dodona. An oracle? Impossible. A grove of oak trees? Anyone see a grove of oak trees?"

"There isn't any," said Martin flatly. He smiled unkindly. "Hold your horses, boys. I thought it was too good to last. Or, no—"

"I see it," yipped the Professor. "This way, my friends. Over here." He eyed disparagingly the single dwarfish scrub oak. "A paltry substitute for the classic grove. Nevertheless, an oak. Now for Themis. Oh, dear, dear, dear, where *is* Themis? Themis, goddess of justice and law, Themis who sits by the throne of Zeus to give him counsel —"

"Justice and law?" repeated the Sheriff. "Stand here. See between the firehouse and the brick building that bit of the courthouse roof? Would that be it?"

"It would indeed. Bless the sharp eyes of a country man. What next? Follow the Archer? Apollo, the sun god. We line up Themis and Dodona and go westward. No, no, *slowly*. Study the ground. Look for freshly turned earth. What have you found, Arnold?"

"Come and see. You're not going to like it."

They hurried to join him and stared blankly into an empty hole.

"No use to look for footprints," said the Sheriff glumly. "The ground's hard-packed. Well, this clinches it. I never really believed it—he seemed such a nice old guy; but there's no doubt now. He and the other were in it together."

The District Attorney frowned. "It would seem so, but—let's go over to my office and discuss it."

They followed the District Attorney down a corridor and into a book-lined office. The D.A. bustled about, arranging chairs.

"We'll sit around the table—it makes for easier talking. Cigarettes? Reynolds? Appleby? No? Martin? Now. Let's chew this thing over and see if together we can solve our problem."

Sheriff Martin grunted. "Which one? We have two. First, where's the money? And second, who was the robber? One thing sticks out—he was smart in his timing. Friday, just before the banks close. That's when most businesses turn in their cash for safekeeping. Not," he added gloomily, "that that means much, because most people know it. Well, Mr. Arnold. We've had a good talk, but nothing to show for it. Any suggestions as to what we do next?"

"A few. First, let's run over the facts so far as we know them. We know that Dr. Holmes and—er—"

"Mr. X," said Martin dourly. "It's always Mr. X."

"—that Dr. Holmes and Mr. X entered the bank at the same time.

That is a fact, though it may or may not be significant. After the robbery the doctor somehow obtained possession of the satchel. That, too, is an indisputable fact. We don't know if he wrested it from Mr. X or whether Mr. X handed it to him—the witnesses told conflicting stories."

"We can't slur it over," protested Martin. "It has to do with whether or not Mr. X and the doctor were working together. That's important."

"Very important, but let's take that up later. Right now we are considering only proven facts. For instance, the clear fact that Dr. Holmes was arrested because he refused to tell what he had done with the satchel, and that he died a few hours later."

The Chief of Police flushed angrily. "I don't like the way you put that, I don't like it at all. You make it sound like we roughed him up. We didn't. The doctor had a bad heart, everybody knows that. If an old man with a wonky heart chooses to tear around, digging holes, burying satchels—"

"—he has only himself to blame if he suffers a fatal heart attack. I agree. Appleby, you were his close friend. Will you go along with that?"

"They threw him in jail," said the Professor bitterly. "I'd like to lay hands on those— Reynolds says he had no part in that. I believe him, he has more sense. To be honest, I'm afraid the dear old idiot did bring it on himself. I saw him run down the bank steps. *Run*. That alone could have done it."

"Oh, definitely. My father had heart trouble—well, you're not interested in that. Let us turn now to the letter in code. Appleby told me of the proposed expedition and urged that Marsh and I come along. We did and you know what we found—an empty hole. Someone, presumably Mr. X, had been there before us."

"Presumably?" gibed the Professor. "You lawyers with your cautious 'ifs' and 'maybes'! Of course it was Mr. X—whoever doubted it? But which of us can name his name?"

"He's a local man," said the Sheriff. "My boys had the roads blocked before he had time to shuck those coveralls. No stranger could have gotten through."

"That doesn't mean he lives here," objected Reynolds. "He could be hiding out somewhere, waiting for a chance to get away."

Arnold glanced at the Professor. "You were there, Appleby. What would you say?"

The little man blushed. "Unfortunately I was not in a position—" Even the lobes of his ears were burning. He gathered together the tattered shreds of dignity and answered coldly, "I did what any man of sense would have done— I hid under the desk. I saw the man's legs, and a brief glimpse of

his back as he ran out. Would a description of his legs interest you? Well, yes, perhaps it would. Something might be learned from legs. His walk, for instance. Brisk and sure and firm, but lacking the springiness of youth. At a guess, I'd say thirty-five to forty-odd years. Shoes, too, may be eloquent. His were well polished, indicating a wearer concerned with his appearance. Brown shoes, so possibly a brown suit under the coverall."

Martin cocked an eyebrow. "You've missed your calling, Professor. You should have been a detective, not a school man. Provided you're right."

"I am. And so are you, Martin. I had a glimpse of his back as he ran through the door. I've seen that back before. Yes, he does live hereabouts."

"Who? Think, man, think."

"I *have* thought. I am not prepared to elaborate. Except—yes, this. I recognized—imagined I recognized—that back as belonging to someone of local importance. No name, just a vague and fleeting impression. You would be justified in ignoring it."

"It would be somebody close to the doctor, if they were in it together. Because, look. Dr. Holmes grabbed the bag and ran. No chance at that time to speak to Mr. X. No chance later because the cops grabbed him. But this morning the hole's empty—Mr. X has dug it up. How did he know where to look? Only possible answer: because he and the doctor had picked out the spot beforehand. Why didn't the doctor return the money to the bank? He left it for Mr. X. Later they'd divide the loot. You agree, Chief?"

"I do not. The doctor wasn't the sort to be mixed up with a bank robber."

"He hid the money, didn't he?" snapped the Sheriff.

"All right, he did. But consider—he was an old man, and old men get rattled. The only thought in his fuzzy old mind was to hide the money where Mr. X couldn't get it again. I don't care how it looks, I still say Dr. Holmes was no thief."

"Bravo!" murmured the Professor. "Arnold, isn't the purpose of this meeting to give to the shadowy Mr. X a recognizable face? After all our talk the mask is still in place."

"At least," smiled the District Attorney, "thanks to you he now has legs."

"Legs and a back," jeered Sheriff Martin. "Almost lunchtime and all we got is legs and a back. How about his height, Professor? Could you guess at that from, maybe, the length of his stride?"

Appleby retorted crossly that he was a teacher of classical literature, not a Sherlock Holmes. He added, also crossly, that considering the hour, and the fact that they were getting nowhere—

"Not quite," said the District Attorney, obviously nettled by symptoms of insubordination. "We have his approximate age, the probability that he is a local man, and a few other details. Yes, almost noon. We'll confer again tomorrow evening. By that time we may have learned more."

"Hop in the car, Professor," said Reynolds. "I'll give you a lift."

"Talk, talk, talk," the Chief grumbled a little later. "It'll be the same tomorrow evening. Here's your house."

"Come in," invited the Professor. "No lunch, I eat downtown, but there's coffee. Are you too proud to sit in the kitchen?" He pattered ahead to lead the way.

The small kitchen was sparsely furnished with a gas plate, a miniature refrigerator, and an oilcloth-covered table flanked by kitchen chairs. A single window pierced the outer wall. Through it one looked down on a garden bounded by a white picket fence, and beyond the fence to an empty, weed-grown lot.

The Professor lighted the single burner and rinsed a granite coffee pot with hot water from the tap.

"Set the table if you would be useful. Cups on the shelf above the sink. Cream in the refrigerator. Spoons in the table drawer."

Reynolds stretched an arm for the coffee pot and refilled his cup. "Good stuff, Professor. Strong enough to give a lift, but not bitter. I misjudged you. I put you down as a tea drinker."

"Heaven forbid! Do I look like a—no, don't answer that, I probably do. So you won't accept Dr. Holmes as Mr. X's accomplice? Nevertheless, Sheriff Martin made a good point. If the two were not working together, it's a bit remarkable, isn't it, that Mr. X should have so unerringly pitched on the right spot."

"He followed Dr. Holmes. Simple as that."

"After he had stripped off his disguise? By that time Dr. Holmes was out of sight."

"Noticed the direction he went. Did a bit of exploring and saw where the ground had been freshly turned—could be any number of explanations. All I'm sure of is that Dr. Holmes was no thief, whatever you and Martin think."

"Oh, *I* don't think so—I knew him too well. But any talk about his 'fuzzy old mind' is balderdash. He hid the satchel deliberately and for a good reason. He had recognized Mr. X—"

"Now that *is* balderdash. Not even the girl at the window recognized him."

"I did, vaguely, and Dr. Holmes was closer to him than I was. Oh, yes, of course he recognized him. And if my notion is correct that Mr. X's back belonged to someone of local importance, wouldn't that account for the burying of the

satchel? Holmes would think, Here's a pretty how-de-do! If *he* is a thief, whom can we trust? It may even be a gang of supposedly impeccable citizens. Let's not be too hasty in returning this, let's wait and see what develops.' Would you accept that as possible?"

"Possible, but it's only guesswork."

"But you'll agree that it's a plausible explanation? Then let us accept it temporarily and consider the identity of Mr. X. A man of some standing in the community. *Hm.* The mayor? Shall we consider the mayor?"

"He wouldn't pick up a dime from the pavement without looking for the owner."

"What about Arnold? He lost heavily in that development project."

"That doesn't mean he'd turn bank robber. No, I'd say he wouldn't."

"How can you be certain?"

"Because I know him—that's reason enough."

"One might dispute that. However—one of the councilmen? No, Felton and Gorty are too old, and Davis limps. The Sheriff? Yes, let's turn our thoughts to Sheriff Hugh Martin, who has just built himself an expensive new house. With what? The savings from a Sheriff's stipend?"

"With money from the sale of his old farm."

"Would that be enough? Martin is supporting a son at college."

"The kid supports himself. Works in a frat house for room and board and a bit over; vacations, he drives a delivery truck. He's a fine kid. His dad's a fine man. Forget it."

"Well, we can't fasten it on some mythical stranger who skipped town—the Sheriff's men were too efficient. The truth is, you don't want suspicion thrown on any of your fellow townsfolk. Set your mind at ease, my friend; none of those mentioned is Mr. X."

"I don't think so, but where does just thinking get you? Arnold's going to say, If not them, then who, and how do you know it?"

"And I," said the Professor calmly, "could answer both. I not only know who Mr. X isn't, I also know who he is."

"Then you *did* recognize him in the bank!"

"Oh, no, not then. Later. However, one had to be positive, so I kept watch and— I wish," said the Professor peevishly, "that X would purchase a stronger bulb for his flashlight. It is difficult, on a moonless night, to follow the dim glow of an inadequate torch. I almost fell into the pond."

Reynolds carefully set his cup in its saucer. "So," he said softly, "you followed him last night. You saw him dig it up. It was all hocus-pocus this morning. Very clever

acting, Professor. I congratulate you."

"*I* thought it was a good performance," said the little man complacently. "Especially that bit about the courthouse. As a matter of fact, I would have been confused if I hadn't seen it at night with the arc light shining on it. By daylight it is almost unnoticeable."

"And later, in the office. Martin: a local man he thinks, and tells why. And Arnold: 'We now' "—he burlesqued the District Attorney's crisp tone—" 'have a hazy picture of Mr. X. Shall we meet tomorrow and sketch in the rest of it?' Why? That's what I want to know, *why?* What do they expect to gain by playing cat and mouse? Damn it," cried Reynolds, slapping the table, rattling the cups in their saucers, "why don't they haul in the poor devil and be done with it?"

"Because they don't yet know who he is. I could tell them, and if necessary I will. At the moment I am cherishing the possibly childish hope that Mr. X will dig up the satchel from that corner of his garden where he buried it and return it himself."

"Then it is only you and Holmes who know. And Holmes is dead." Reynolds' eyes turned to the window and the vacant lot.

"And on the other side of us," said the Professor drily, "an empty house—the family's away. Convenient, should Mr. X decide to silence an imprudent school man. He won't. Mr. X is no killer."

"You may be wrong about that."

"Fiddle-faddle! He will not even slay reputations. Suggest that So-and-So may be the robber and X rushes in to So-and-So's defense."

Reynolds continued to stare out at the vacant lot.

"Yes," said the Professor, watching him covertly, "There is much virtue in Mr. X. Conscientious and not without courage. That knifing affair last year— But there are problems. Which of us could swear that under strong temptation—"

"Temptation?" exploded the other. "You smug little manikin, what do you know about temptation? Have you a wife that's dying of T.B.? I have. 'Put her in a sanitarium,' says the doctor, 'then she'll have a chance.' Sanitariums cost money, and I haven't got that much."

"Have you considered—?"

"There's already been a long spell in the hospital, and she didn't get better. Arizona, the doctor says. The house— I mortgaged it to pay the hospital bills, and there's nothing left. Damn it, I love my wife. What would *you* do?"

"Not risk the penitentiary when there's another way. Why on earth didn't you think of the T.B. Association? There's an office on Spruce Street, they'll help you out. 2416 Spruce."

Reynolds noted it down. "Would they let it be a long-time loan? Or

maybe a little each month from my salary?"

"If the need is great they'd probably give it to you—no, you wouldn't want that, you're too stiff and proud. Go and talk to them, something can be arranged. —Waving guns and playing Jesse James! You should have your head examined!"

For long moments the Chief brooded, absently beating a tattoo on the table. Finally he squared his shoulders. He muttered, "Dig up the stuff and take it back tomorrow. Be glad to be rid of it— But Arnold! My God, *Arnold!*" The shoulders drooped. "I'll be kicked off the force—"

"Not necessarily, my friend. The word of even a smug little manikin may carry some weight—"

"Okay, okay. I apologize."

"Especially as once upon a time the smug little manikin uncovered evidence which enabled the District Attorney to win an important case. I'll talk to Arnold. I'll point out that with the return of the money nothing has been lost. I'll remind him of the hitherto unblemished reputation of the Police Chief, of the shadow of tragedy which prompted the act—"

"Damn it, I'm not whining any excuses."

"Nobody asked you to. And if you think that I shall do the whining for you, you couldn't be more mistaken. I'll present the case and let Arnold make his own decision—he would anyhow. Say, I'm starved!—man cannot live on coffee alone. Come downtown and have a bite with me."

"Huh? Oh, lunch." Reynolds worried his jaw, frowning. "Something I don't understand. If you didn't recognize —er, Mr. X— in the bank how did you know? There was nothing in Dr. Holmes's letter."

Appleby chuckled. "Oh, yes there was—there was indeed! Look at that scar on your wrist. Like three spikes on a post—you described it that way yourself. Bosh, it's a three-pronged staff, that's what it is—a trident. In other words, Poseidon's scepter—Neptune's, if you prefer the Roman name. *Now* will you munch a cheese sandwich with me at the Hole-in-the-Wall?"

"I suppose so," said the other moodily. Then he grinned. "You're a funny guy, Professor. Unexpected. I guess I haven't known you very well—you're more of a he-man than I thought. No, I won't go with you to the Hole-in-the-Wall. *You* will come with *me* for a decent meal at The Inn. My treat, and by all your favorite gods and goddesses you've earned it."

Mr. Ash was merely filling in for the Loan Manager until the afternoon. Now, what could be dangerous about that? In a well-regulated bank with an established routine, with an armed guard near at hand, and with the State Bank Examiners themselves on the scene?

BREAK IN THE ROUTINE

by ED LACY

AT 10:30 A.M. A LARGE ELDERLY man wearing an expensive but worn tweed suit walked into the Hampton Bank. His thick gray hair was carefully brushed, his shoes were neatly polished, and his big hands hung at his sides, right hand balled into a fist. He asked the guard, "Where's the Loan Department?"

"Mr. Ash is taking care of that this morning. His desk is on the other side of the railing," the guard said, pointing to a slender clean-cut man in his mid-30s who was talking on the phone. There were two other desks at the side of his, with neat brass signs of MANAGER and ASS'T. MANAGER on them, both empty at the moment.

The elderly man walked in and stood at the desk as Mr. Ash said into the phone, "Well, thank you very much for the information," and then hung up. He smiled at the heavy man in tweeds and asked, "Can I help you, sir?"

"You can. I'd like to see about a loan."

Mr. Ash glanced at his wrist watch. "Could you possibly return in the afternoon, sir? I'm merely filling in for the Loan Manager. I could start you on the usual application forms, but it happens that the Loan Manager and the Manager are busy this morning—the State Bank Examiners came in unexpectedly; and since the Loan Manager would have to pass on your application anyway—"

"I'd like to get started on the matter now," the elderly man said softly.

"Very well. Sit down, please." Ash nodded his crewcut head at the chair next to his desk and took a loan application blank from his drawer. The older man sat down, right fist in his lap. Ash told him, "Now sir, if you'll give me your name and address, type of business, the amount of the loan, the kind of collateral—"

"Were you ever in the army?" the heavy man interrupted.

Ash's handsome face showed surprise. "Yes, I was in Korea. If this is a G.I. loan—" He glanced at the other's gray hair, hesitated.

"I must inform you they are no longer—"

"This is not a G.I. loan. I want $10,000."

"Yes. Well, Mr—? What is your name, sir?" Ash asked, picking up a pen.

"Forget my name." The elderly man hunched forward, placing his big right fist on the desk. "First you must see my collateral." Carefully raising the middle two fingers of his right fist, he asked, "Do you know what I'm holding, Mr. Ash?"

Sweat appeared on Ash's forehead. "Yes, sir! It's a—a hand grenade!"

"Exactly. Notice that I've pulled the pin, so once the pressure of all my fingers is removed from the grenade handle, it will explode."

"But you'll be killed!" Ash whispered.

"Indeed, the explosion will splatter me all over your nice marble walls—and you too! Listen to me carefully, Mr. Ash. I don't want to kill you but I'm a desperate man and I'm not afraid of death. Don't try anything tricky, like pressing an alarm button or alerting the guard. Even if he shoots me, once I open my hand, we'll *both* die. Do you understand?"

Ash gulped. "Yes, sir! W-what do you want me to do?"

"First, don't move, remain seated. Next, pick up your phone and have a teller bring you a bag with $10,000 in $20 bills. Should the teller become suspicious, or if the guard comes over, they will merely join the circle of death. Make it clear that you need the money at once, that you'll explain later."

"But, sir, a teller won't bring over that much money without my giving him a reason—a convincing reason."

"All right, have the teller give it to the guard and tell him to bring the money here. I don't care how many people are around me—they'll die too if they don't obey me. Once the moneybag is in my left hand, you'll walk with me to the door and out to my car. You won't be harmed. But impress on the guard and the teller that shooting me will only cause the grenade to explode and kill all of us."

Ash stared at the older man for a second. The big man snapped, "I'm not bluffing! If I don't get the money it doesn't make the slightest difference to me whether I live or die!"

"I understand. Do you mind if I light a cigarette?" Ash asked, nodding at a pack of butts on his desk. "Would you care for one?"

"Stop stalling! I won't warn you a second time."

"I believe you," Ash said, taking a cigarette and lighting it. Then, leaning back in his chair, he said, "I'm not stalling, sir. You said you're not afraid to die. This is a bit of bad luck for you—*but neither am I.*"

"Get the money or I swear we'll both be killed!"

"My dear man, I don't mind being killed. I happen to be desperate myself. My wife left me this morning—with my best friend. Rather than face life alone—I love her very much—I'd rather be dead. Suicide has been on my mind all morning, but I didn't have the guts. Now you come along—a break for me."

"Fool, don't try bluffing me!"

Ash blew out a neat smoke ring. "If you think I'm bluffing, go ahead and open your hand."

"I'm warning you, this is a live grenade!"

"I know it is—I saw enough of them in Korea," Ash said calmly, moving his left shoe under the desk toward the silent alarm button.

"I'm warning you for the last time—we'll both die if you don't phone for the money at once."

Ash blew out another smoke ring. "You've done a lot of talking about dying. So I'm telling you—either open your hand or get out of here. Your scheme was stupid anyway. What kind of a bank do you think this is where I could have a teller bring over $10,000 at my mere asking for it?"

The old man's eyes widened as he stared at his right fist—as if it wasn't really a part of him. The thumb opened—just a little—then closed on the grenade again. Helpless fear filled the man's eyes.

Ash did three things: his foot pressed the alarm button, his mouth blew a cloud of smoke at the other man, and his hands shot out and grabbed the old man's right fist, pressing the fingers tightly around the grenade.

Suddenly there was a great deal of confusion in the bank. Frightened customers stood around, bewildered. The guard was covering the old man, still seated at Ash's desk, with his gun. The Manager and Assistant Manager, the State Examiners, stood at desks beside Ash's.

Still holding the old man's hand, Ash said again, "Everybody stay away from us! He has a live grenade!" The elderly man sat there, dazed, making no effort to resist or to pull his hand from Ash's.

Police sirens screamed and seconds later four cops rushed into the bank, their guns drawn. Ash called out, "Stay back—this man has a live grenade! Don't try to hit him!"

Still clutching the elderly man's right fist tightly, Ash stood up. The old man also got to his feet. Followed by the police and the guard, Ash backed to the door, leading the old man by his right fist. Once on the sidewalk, the odd group walked toward a vacant lot.

Ash told the old man, "Do as I tell you and you won't die. Open your fingers as I press on them,—*slowly*—and let me replace the pressure on the grenade handle with my own fingers. Careful now —one mistake and we all go!"

The elderly man nodded. As he gently raised a finger, Ash simultaneously put his own finger on the grenade. When he was holding the grenade alone, and the police had handcuffs on the old man, Ash snapped, "Now get off the lot, all of you—back behind one of the buildings. And stay there!"

When he was alone on the lot, Ash took a deep breath, heaved the grenade, and promptly hit the dirt. There was a loud explosion about 40 feet away, flying dirt and rubbish . . .

The Manager patted Ash on the back and said, "Fast thinking! You really used your head. That phony wife bit was clever." The Manager winked. "You're a sly one—wife! I've heard about you and your girl friends, Ash. You've not only saved our money but—and far more important—many people might have been killed or hurt. By using your head you prevented a nasty situation."

Ash brushed his dirty suit. "All a matter of psychology, sir. I knew that nobody really wants to die. May I—?"

"This has so upset the Examiners that we're all knocking off until one thirty for a long lunch. But I have reporters coming over then and I assure you the Board of Directors will hear of your heroic action. There should be a promotion coming your way soon, Ash."

"Well, thank you, sir." Ash pointed toward his dirty suit. "May I go home and change, sir?"

"Of course. But be back by one thirty. I'd like the news photographer to get a picture while there are customers in the bank—good publicity. Perhaps we'll even have one with the Examiners in the background—butter them up, too."

As Ash drove to his apartment he saw it was only 11:34. He grabbed a brief case and a packed bag, then sped toward the airport. "Boy, what a break!" he thought. "*Now* the Examiners can't possibly learn of the shortage until late in the afternoon—and by then I'll be landing on some Caribbean island under a false name." He patted the stuffed brief case at his side.

first publication in the United States

new novelet by

JOHN CREASEY

We welcome the first appearance in EQMM of John Creasey, equally well known to American readers as J. J. Marric, author of the popular Gideon novels . . . This novelet, never before published in the United States, brings you Chief Inspector Roger West of New Scotland Yard, in the kind of police procedural story that Creasey-Marric does so well—detailed, painstaking, authentic. But with something more—human interest, heart. West and Gideon are thoroughly professional policemen—yet not so objectively professional that they cannot be touched personally by something of each tragedy they investigate—especially when there is a witness, an innocent bystander, only seven years old . . .

NOTE TO THE AUTHOR: *Now that the "ice is broken," why not write a Gideon short story or novelet especially for EQMM?*

THE GREYLING CRESCENT TRAGEDY

by JOHN CREASEY

THE CHILD LAY LISTENING TO the raised, angry voices. He was a little frightened, because he had never heard his mother and father quarrel so. Quarrel, yes, but nothing like this. Nor had he known such silence or such awkward handling from his mother while he had been washed and put to bed.

He was seven—a babyish rather than a boyish seven.

He could hear them in the next room—now his father, shouting, next his mother, shouting back. Once she screamed out words he understood, but most of the time there was harsh shrillness or the rough, hard tones of his father.

He had not known that they could make such noise, for they were gentle people.

The child lay fighting sleep, and fearful, longing for a gleam of light to break the darkness, or for a sound at the door to herald their coming; but there was no relief for him that way.

There was relief of a kind.

The voices stilled, and the child

almost held his breath, not wanting to hear the ugly sounds again. He did not. He heard the sharp slam of a door, and after that, his mother crying.

Crying.

Soon sleep came over the child in great soothing waves which he could not resist. The darkness lost its terror, the longing for the door to open faded away into oblivion . . .

Usually the child woke first in this household, and waking was gentle and welcome. This morning was no different. There was spring's early morning light, bright yet not glaring, for it was early and the morning sun did not shine into this room. But there was the garden, the lawn he could play on, the red metal swing, the wide flowerbed along one side, the vegetable garden at the far end, rows of green soldiers in dark, freshly turned soil.

He stared from his bed, which was near the window, seeing all this and staring pensively at the heads of several daffodils which he had plucked yesterday. He frowned, as if in an effort of recollection, then turned his attention to the small gilt clock on the mantlepiece. When the hands pointed to half-past six, he was allowed to get up and play quietly; at seven, if neither his mother nor his father had been in to see him, he could go and wake them.

The position of the clock's hands puzzled him. He could not tell the time properly, but had learned these hours of great importance: half-past six, seven.

The position of the hands was not near either, and that disappointed him. He had a book, much thumbed, by the bed, and began to look at the familiar pictures of animals, and to puzzle and stumble over the unfamiliar words. In a cooing voice he read to himself in this way, until abruptly he looked at the clock again.

The hands were in exactly the same position as before.

Obviously this was wrong. He studied them earnestly, and then raised his head, as if with a new, cheering thought. A smile brightened his eyes and softened his mouth and he said, "Why, it's stopped."

He got out of bed and went to the window, his jersey pajamas rucked up about one leg and exposing part of his little round belly. He pressed his nose against the window and for a few minutes his attention was distracted by starlings, sparrows, and thrushes. One starling was pecking at a worm, quite absorbing to the boy, until his attention was distracted by a fly which began to buzz against the inside of the window. He slapped at it with his pink hand, and every time it flew off, he gave the happy chuckle of the carefree.

Suddenly he pivoted round and

looked at the clock. Birds, fly, and joy forgotten, he pattered swiftly to the door. He opened it cautiously and softly onto the small living room.

All the familiar things were there.

He looked at the clock on the wall and was obviously astonished, for the hands pointed to half-past seven—certainly later than his training had taught the need for quiet. Eagerly, happily, he crossed to his parents' room, and opened the door.

Silence greeted him.

His mother lay on her back in bed, with her eyes closed.

The bedclothes were drawn high beneath her chin, and her arms were underneath the clothes. There were other unusual features about the room, which he saw with a child's eyes, but did not think about.

His father was not by his mother's side.

He went to the bed and called, "Mummy."

His mother did not stir. He called her again, then again and again, and when she took no notice, he touched her face, her cold, cold face, not wondering why it was so cold.

"Mummy."

"Mummy, Mummy, Mummy."

It was no use, and soon he gave up, not knowing what to do . . .

For Chief Inspector Roger West of New Scotland Yard it was a normal morning. There was too much to do, but like the rest of the Criminal Investigation Department's staff, he was used to that, and dealt with each report, each query, and each memo with complete detachment. He was between cases, having just prepared a serious one for the Director of Public Prosecutions. Whenever he took his mind off the documents on his desk, he wondered what he would have to tackle next.

A messenger came into the large office which Roger shared with four other Chief Inspectors, but where he was now alone.

"Mr. Cortland would like a word with you, sir."

"Right." Roger got up at once, to go along to Superintendent Cortland's office. This would be the job.

It was.

"Looks pretty well cut and dried," said the massive, dark-haired, aging Cortland, 60 to Roger's 40. "Woman found strangled, out at Putney. When a milkman called, a child opened the door and said he couldn't wake his mother. As it was after ten, the milkman went to find out why. The child's with a neighbor now. The family's name is Pirro, an Italian name, and here's the address—29 Greyling Crescent. It's the end house or bungalow, fairly new—but you'll soon know all about it. Better go to Division first, they'll fix anything you

want. Let me know if you need help from me."

"Thanks," said Roger, and went out, brisk and alert. He collected his case from his office and hurried down to his car.

It was then a little after eleven o'clock.

An hour later he approached the bungalow in Greyling Crescent, with misgivings which always came whenever a case involved a child. Most policemen felt the same, but partly because his own sons were still young, and partly because in his early Scotland Yard days he had been in charge of a case which had been particularly savage on a boy, he was acutely sensitive.

He had learned a little more about the Pirro child from Divisional officers, who were only too glad to hand the inquiry over to a Yard man. No one put it into so many words, but it was apparent that everyone saw this as a clear-cut job: husband-and-wife quarrel, murder, flight.

From the Divisional Headquarters Roger had telephoned Cortland, asking him to put out a call for Pirro who might, of course, be at his daily job in a city office. He was an accountant with a small firm of general merchants.

The bungalow was dull—four walls, square windows which looked as if they had been sawed out of reddish-brown bricks, brown tiles, and drab brown paint. It had been dumped down on a piece of wasteland, and the nearest neighboring houses were fifty years old, tall, gray, and drab.

But the front garden transformed the bungalow.

In the center a small lawn was as trim and neat as a billiard table. About this were beds of flowers, each a segment of a circle, alternating clustered daffodils, wallflowers bushy and bright as azaleas, and polyanthus so large and full of bloom that Roger had to look twice to make sure what they were.

Two police cars, two uniformed policemen, and about twenty neighbors were near the front door. Roger nodded and half smiled at the policeman as he went in, and was greeted just inside the door by Moss, of the Division, an old friend and an elderly, cautious detective.

"Picked up Pirro yet?" Moss asked, in a voice which did not reach the street. His grin meant: "Buck up, you Yard slowcoaches."

"Sure you want him?" asked Roger.

"Oh, we want him."

"Seen in the act of murder, was he?"

"Damned nearly."

"Who by?"

"A neighbor," Moss said. "The child's with her now. For once we've got a woman who doesn't get into a flap because we're around." Moss was leading the way to an open door, beyond which men were moving and shadows appearing to the accompaniment of quiet

sounds. "She was taking her dog for a walk last night, nine-ish, and heard Pirro and his wife at it. Says she's never heard a row like it."

"I'll have a word with her later," Roger said. "How about the boy?"

Moss shrugged, and drew attention to his thick, broad shoulders.

"Doesn't realize what's happened, of course, and thinks his mother's still asleep. Not much of a future for him, I gather. No known relatives. Pirro's an Italian by birth—the neighbors don't know much about his background. The dead woman once told the neighbor she lost her parents years ago, and she was an only child."

"Found any documents?" Roger asked.

"A few. Not much to write home about," Moss said. "Ordinary enough couple, I'd say. Furniture bought on installments, monthly payments made regularly. Birth certificates for the mother and child, naturalization papers for Pirro, death certificates for Mrs. Pirro's parents; the dead woman's maiden name was Margent—Evelyn Ethel Margent. Age twenty-seven."

Moss looked at West as if puzzled, for West had made no move to go into the room of quietly busy men. "There's a family photograph over there, taken this year, I'd say. The kid looks about the same."

The photograph was a studio one, in sepia, and the parents and child were all a little set—posed too stiffly. The woman was pleasant to look at, the man had a dark handsomeness; she looked as English as he looked Southern European.

The child, unexpectedly, was nothing like either. He had a plain, round face, with a much bigger head, proportionately, than either the man or the woman, big startled eyes, and very thin arms; their legs weren't in the picture.

"Did you say you'd seen the child's birth certificate?" Roger asked.

"Yes."

"All normal?"

"Take a look and see."

There it was: father, Anthony Pirro, mother Evelyn Ethel, date—

"What's the date on the marriage certificate?" Roger asked, and Moss handed the certificate to him. "Thanks. February 7, 1950, and the child was born October 1, 1950."

"Must have got married for love anyway," Moss said. "They couldn't have known for sure the kid was on the way when they got spliced."

"No. Let's have a look round," Roger said, and still kept out of the bedroom.

He went into each small room and the kitchen, and everything was spick and span except for the morning's dust. The furniture was good for a small suburban house, and in excellent taste. Here was a home that was loved, where happiness should live.

At last Roger pushed the door of the bedroom wider open.

Death had not spoiled Mrs. Pirro's pleasant face, except for the dark, browny bruises at her throat. A police surgeon was there, waiting—Dr. Sturgeon, whom Roger knew well, with photographers and a fingerprint man.

"Hello, Handsome," Sturgeon greeted.

"Hello, Dick. How are things?"

"About what they seem, I'd say. Tell you better when I've done the p.m."

"When did she die?"

Sturgeon pursed and puckered his full lips.

"Sometime between eight o'clock last night and midnight."

"Playing safe, aren't you?" Roger commented dryly, and studied the woman's pale, untroubled face. He was hardened to the sight of death, in the young as well as the old, yet Evelyn Pirro stirred him to deep pity. Add the bright gaiety of life to her features and one could see a kind of beauty.

"Any other injuries?" Roger asked.

"None that I've noticed yet."

"General condition?"

"Excellent."

"Any sign of another child?"

"No. You're a rum 'un," Sturgeon added thoughtfully. "What put that into your head?"

"Go and have a look at the family photograph in the next room and also have a look round," Roger advised. "That might give you some ideas. Then you'd better take her away. Photographs finished?" he asked the youthful, red-faced photographer who had been standing by.

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Fingerprints got anything?" Roger asked a tall and sallow man who had a little dank gray hair.

"Three sets," this man replied promptly, and nodded at the bed. "Hers, another set probably a man's, and the child's."

"Anything else?"

"No, sir."

"Forced entry, or anything like that?"

"I've checked the windows and doors," Moss answered.

"Thanks," said Roger.

"What I want to know is, why did it happen," Moss said suddenly. "Look at the house and the way it's kept. What makes a man come home and kill his wife and run out on his kid?"

"You couldn't be more right on that score—we want the motive as badly as we want Pirro," Roger agreed, almost sententiously. "Something set off this eruption, and that cause is the real killer."

The morning sun caught his face and hair as he stood by the window looking out onto the back garden. There the lawn was less trim than that at the front, obviously because the child had been allowed to play on it. There were bare dirt patches

beneath a metal swing which showed bright red in the bright light.

Roger studied all this and considered the evidence of what he had seen and heard, only vaguely aware that Moss, Sturgeon, and the others had taken time to study him. He looked strikingly handsome, with his fair, wavy hair, and his features set and grim, as if something of this tragedy touched him personally.

Then he caught sight of a movement in a garden beyond a patch of scarlet, and soon a woman, calling, "Tony. Tony!"

But she was too late, for a child in a red jersey had started to climb a wooden fence, the stakes of which were several inches apart, nimble and sure-footed. The woman hurried after him, tall, pleasant-faced, anxious.

"Tony, don't fall!"

"I won't fall," the boy said clearly, as Roger opened the French windows and stepped outside.

Sight of him achieved what the woman had failed to, and the child stopped. The sun touched him on one side, and made his fair hair look silky and bright, and his fair, round face was puzzled. One long leg was this side of the fence, and he held onto the top firmly with both small hands.

The neighbor caught up with him.

"Who is that man?" the boy demanded firmly. "Is it a doctor?"

"Tony, please . . ."

"Is it a doctor come to wake Mummy up?"

So they still had not told the child the truth.

Roger felt quite sure that they should, soon. It was false kindness not to, and it would probably shock and surprise soft-hearted people to find out how calmly the child would take the news. Seven was a strangely impersonal age, when such hurts could be absorbed without outward sign of injury.

"I'll tell you when the doctor comes," the woman promised. "You must come in now."

She was nice. Fifty-ish, with dark hair turning gray, a full figure, a navy blue dress. Her hand was firm on the child's thin shoulder, and he turned away from Roger and climbed down.

"I'm sorry, but I'm not a doctor," Roger said, and won a grave scrutiny.

Then Moss called out quietly from the French windows.

"I'll have to go," Roger went on gravely. "Goodbye for now."

"Goodbye, sir," the child said, and Roger turned away thoughtfully, and went to Moss.

"What's on?"

"We've just had a flash from the Yard—a message from Keeling and Keeling, Pirro's office."

"What?"

"He hasn't turned up this morning."

"Right," said Roger. "I'll come and talk to the Yard."

He moved swiftly, suddenly decisive, and the sight of the stretcher being pushed into the ambulance did not make him pause. He slid into his own car, noticing that the crowd had swollen to forty or fifty. Windows were open at the drab houses and women stood at their front doors, all looking this way.

Roger flicked on his radio, and when the Yard Information Room answered, he said, "Give me Mr. Cortland."

A small car swung into the crescent, stopped abruptly, and two men got out—newspapermen, one with a camera. Roger watched them as he waited.

"What are you after, West?" Cortland demanded.

"I'd like the whole works here," Roger said promptly. "Enough men to question all the neighbors and to try to find out exactly what time Pirro left home last night. Quick inquiry at his office, too, to find out if he's been nervy lately. Check on any boy friends his wife might have had just before they married and whether any old flame has come on the scene again lately. How about it?"

"Take what men you need, but release 'em as soon as you can." Cortland was almost curt.

"Thanks," said Roger.

Soon it was all on the move. Detectives from the Yard and the Division swarmed the crescent; neighbor after neighbor was questioned; statement after statement was made and written down.

Roger himself went to see the neighbor who was looking after the boy, and heard her story firsthand; it was simple enough and exactly what Moss had already told him. The woman, a Mrs. Frost, was calm and obviously capable; frank, too.

"I'll gladly look after the boy for a few days, but I don't know what's likely to happen after that," she said. "Mrs. Pirro had often told me she had no relations."

"And her husband?

"She knew of none, anyhow."

"Did they often quarrel, Mrs. Frost?" Roger asked without warning.

"I've never known a more contented couple and I've seldom heard a wry word," she said. "It was almost too good to be true. They both doted on Tony, too."

"Has anything unusual happened recently?"

Mrs. Frost, the nice woman, hesitated as if she didn't quite know how to answer; but Roger did not need to prompt her.

"Not really, except one thing, and I feel beastly even mentioning it, but she had a visitor yesterday morning. Tony was at school, of course. I saw a man drive up in a small car, and go in, and—" Mrs. Frost paused, but set confusion quickly aside. "I daresay you'll think I'm being catty, but I was sur-

prised. It was a young man, and he was there for at least two hours. He left just before Mrs. Pirro went to fetch Tony from school."

She had never seen the caller before, she answered Roger, and hadn't noticed much about him, except that he was tall and fair. There was no way even of guessing whether the visitor had anything to do with what had happened.

Roger left her, without seeing the child, had a word with Moss, and then went to Keeling & Keeling's offices, in Fenchurch Street. It was the third floor of an old dark building with an open-sided elevator and an elderly one-armed attendant.

Pirro had not come back.

Pirro had been quite normal all of yesterday, his short, stoutish employer asserted. An exemplary worker. A happy man. In receipt of a good salary. Special friends? No, no confidants here, either. Kept himself to himself. By all means question the staff, if it would help.

There were thirteen members of the staff. Two men seemed to have known Pirro rather better than the others, and the picture of the man became clearer in Roger's mind. Pirro brought sandwiches to lunch every day, went straight home every night, was passionately devoted to his wife, doted on his child.

It was impossible to believe that he had killed his wife, they said. *Impossible.*

Did anyone know where his wife had worked before her marriage?

Of course; at an office on the floor below—Spencer's.

Roger went there, to find a benign-looking, round-headed elderly man who made a living out of selling insurance. Did he remember Evelyn Margent? A *charming* girl, and most capable. Surely no *trouble?* So devoted to her Italian young man. Other boy friends? We-*ell*—was there anything wrong in a boy friend or two before marriage? Surely it was customary, even wise? What girl knew her mind while she was in her teens?

"Mr. Spencer, do you know if Mrs. Pirro had an affair just before her marriage?" Roger was now almost curt, for benignity could be too bland. This man's round head and round face worried him, too; by now Sturgeon would know why.

"As a matter of fact, Chief Inspector, yes, she did. But I insist that it was perfectly normal, and certainly no harm came of it."

"With whom, please?"

Spencer became haughty. "With my son, Chief Inspector."

"Thank you," Roger said. "Have you a photograph of your son here, Mr. Spencer?"

"I really cannot see the purpose of such an inquiry. My son—"

Spencer didn't finish, but lost a little of his blandness, opened a drawer in an old-fashioned desk, and took out several photographs:

of a woman and a boy, the woman and a youth, the woman and a young man perhaps in his early thirties.

"There is my wife and son, Chief Inspector, at various ages. Take your choice."

Roger studied the photographs impassively. He did not speak for some time, although he already knew exactly what he wanted to ask next. Spencer's son, over the years, was fair-haired and round-faced, and in the photograph of him as a child, he looked remarkably like little Tony Pirro.

"Thank you, Mr. Spencer," Roger said at last. "Will you be good enough to tell me where your son is?"

"He should be here at any time," Spencer said, and his own round face was red with an embarrassment, perhaps distress, that he couldn't hide. "He is my partner in business. Why do you want to see him, Chief Inspector?"

"I would like to know whether he has seen Mrs. Pirro recently."

Spencer was now a harassed, resigned man.

"I can tell you that," he said. "Yes, Chief Inspector, he has. It is a long story, an unhappy story. By dismal chance he saw Mrs. Pirro and her son only a few days ago. He—he told me about it. He was in great distress, very great distress. The likeness—"

"Likeness?"

"You are a man of the world, Chief Inspector, and there is no point in beating about the bush. My son and Mrs. Pirro were once on terms of intimacy—her marriage to Pirro came as a great shock. A *great* shock. He did not dream that her child was *his* child, but he told me that once he saw them together, it was beyond all doubt.

"Naturally, he wanted to see his son. He was quite prepared to do so without disturbing Mrs. Pirro's domestic life, but it was more than flesh and blood could stand not to see his own—ch-child. All last evening he talked to me about it. My advice was that he should try to put everything out of his mind, but I doubt if he ever will. It's a great tragedy, there's positively no other word for it."

"Has he seen Mrs. Pirro since that chance encounter?"

"Oh, yes. He went there yesterday morning. He—but here is Charles, he can speak for himself."

Charles Spencer came in, and the likeness between him and Mrs. Pirro's son put the identity of the father beyond any reasonable doubt.

"Dead," echoed Charles Spencer, just two minutes later. "Evelyn *dead?*" He looked from Roger to his father, and back again, as if unbelieving. "But *how?*"

"That's what I'm trying to establish, Mr. Spencer," Roger said.

"It's fantastic! I can't believe it.

She—she didn't give me the slightest indication." The round face was red in this man's own kind of dismay.

"Indication of what, Mr. Spencer?"

"That she would do away with herself! She—she agreed that as I knew about the boy I couldn't be expected to lose sight of him. It's dreadful. It—"

"Mrs. Pirro was murdered, Mr. Spencer."

"Oh, my God," breathed Charles Spencer. "Oh, my God." Then, as if the words were wrung from him, "She said he'd kill her if he ever found out."

Roger went into Cortland's office about six o'clock that evening.

"Still no sign of Pirro," he said abruptly. "Will you give the okay to put that call for him all over the country?"

"Can do. What's worrying you?"

"I'd rather he didn't kill himself before we get him," Roger said brusquely. "It could happen. I don't like the case at all—there's something very nasty about it."

"You never were happy until you'd got your man," Cortland said, and telephoned to have the call for Pirro extended. When he rang off he said, "Now, what've you got so far?"

A summary of the investigation took twenty minutes in the telling. Cortland listened attentively, and made little comment beyond, "Well, it's all adding up. You've found two neighbors who saw Spencer go there yesterday morning, three who heard last night's quarrel, two who saw Pirro leave just after nine fifteen. Any doubt about that time?"

"No. It was just after a television program; the neighbors, husband and wife, took their dog for an airing."

"Seems straightforward enough," Cortland said. "We've had a few false reports that Pirro's been seen, but that's all. Seldom went anywhere else, as you knew, just a home bird. We've got his history," Cortland went on, and handed over some papers.

Roger scanned them.

Pirro's parents had settled in England shortly before the war; when they died, he was sixteen, and had already spent most of his life in England. There were details about people whom he and his parents had known, and much to show that Pirro had always been regarded as wholly trustworthy. During the war he had worked with the Civil Defense.

"None of the people who knew him then seem to have kept in touch," said Cortland. "But you know pretty well all there is about him since he got married, don't you?"

"Yes," admitted Roger. "We've got an even-tempered, home-loving man, no outside interests, nice wife, apparently thoroughly happy, who

comes home one night and is heard shouting and raving, for the first time ever. That morning, the wife's old lover had appeared and we now know he was the child's father. So—"

"If Mrs. Pirro decided to tell her husband the truth, that could explain what happened," Cortland interrupted. "Enough to drive a man of Pirro's kind off his rocker, too, and it's easy to go too far. We'll soon pick him up, and he'll—"

"I hope we don't pick his body out of a river," Roger said gruffly. "I'm trying to think where a man in his position would go in such a crisis. Home wrecked and life wrecked. Where—" He broke off and snapped his fingers. "I wonder where they spent their honeymoon."

"Margate, probably," Cortland commented dryly.

"Mrs. Frost would know," said Roger. "I'll have the Division ask her." He saw Cortland's grin at his impatience, but that didn't worry him. All he wanted was an answer, and one soon came: the Pirros had honeymooned in Bournemouth.

It was almost an anticlimax when Pirro was picked up on the cliffs at Bournemouth late that evening.

"All alive, too," Cortland jeered.

"That could be a good thing," Roger said. "Does he know why he's been picked up?"

"No."

"When did he go, has he said?"

"Last night's mail train—10:42 from Waterloo. He went to Putney Station, was seen hanging about for twenty minutes or so, caught a train to Waterloo for the 10:42 to Bournemouth, with a few minutes to spare."

"I see. Mind if I go down to get him?" Roger asked.

"Mind he doesn't give you the slip." Cortland jeered again.

Pirro was smaller than Roger had expected, but even better-looking than in his photograph—a short, compact man with jet-black hair, and fine, light blue eyes which made him quite striking. His lips were set and taut and his hands were clenched as he jumped up from a chair when Roger and a Bournemouth detective entered the room where he was guarded by a uniformed policeman; but he didn't speak.

"Good evening, Mr. Pirro," Roger greeted mildly. "I am Chief Inspector West of New Scotland Yard, and I would like you to answer a few questions."

"Is it not time you answered questions?" Pirro demanded, with restrained anger. "Why am I kept here? Why am I treated as a criminal? I demand an answer."

Was he simply being clever?

His English had a slight trace of an accent, and was a little more precisely uttered than most. He had had a lot of time to think over the situation, and might have pre-

pared answers of a kind to every question. The best thing would be to catch him off his guard.

There was only one way—to use shock tactics. Roger used them, roughly, abruptly.

"Anthony Pirro, it is my duty to arrest you in connection with the murder of your wife, Mrs. Evelyn Ethel Pirro, at about ten o'clock last night, and I must inform you that anything you say will be written down and may be used in evidence against you."

During the charge Pirro first started violently, then his expression and his whole body seemed to go slack. Then suddenly a new expression came into his eyes. Did he will that expression? Had he carefully and cunningly prepared for this moment of crisis.

His next reaction took both Roger and the Bournemouth man by surprise. He leaped forward as if to attack, snatched at Roger's hands and gripped his wrists tightly.

"You are lying, she is not dead," he said fiercely. "You are lying!"

His body quivered, his white teeth clenched, his fingers dug into Roger's wrists.

"You know very well she is dead," Roger said coldly, nodding the Bournemouth man to stand back.

"No!" cried Pirro, as if real horror touched him now. "No, she is not dead, she cannot be. I pushed her away from me, that is all. I felt that I hated her, but *dead—*"

It was an hour before he could talk rationally, and much that he said was obviously true. His wife had told him the truth about the child, and in the rage and hurt of the revelation Pirro had wished both her and himself dead; he had raved and damned and cursed her, had struck her and stormed out of their home. But—

"I did not kill her," he said in a hushed voice. "When I came here I knew she remained everything to me. I could not live without her . . .

"I *cannot* live without her," he went on abruptly. "It is not possible." Then calmness took possession of him, as if he knew that further denials were useless, and did not really matter.

"The child?" Roger asked.

"He is not mine," said Pirro. "I have no wife and I have no son."

"Well, you've got everything you can expect," Cortland said, next afternoon at the Yard. "Motive, opportunity, and an admission that he struck her. He could have had a brainstorm and not remember choking the life out of her, but that's neither here nor there. Don't tell me you're not satisfied."

"I'm still not happy about it," Roger said. "Pirro closed up completely when he realized his wife was dead, and behaved as if nothing mattered after that. He hasn't

said a word since. We've checked that he caught the 10:42 from Waterloo to Bournemouth. He seems to have retraced the steps he and his wife took on their honeymoon. They loved each other so much for so long that I feel I must find out exactly what happened to cause all this."

"If he won't talk, who will?" Cortland demanded.

"The child might," Roger said slowly. "I wanted to avoid it but now I'm going to question him."

Little Tony Pirro looked up into Roger's face, his own gray eyes grave and earnest. He stood by the bungalow, and Roger sat back, a cigarette in his hand, aware that Mrs. Frost was anxious and disapproving in the kitchen, with the door ajar.

Tony had said, "Good morning, sir," with well-learned politeness, and waited until Roger said, "Do you know who I am, Tony?"

"Yes, sir. You are a policeman."

"That's right. Do you know why I'm here?"

"Aunt May said you were going to ask me some questions."

"That's right, too. They're important questions."

"I know. They're about my Mummy being ill."

"Yes, she's very ill, you know."

"The doctor said she was going to die," announced Tony, with no inflection in his voice, "but it won't hurt her."

Damn good doctor.

"It won't hurt at all," Roger assured the child. "Did you see her last night?"

"No, I was living here, with Mrs. Frost."

"When was the last time you saw her?"

"Oh, lots of times."

"Can you remember the very last time?"

"Yes, of course."

"When was it, Tony?"

"Not last night, but the night before that."

"Where were you?" asked Roger, almost awkwardly.

"In my bedroom."

Roger's eyes widened as if in surprise.

"Have you a whole bedroom all to yourself?"

"Oh, yes." Tony's eyes lit up, and he turned and pointed. "It's over there."

"I'd like to see it," Roger said, and got up. "Will you show me?"

"Oh, yes," said Tony eagerly. "It's a big room, and Daddy papered the walls 'specially for my birthday."

He went, hurrying, to open the door onto the small room, with Robin Hood motifs on the walls, the bed, even on the toys. He stood proudly, waiting for Roger's look of surprised approval, and also waiting on his words.

"Well!" Roger breathed. "This is wonderful! Robin Hood, too. Look at him! I hope he won't

shoot you with his bow and arrow."

"Oh, he won't, he's only a picture," Tony announced, as a statement, not reproof.

"Oh, of course," Roger said, and continued to look round for several minutes, before asking, "Did Mummy come in to say good night?—the night before last, I mean."

"Yes."

"The way she always does?"

"Yes."

"Was she ill then?"

"No," said Tony thoughtfully. "She wasn't ill, but she wasn't happy like she usually is."

"Oh, what a pity. How do you know?"

"She was crying."

"Did she cry very much?"

"No, only a little bit. She didn't want me to see."

"Did she cry very often?" Roger persisted.

"Well, only sometimes."

"When did she usually cry, Tony?"

"When Daddy was ill," Tony said, very simply. "It was Christmas, and Daddy had to see the doctor."

"Did she ever cry when Daddy was well?"

"Oh, no, *never.*"

"That's good. When she cried the night before last, was Daddy here?"

"No, Daddy wasn't home then."

"Did you hear him come home?"

"Oh, yes, I always recognize his footsteps, and Mummy does, too."

"Did he come to you and say good night?"

"Yes."

"Was he crying?"

"Oh, Daddy doesn't cry," Tony said with proud emphasis. "He's a man."

"Of course, how silly of me. Was he happy that night?"

"He was happy with me," Tony declared.

"The same as usual?"

"Just the same."

"Was he happy with Mummy?"

"Well, he was at first," Tony said quietly, and then went on without any prompting. "Then he shouted at Mummy, ever so loud. It woke me up, and I listened for ever such a long time. Daddy shouted and shouted, and Mummy cried, and then *she* shouted back at him. I didn't like it, so I put my head under the bedclothes."

"That was a good idea. When you took it out again, were they still shouting?"

"Well, yes, they were."

"Both of them?"

"Well, no," said Tony, after a pause. "Only Daddy was."

"Did you hear Mummy at all?"

"She was crying again."

"Was she crying very much?"

"Well, quite a lot, really."

"How long did Daddy shout at her?"

"Not long, then. He went out."

"How do you know?"

"Well, I heard him bang the door and then walk along the street. He was going ever so fast."

"Was he by himself?"

"Oh, yes."

"Didn't Mummy go with him?"

"She just cried and cried," Tony said, quite dispassionately. "And then she went all quiet. I thought she'd gone to sleep. I didn't know she was ill."

"Tony," said Roger softly, "I want you to think very carefully about this. Did your Mummy cry *after* your Daddy banged the door?"

"Oh, yes, like I told you."

"Did she cry a lot?"

"Ever such a lot."

"Did she come and see you then?"

"No, she didn't."

"What did happen?"

"I just went to sleep," Tony said, with the same complete detachment, "and when I went to see Mummy in the morning she wouldn't wake up."

"I see," said Roger, and he had to fight to keep from showing his excitement to this child. "Thank you very much for answering my questions so nicely. I'm going away now, but I'll see you again soon."

In the next room he spoke to the sergeant who had been there with a notebook. "Get all that?"

"Every word, sir."

"Fine!" Roger went out of the room as swiftly as a man could move, and strode into the street and to his car. This afternoon there were fewer spectators. He slid into his seat and flicked on the radio, and when the Yard answered, he asked for Cortland.

Cortland soon came on.

"Seen the Pirro child?" he demanded.

"Yes, we've had a talk," said Roger, "and he's told us a lot we didn't suspect. I'm going over to check Charles Spencer's movements last night. His father's given him an alibi but it might be easy to break."

"Hey, what's all this about?" Cortland demanded.

"The child says that his mother cried after Pirro left," Roger said. "If that's true, she was alive when he went out. I'd believe that Pirro would kill his wife in a rage, but not that he'd go out, cool down, and come back and kill her in cold blood."

"My God!" breathed Cortland. "All right, get cracking."

The Yard and the Division put every man they could spare onto the inquiry. Results weren't long in coming.

Charles Spencer had left his father's Chelsea house at half-past nine on the night of the murder, giving him ample time to get to the Putney bungalow in time to kill Mrs. Pirro. His car had been noticed in a main road near the bungalow. He had been seen walking toward Greyling Crescent. No one

had actually seen him enter the bungalow, but he had been seen driving off in the car an hour later.

By the middle of the afternoon that third day Roger saw Charles Spencer at the Fenchurch Street Office—the man so like his son, protesting his innocence mildly at first, then indignantly, then angrily. But eventually he grew frightened, his round face reddening, his big strong hands clenching and unclenching.

"Mr. Spencer, I want to know why you went to see Mrs. Pirro that night, and what happened while you were there," Roger insisted coldly.

"Supposing I did see her for a few minutes—that's no crime! I went to see that she was okay. She was perfectly well when I left her. Her brute of a husband had run out on her, and she was terrified in case he'd come back and do her some harm. He did come back and he strangled her—"

"No, he didn't," Roger said flatly. "He walked to Putney Station, waited twenty minutes for a train to Waterloo, then caught the mail train to Bournemouth, the ten forty-two. He couldn't possibly have had time to go back to the bungalow. Mr. Spencer, why did you kill Mrs. Pirro?"

"Damn good thing you decided to tackle the child again," Cortland said, on the following day. "How about motive? Made any sense of it yet?"

"It's showing up clearly," Roger told him. "Young Spencer always hated Pirro for taking his mistress away from him. When he discovered the child, all the old resentment boiled up. I doubt if we'll ever know whether he meant to kill Mrs. Pirro; he might have gone there to try to resume the old relationship, and hurt Pirro that way. Whatever the motive, we've got him tight."

"Only bad thing left is that kid's future," Cortland said gruffly.

"Pirro's going to see him tonight," Roger said thoughtfully. "A man of his kind of heart-searching honesty can't throw six years away so easily. You get fond of a child in six weeks, let alone six years. I'm really hopeful, anyhow."

"Fine," Cortland said, more heartily. "Now, there's a job out at Peckham—"

The closest that Dubois (out of Damon Runyon by Ring Lardner) had ever been to a fortune was the time he was a pallbearer at Hymie Bates's funeral—Hymie once won the daily double. The only trouble was, the key was as hot as a firecracker on the Fourth of July . . .

THE HOT KEY CAPER

by ARTHUR MOORE

Banty is a little guy about five feet tall and shaped something like a railroad spike. He is just as soft. However, Banty is not thick in the thinkpot. He has got like oiled wheels where other guys is nothing but plain bone.

Banty has informed everyone he is a retired hood. He is always referring to his past and laughing. When he laughs it is like a tiger remembering a juicy leg-of-native.

But when I meet Banty at the bus station it is my lucky day. I am seeing Windy Wilson off to Jersey. Windy, who has not spoke ten words since Prohibition, grunts at me as the bus pulls out. I am waving at him, flattered at his prattle, when Banty knocks me down.

"Grab dis, Dubois," he says and then he is gone like a bootlegger's wink.

I am picking myself up off the asphalt when two large, wheezing, plain-clothes bulls knock me down again. They are chasing Banty and are running out of the money. Banty is going around things but the dicks are going through them.

When the procession finally tails off, I am left with a key in my hand.

I don't look at the key till I am a block away from the bus station. Then I see it is one of them public-locker keys. Banty has stashed something in a locker just before the fuzz closed in on him. And he has give me the key to hold.

As I am holding it, the key gets very hot. I have to slip it in my pocket or suffer third-degree burns on my flab. Good old Banty has just made me one of the gang.

If they catch Banty now, he will sport no evidence, so they will maybe roust him around a bit and then spring him. Whereupon he will look me up pronto. I suddenly remember I have a hole in the pocket, so I clutch the key. If I do not have it when Banty comes calling for it, he will chop me up very fine—but he will probably do something unpleasant first.

When I hear the sirens I naturally scoot. There is a noisy crowd gathering on the far side of the bus station, so I hustle the other way to

The 97 Club to take the weight off my brains.

The 97 Club is only a room with lots of prizefight pictures and beer stains. Eliot Ness once kicked holes in beer barrels behind the bar, and the smell lingers. It is one of Banty's numerous hangouts.

Sammy, the barkeep, gives me the fisheye and nods like maybe he has seen me before but can't remember in which lineup. I slide onto a stool and shove a warm dime at him.

"Gimme a short beer, Sammy."

He nods again, draws a foamy one, parks it in front of me, and palms the scratch. He is a runty creature wearing a large blotchy marble for a head, and his hair looks like it is painted on. I am sure that in other, less civilized parts of the world, Sammy would be considered either dead or not expected to live.

He stares at me like we have just announced our engagement. I begin to wonder if the fluid is poisoned and Sammy has got a ringside seat for the finale.

"Hi, Dubois," he grunts at last, and starts picking his teeth with his finger. I am glad he has got me pegged.

"You seen Banty lately?" I ask—and instantly I realize I should have asked him, instead, if he still has any of the Lindbergh Kidnap dough left.

He jerks upright and bites the finger. His funny eyes get big and he swallows hard; then he slumps down and turns several different muddy colors. He is so wobble-eyed that he is looking at the front and back doors at the same time. It is such a fascinting show that I almost slop the Milwaukee dew.

"What about Banty?" he snarls. He pushes his ugly phiz into mine, and his shifty little eyes is making me seasick. I would swear he has two eyeballs in each eye. "How come you askin' about Banty?"

"I ju-just—ah—happened to see him this A.M.," I say.

"Oh," he growls. "You seen him, huh?"

"I see lots of guys."

"You do, huh?"

"I'm seein' you," I say, lifting the glass shakily. "Ain't I?"

He broods about that but it seems to convince him. He gives me a vague nod and gets very casual. "You see him again, you tell him the fuzz was here lookin' for him, he should scarce-out."

"Flatfoot fuzz?"

"Flashin' buzzers, moochin' beer, and leanin' on all his pals. They think Banty is pushin' H. Dat's a laugh, huh?" Sammy laughs and I know it is true.

I laugh too, even though the sound of it kind of surprises me, and finally Sammy goes away. I park at a corner table and bend my headbones very hard.

There is either H or moo in Banty's locker. And I have the hot key.

If it is geetus, I could be lootlogged for the rest of my lifeline.

Of course, I would have to learn to like deep-dish giraffe or fried rhino, because I would be living in rural Africa where Banty couldn't find me in the phone book. And I am sure he would look very hard. He is that kind of a sorehead.

I take a long time pondering a powder path and wondering what is keeping Banty. He don't show, but after a hour or more, McGinty comes spurting in.

McGinty is a short, square, ex-wrestler who was a drop out from the grunt dodge about the time that Central Casting bought the mortgage. McGinty would get so wrapped up in step-over toeholds that he forgot the script and confused the TV announcers, who complained to the Commission. They told McGinty to pack up his cauliflower and never darken their lager ads again. Besides, he was a terrible actor.

Right away I see that McGinty is carrying the mail. He hurries over to Sammy and the two of them is huddled at the end of the bar. McGinty is doing the talking and, from the look on Sammy's repulsive profile, they have found the plates for ten-dollar bills.

Then I notice that McGinty is giving me the fisheye-type double-ogle and blowing cigar smoke my way. He slouches over and sits down. Sammy comes to my end of the bar and takes up the staring where he left off before.

"Hi, McGinty," I say, real polite.

He nods and Sammy nods too.

"What's reet?" I ask brightly, just to keep the conversation moving because he ain't really holding up his end. He is regarding me like I have turned zebra-striped and polka-dotted.

"I hear you have seen Banty," he says. He has a voice like a lawnmower cutting tin grass.

I shrug and try to act innocent.

He blows more smoke at me. "What was he doin', Dubois?"

"Walkin'," I tell him quick, so he will know I am not taking time to think. "I am on one side of the street and he is on the other. We didn't speak."

McGinty studies the end of the cigar and nods. "What was he carryin'?"

"Nothin'."

"You didn't see him stick no bundle nowhere?"

I shake my head hard and look as innocent as possible. McGinty squints at Sammy and they both nod.

Sammy says, "Dubois is too smart to try to put anything over on us."

"Sure he is," McGinty agrees, giving me his .38-caliber, armor-piercing frown. Then he drops his bomb. "Banty is wearin' a slab. Accordin' to the radio, a uptown cop put a slug through his liver and let all the air out of him. We have lost a pal."

He bows his head and I follow suit because I am struck dumb with

astonishment. Only McGinty and Sammy don't seem real dejected. This makes me reflect over recent gossip.

There has been a lot of chatter that Banty and McGinty has dug up the hatchet, and that one of them has bought a grindstone to sharpen the blade. I am getting a strong hunch McGinty is the one.

He blows more smoke at me. "I'll see you around," he warns me, and gets up and drifts back to the far end of the bar. He and Sammy put their heads together again, and they both look worried. A medium-sized snappy dresser who is chewing a matchstick comes out of the back room and lays a beady eye on me. Then he gets in the huddle to help them worry.

I can't hear what they're saying, but I have got a sudden conviction. McGinty is hep that Banty was heavy with loot. Otherwise, why all the questions? He is wise that Banty didn't have no bundle on him when he was smeared, so he knows Banty stashed it somewhere. Naturally, McGinty is panting for the stash.

That reminds me. The loot is all mine—because I have got the key. I feel a song coming on.

I slide out to the street, squeezing the key in my pocket and ticking off certain luxuries I will acquire with the good greenies which are waiting for me. It is too bad about Banty, but he is long overdue in the hot place anyway.

The key is only good for 24 hours. I have got to get there before they empty the lockers. Otherwise, the public-locker cats would make me explain—if they find what I think they would find. And I doubt if I could explain good enough. I always get the stutters around cops.

But I am humming the song and hustling toward the bus station when I spot a pawnshop, so I stop to see what time it is. Plenty of time—twenty hours at least—so I relax.

Then I tighten up all of a sudden. In the window glass, which is like a mirror, I spot the medium-sized pinstripe behind me. I have picked up a tail. It must be there is something about my story that makes McGinty suspicious. He is a natural-born fink—but I could be sunk.

If I try to lose the matchstick chewer, McGinty will put two and two together so fast it would blow out a computer. My neck will be out so far it will reach from one end of my grave to the other. But if I don't lose him I cannot open the locker.

Standing on a corner, I compare McGinty and Banty. McGinty is maybe not as tough as Banty. He is more like a moody tiger-shark where Banty is made out of that stuff they put on the front of Sherman tanks. But Banty ain't around no longer, and I am scared I cannot outfox McGinty.

I start off down the street again, but I am beginning to sweat so much that I look around to see if I

am leaving a trail. I have got one chance—not counting suicide. I can get rid of the key, which is now as hot as a firecracker on the Fourth of July.

Except that I don't want to get rid of it. This is the closest I have ever been to a fortune since the time I was a pallbearer at Hymie Bates's funeral—he once won the daily double.

Without intending to, I wander into a park and shove my way past the pigeons to the nearest bench. I got no choice if I want to save my skin. I got to lose the key. I cannot go to the fuzz—that would only make some cops rich—and I cannot give the key to McGinty now. He would mash me because I didn't slip it to him sooner.

I take out the key and stare at it. It is not very big. I almost toss it over my shoulder, and then I stop just in time. After all, it should be easy to get rid of the key whenever I have to.

I have got to act natural. I put the key in my good pocket and lean back to enjoy the scenery. Act natural—that is the ticket. I say to myself, "Dubois, you ain't been in a park in ten years. It is time you learned to like trees and statues and pushy pigeons and jazz like that."

And then I almost fall off the bench. Ten years! I am not acting natural at all! A park is the last place McGinty would expect me to go!

I get up and hustle across the grass, and spot a neon flicker on the far side. I head toward it trying to look like a thirsty soul who is taking a short cut to the nearest bistro.

The oasis turns out to be a small bar with a television set giving out a soap commercial. A row of glassy-eyed guys are watching the screen and getting cricks in their necks. I slide onto a stool and order a short brew.

The tail in the snappy clothes comes in and sits in a corner.

I can feel him boring two holes in my back. The sweat is running down under my shirt. I am tuned so fine that if I shake hands with anyone I will give out a high C. I am also jumpy enough to jitter like a junky jalopy.

I canot finish the beer because it now takes more than two hands to get the glass to my mouth, and all I got is two hands. The other guys are looking at me out of the corners of their eyes and the bartender is reaching for a fly swatter in case I should start walking up the wall.

I dribble about half the beer onto the bar, so I give a casual little laugh. Only it comes out sounding sort of giggly, even to me, so I blow the joint.

Outside on the sidewalk I spot a grille over a sewer opening, and I am standing on it reaching for the key when medium-size slinks out, still picking his teeth. I stumble on down the street.

I wonder if I should get rid of the key now. It is no use to me any

more. Even if I could get to the locker, I could not get the thing in the lock. I am so nervous and twitchy I would get thrown out of an opium den.

Then I spot the cab waiting on a corner, bright and yellow. I lurch over to it and get the door open in only two grabs. The cabby is a skinny little guy with bushy eyebrows and sleepy eyes. He looks disgusted when I totter in and sprawl over the seat.

"You mess up my floor and I'll bust your arm," he says. And then he remembers he is in business. "Where you wanna go, pal?"

"Katzie's Saloon," I tell him, on account of I am not prepared for the question. It is the first place that pops into my head. He starts the engine which backfires and the cabby jumps a foot when I shriek. I try to pull myself together by taking deep, wheezing breaths and the worried hackie keeps glancing back at me.

"You don't look too good, pal," he informs me. "What kind of embalmin' fluid you been drinkin'?"

I try to ignore him, and roll down the window, but he don't like that either.

"Roll up that winder," he yells. "You tryin' to give me pneumonia?"

I say, "Yes," and he glares at me. Now he watches every move I make. When we get to Katzie's, he brakes the cab with a jerk, so I slide off into a heap on the floor. He opens the door and leans on it to watch me crawl out.

While I pay off the cabbie, I see another hack pulling up just behind us. The medium-sized matchstick chewer gets out and leers at me.

I am galloping through the door of Katzie's when I spot McGinty inside. That is the point at which I come unstuck.

I am convinced McGinty is wise to the key and is waiting for me. I turn around and dash across the street. I don't know where I am going—I just have to put real estate between me and McGinty and the medium-size clown.

I hear somebody yell and then a car skids. Two guys jump at me from nowhere and all of a sudden there are so many cops around it is like a Minsky raid. Two of the flatties growl at me to stop screaming, and then they toss me in the back of a prowl car.

The fuzz is cleaning out Katzie's. I see McGinty with his dukes in the air, along with a couple of other sports who are likewise unhappy. I am so upset I forget all about getting rid of the key. When we get to the station house I am shook—shook to the core.

There is Banty, big as life.

His mouthpiece is waving papers, and the fuzzheads are looking sour, but they are turning him loose. Banty is wearing a strip of white tape over one ear, but otherwise he is in the pink.

He wanders over close to me and nags at his tie, giving me the eye and pushing a harness bull out of the way so he can look in a mirror to comb his hair. The coppers don't pay any more attention to him on account of he is officially sprung.

So he says real soft, "Gimme de key, Dubois."

And I do. It is like I have surrendered a brain tumor. McGinty turns white when he sees Banty, but Banty only bumps into him and pushes past to the door.

I don't get a chance to hardly sit down before Banty's mouthpiece springs me too. Banty is waiting outside in a car. I get in and he slips me a Jackson.

On the way back to Katzie's he informs me that it was McGinty who fingered him at the bus station, telling the coppers that Banty was loaded with H. "Dey didn't find it," he says. "The H is still dere."

"Well, anyway," I say, "you now got the key."

"No, I ain't. The cops ain't gonna let me outa their sight, so I planted it on McGinty." He grins like a saber-tooth tiger. The light from a street lamp glints on his teeth. "Somepin tells me he's goin' on a long trip."

This is my lucky day. I make twenty fish without even bucking the track.

CLASSIFIED

Rates $1.00 per Word

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

I Made $40,000.00 Year by Mailorder! Helped others make money! Start with $10.00—Free —Proof. Torrey, Box 63566-T, Oklahoma City, Okla. 73106.

FREE Book "990 Successful Little-Known Businesses." Fascinating! Work home! Plymouth 911-L, Brooklyn, N. Y. 11218.

TRAVELPAK Cartopper Camper. Fits most cars. Distributorships Available. Cartopper, 123-EQ, Napoleon, Ohio 43545.

RAISE Capital fast—easy proven sources. Free information. Advisor, Box 48337-SM-2, Los Angeles 90048

MAKE Mail Order pay. Get "How To Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth $2.00 toward classified ad in S & M. Send $1.00 to C. D. Wilson, Science & Mechanics, 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022.

EARTHWORMS

BIG Money Raising Fishworms and Crickets. Free literature. Carter Farm-O, Plains, Georgia 31780.

FIREARMS, AMMUNITION & EQUIPMENT

SILENCERS: Pistols, Rifles. Illustrated Details, Construction, Operation, $1.00. Gunsco, Soquel, Calif.

PATENT SERVICE

PATENT Searches, $6.00. For free "Invention Record" and "Important Information Inventors Need," write: Miss Hayward, 1029E Vermont, Washington 5, D.C.

PERSONAL

TWO "Will" Forms and Lawyer's booklet about Wills. Complete $1.00. National, Box 48313-EQ, Los Angeles 48, Calif.

GET out of debt—clear credit, immediate relief, Advisor, Box 48337-SM-1, Los Angeles 90048

BEAT Vegas!! Information only $1.00. Painter, Box 3114, Corpus Christi, Texas 78404

PROFITABLE OCCUPATIONS

INVESTIGATE Accidents. Earn $750.00 to $1,500.00 monthly. Car furnished. Expenses paid. No selling. No college education necessary. Pick own job location in U. S., Canada or overseas. Investigate full time. Or earn $8.44 hour spare time. Men urgently needed now. Write for Free information. Absolutely no obligation. Universal, CMH, 6801 Hillcrest, Dallas 5, Texas.

RARE BOOKS

Out of print mysteries? Our specialty. Aardvarks Book Detectives, Box 1749, Orlando, Fla. 32802.

TREASURE FINDERS—PROSPECTING EQUIPMENT

DIAMONDS, Gold. Find Them. Pamphlet Free. 18788 Cajon, San Bernardino, California 92407.

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

If you have been hungering for two years to find another spy novel with the same tone and edge as THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD, the same irony and ingenuity and conviction and quality, you may well find your appetite satisfied by Elliot West's THE NIGHT IS A TIME FOR LISTENING (Random, $4.95). Certainly this long and powerful novel of intrigue, obsession and revenge in the postwar '40s comes closer to le Carré's masterpiece than anything I've read in the interval.

Other noteworthy spy novels: Donald MacKenzie's SALUTE FROM A DEAD MAN (Houghton Mifflin, $3.95), a tight, tough, objective realistic thriller about a duel between Russion agents and the London underworld; and Dorothy Gilman's THE UNEXPECTED MRS. POLLIFAX (Crime Club, $3.95), a spirited and delightful comedy of intrigue with a plump and aging agent who might be one of Helen Hokinson's "girls."

★★★★ **ODDS AGAINST, *by Dick Francis*** (Harper & Row, $4.95)

Francis' novels are consistently the best of sports mysteries and among the best of all contemporary suspense novels. This study of the making of a great jockey into a great detective may be his finest.

★★★★ **ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY: 1966 MID-YEAR EDITION** (Davis, $1.25)

The 11th in this splendid series features a grand Woolrich novelet, a dazzling Crispin short-short, and 18 other rewarding entries from EQMM, 1942-60. Anthology buffs will find the stories in Stewart H. Benedict's THE CRIME-SOLVERS (Dell 3078, 50¢) overfamiliar; but for novices, the average quality is very high.

★★★ **CRIMINAL CONVERSATION, *by Nicolas Freeling*** (Harper & Row, $4.50)

Simenonian sensitivity and solidity in study of relation between a respectable murderer and Inspector Peter van der Valk show why Freeling recently won the Grand Prix de Littérature Policière (for QUESTION OF LOYALTY, Harper & Row, 1964).

(*Continued on next page*)

★★★ **THE CHILDREN ARE GONE, *by Arthur Cavanaugh*** (Simon & Schuster, $4.50)

Remarkably competent first novel of peril and suspense, in which a distraught mother, undergoing psychiatric treatment, is suspected of making away with her kidnaped children.

★★★ **THE HOLM OAKS, *by P. M. Hubbard*** (Atheneum, $3.95)

Simple, effective plot of adultery and murder distinguished by striking evocation of place and mood of dark brooding terror.

Too great to classify: I cannot assign a precise number of stars to Roland Topor's THE TENANT (Doubleday, $3.95), translated from LE LOCATAIRE CHIMÉRIQUE by Francis K. Price—partly, to be honest, because I do not entirely understand it. But difficult and self-contradictory though it is, this is a magnificently compelling sur-surrealist nightmare.

★★★ **MURDER MAKES THE WHEELS GO 'ROUND, *by Emma Lathen*** (Macmillan, $3.95)

Dry humor and plausible intricacy mark another problem in murder and high finance for John Putnam Thatcher, this time in Detroit.

★★★ **THE SIX IRON SPIDERS, *by Phoebe Atwood Taylor*** (Norton, $3.95)

One of the most interesting of the Asey Mayo revivals, which has inadvertently become, in a quarter of a century, a precise and vivid period novel of the first days of World War II in America.

★★★ **THE SOUND OF INSECTS, *by Mildred Davis*** (Crime Club, $3.50)

More a conventional whodunit than Miss Davis' excellent (and too infrequent) earlier novels, but still a sharply etched picture of blackmail, murder and calumny in suburbia.

★★★ **HIS OWN APPOINTED DAY, *by D. M. Devine*** (Walker, $3.50)

Much the best Devine to appear here: a skilled detective puzzle with the plus of firm characterization and lively compassion.

★★★ **NICE FILLIES FINISH LAST, *by Brett Halliday*** (Dell 6361, 45¢)

Mike Shayne in a nicely complicated, medium-tough action-problem of murder and harness racing.

It is to be hoped that none of today's enthusiastic readers of gothicas have missed the towering masterpiece of the genre, Emily Brontë's WUTHERING HEIGHTS (1847). Any who have should seize upon the latest edition (Premier R297, 60¢), which adds a penetrant and vivifying introduction by Edizabeth Hardwick.

the *NEWEST* crime story by

ANTHONY GILBERT

In her recent stories Anthony Gilbert has been writing what might be called the "pure" crime story, with the police completely offstage. We welcome this new development in Anthony Gilbert's work—it is a fine change of pace from the "pure" detective story, procedural or traditional.

Anthony Gilbert's newest story is traditional too—in the highest tradition of British crime writing. American writers handle "pure" crime differently—but there is much to be said in favor of the British style . . .

THE DOVE AND THE HAWK

by ANTHONY GILBERT

PENELOPE CAME INTO MY LIFE when I was 21. She was my father's child by his second wife, more like a niece than a half sister, and for years she called me Aunt Helen.

I'll never forget the night I first set eyes on her mother.

As a rule I spent my holidays in London with my Aunt Olive—I was an only child—while my father went to his beloved mountains; but that year I developed a sudden sharp attack of influenza and had to stay at home. On the fifth evening, when my temperature was rapidly subsiding, I heard a sudden commotion in the hall and crept out of bed to find out what was going on. To my amazement I saw my father in the hall and with him a girl of about my own age, whom I'd certainly never seen before. My father looked up and saw me. He was a handsome, unpredictable, undemonstrative man.

"What on earth are you doing here, Helen? Why aren't you in London?"

I murmured something apologetic about influenza, but before I could finish, the girl came running up the stairs.

"You're Helen," she said. "Oh, isn't it lovely for me that you should be here? There's so much to learn and you'll know all the answers. You must think of me as a sister, never as a stepmother. Ugh!" She pulled her lovely mouth into a grimace.

I was gawky with amazement. She was never to my thinking quite

so beautiful as her daughter, Penelope, was to be, but at that time she was the loveliest creature I had ever seen. Like a living beam of sunlight —and for some incredible reason she had wanted to marry a man 30 years her senior. It took me a long time to realize that she was in love with him, and she stayed in love with him all her life. She was a small woman, neatly formed as a bird, dark and glowing—like a beam of a living sun.

"You'd better go back to bed, Helen," my father said. "Jenny, my dear, be careful. Influenza can be very infectious."

"He's right—you must go back," Jenny told me. "I'll come and talk to you."

I don't know where she learned her skills, but within five minutes our glowering Mrs. Mopp had turned into a ministering angel and was bringing me cold drinks and a fresh hot-water bottle.

"What a homecoming!" I said shakily. "But no one told me . . ."

"I know. It was awful of us. I knew we ought to cable you, and you could have flown out or something, but I thought—suppose she feels she can't share him—I wouldn't blame you a bit. Darling Peregrine!"

I realized dazedly she was talking about my unapproachable father.

"But it'll be all right, you'll see. I shan't take your place, just pop into an empty room in his life. Tell me about your mother. It must have been dreadful for you when she died."

Jenny was right, as always. During the year I lived on at home I was never once asked to have a tray in my room when company came; she took over the reins of office by degrees and so unobtrustively that I hardly realized they were slipping out of my hands.

At the year's end my father said, "It's time you thought of your own future, Helen, my dear." He'd become kinder since his second marriage; Jenny softened everything she touched. "You've great potentialities. It occurred to me you might like to take a secretarial course. There are excellent openings, and, I believe, a great shortage of competent young women. If you manage an employer as well as you managed this house you should go far."

His idea was that I should occupy Aunt Olive's spare room in London, but Jenny put a stop to that.

"Darling, do have a heart," I heard her say. "Helen's young, she wants some fun, not just a collection of Aunt Olive's grisly old bores. And you know you've never really done anything for her."

"I brought you into the family," he said simply. "She's had a year with you under the same roof."

He explained he'd make me an allowance until I was trained. I'd come into some money from my mother when I was 25, and after that I should be able to make my own way.

Aunt Olive found me a bed-sitting room in a rather dingy but respectable street and had me enrolled in London's most famous secretarial college. I loved it from the start. Sitting in an office, keeping books, arranging appointments—it was like housekeeping all over again but with a much wider scope. At that stage I didn't envisage the Helen Bryce Employment and Secretarial Agency—headquarters in London and two provincial branches, all doing very nicely, thank you—but I knew in my bones I was bound to succeed. I wrote to tell my father, but he'd lost interest in me by now, because Jenny was going to have a baby. This time, he was convinced, it would be a boy.

But it wasn't. It was another girl whom they christened Penelope. I saw her when she was two weeks old. I suppose she wasn't really beautiful then—they can't be at that age—but from the moment I set eyes on her, Jenny occupied a second place in my heart. It was a different form of "love at first sight."

It says a lot for Penelope that before she was two she had reconciled her father to her disappointing sex. She captivated everyone wherever she went. Strangely, I never connected her closely with my father—as well, I thought, expect a toad to hatch out a butterfly. She was just the zenith of the miracles that Jenny had worked on our dull, uncheerful house.

The child took to me from the first. By this time I accepted the fact that I was unlikely to marry. I was doing well at my job, and my prospects were bright. When Penelope was five Jenny said one day, "If anything should happen to me, Helen, you'd look after Penelope, wouldn't you? Even in the grave I wouldn't worry if I knew she was with you."

Second sight? I don't know. Anyway, nothing did happen for several years. Except in my career. As soon as I came into my inheritance I bought a partnership with a Miss Carless, who ran a secretarial bureau. We were doing well and would do better.

Three years later Miss Carless had a stroke and I bought her out. When she died a year later, I turned the concern into the Helen Bryce Agency. They say a recommendation from me goes a long way to help a girl to get a particular job.

When Penelope was 14 the blow fell. Both her parents were killed in a plane crash over the Alps. Under my father's will she became a ward of court. There was a good deal of money involved and practically everything was left to her. My Aunt Olive had died two years previously, so I was her only living relative.

Mr. Prendergast, the lawyer, hemmed and ha-ed a bit when I said Penelope's home would henceforth be with me. She had just started boarding school, but she'd need a place for the holidays. I was my own boss by now, could fix my holidays as I chose, so Penelope

wouldn't be neglected; but I should see to it, too, that she didn't lack companionship of her own age. What settled the question was the child herself.

"I shall go to Aunt Helen," she said. "It's what Mother wanted."

I had recently bought a house in the suburbs. I furnished the top floor as a sort of flat, remembering how much I'd longed for privacy at Penelope's age. She had her own bathroom and sitting room, where she could entertain her friends, and there was a sofa if she wanted to invite them to stay over. But she had the run of the whole house.

She was up in that flat less than I anticipated. I had dreamed of her joining me when she started work —she could be a junior executive in no time, and no nonsense about nepotism, but Penelope wouldn't hear of it.

"I wouldn't be any good at it. If I was anyone else you'd give me the sack in a week. Besides, I've sort of promised Marjorie to join her—she's starting a shop for kookie clothes. She thinks I could model and perhaps design."

"But you don't know anything about clothes," I protested.

"Darling, everyone knows about clothes."

I wasn't in love with the idea. The Cochranes were a young couple embarking on a rather hazardous enterprise with inadequate capital. Penelope was 18, and when she was 21 she'd be a very rich young woman. I was resolved not to be coaxed into putting any money into the concern.

"All right," said Penelope, obviously disappointed, "but actually it would be a very good investment."

"If they're solvent at the end of a year I'll reconsider," I promised.

"If they're solvent at the end of a year they won't need it."

She didn't stay with me long after she started the job. She didn't make any excuses about difficulty of transportation, or anything like that; she just said she wanted to share a flat with a girl she knew. I hid my disappointment—after all, I hadn't wanted to live with my aunt when I was her age, and aunts are aunts the world over. The funny thing was, that was how I thought of her —as my niece rather than my half sister, though about this time she stopped calling me Aunt Helen. But all her friends—the few I met, that is—all assumed I was her aunt and neither of us bothered to correct them.

Penelope moved out the following week. Secretly I thought her new flat deplorable and the morals of her friend pretty dubious, but I had the wit to say nothing. After a time she moved casually into another flat in Regent's Park, where I went once or twice by invitation. But though she still came to see me, nothing would induce her to bring her companions.

"Darling, you're so efficient they'd

be terrified. They'd think you square."

She'd been at work for about a year when Tim Driscoll loomed on her horizon.

Loomed? He leaped, he bounded, he was as sudden as Jenny must have seemed to my father. I met him of all places at Penelope's bedside. She had been involved in a car accident, of which she made pretty light. "Darling Helen,"—it was Jenny over again—"your generation does fuss so. Just be grateful for our wonderful Health Service—it won't cost us a penny."

When I arrived with a basket of fruit and some flowers, I found her looking like Pallas Athene, arising out of a sea of flowers, cards, books, bottles of perfume, and chocolates —there was hardly any room for her in the bed. But my eyes were all for Tim. He was a dark vital man, oozing with that unscrupulous charm that sweeps young girls off their feet, and a good many older women, too. I knew he was no good to Penelope the instant I set eyes on him; but I knew, too, I was going to have the hardest job of my life persuading Penelope of this. He was 30, at least, and I wouldn't be surprised to know there were already one or two broken marriages behind him.

Penelope held out her hand. "Helen darling, this is Tim. We're in love." She might have been introducing the Archangel Gabriel.

"How are you, Aunt Helen?" Which was absurd, for there were only a few years between us. "Don't tell me you don't like Irishmen, but how about the Englishman's sense of fair play? When I was a boy there was a man who lived on the corner, kept a few pigs, and in bad weather you could hardly tell the pigs from the muck they wallowed in. He put up a notice. 'Don't judge the pigs by the sty, but wait till you get the flavor of the bacon.' You get the message—Aunt Helen?"

Penelope watched him with adoration in her eyes. She seemed to throw her love over him in handfuls, so that he glittered in consequence.

"I knew how it would be." Tim Driscoll turned to her with an air of comic dismay. "Your aunt doesn't think I'm good enough for you. Well, that's one thing we can agree on right away. But where on earth are you going to find the man who is?"

I thought he would realize that I wanted a little time alone with Penelope, but he made no move. He carried on a conversation practically nonstop.

"What a girl! She's so popular, her visitors come in droves. I have to act as a sort of social secretary and space them out."

He looked at me impudently, as if to suggest I ought to have made an appointment, but I wasn't having any of that.

"There are a few things I want to talk to you about, Penelope," I an-

nounced, and even he couldn't pretend not to notice that.

"I can take a hint," he said. "Now don't let Aunt Helen put you against me, sweetie." But he had no fears of that. The child was completely under his spell.

"Where did you meet him?" I asked Penelope, when we were alone.

"At the races."

"I didn't know you were a gambler."

"Aren't we all? Helen, you *must* like him. He's nervous about you—that's why he tried to sound so confident. He's terrified you'll try and break it up."

"Why should he suppose I'd want to do that?"

"Well—you might think he was too old, for one thing."

"He is. He'll never see thirty again."

"He's thirty-four. My mother was twenty when she got married, and my father was fifty. You're not going to try to tell me that wasn't a success. Why, everything I know about love I learned from her—until I met Tim, of course. I knew it was right the first minute we met—it was like the sun coming out."

"I didn't know your sun had ever gone in."

"Well, not the ordinary sun. But this was different. This was—well, like a radiance, the light that never was on sea or land. If you're not going to like him it'll be the first barrier there's ever been between us. Because I could never give him up—never."

"How long have you known him?"

"What difference does that make?"

"I suppose you're not thinking of getting married right away? You're barely twenty."

"Why waste time? Oh, you're thinking about me being a minor, but I'm sure the courts wouldn't object, even if it got that far. Not if you said you approved. And you must. You've always put my happiness ahead of everything, even your beloved business. I used to wonder if I could ever love anyone as much as that. Now, of course . . ."

Her smile finished the sentence. She meant that now, of course, she had outstripped me, that I could never hope to catch up.

He was there the next time I went, though I'd written in advance this time. I wondered what kind of job he had that he could turn up on an afternoon. Penelope was as sweet as ever, but I realized she had started to move away from me, and wouldn't be coming back.

It was somehow like being on an island just offshore—I could see what was going on, I could wave, and she could wave back, but there was that implacable sea between us.

Some young things came piling in when I'd been there about fifteen minutes—one worked in a coffee bar, one was on the stage, none of her friends seemed to have steady

jobs or regular hours—and the gulf between us perceptibly widened.

Mind you, they were charming, they glowed in a way I don't remember youth glowing when I was a girl, as if they lived in a blaze of perpetual sunlight. They accepted Tim as casually as if he'd been a poodle or a Persian cat, someone belonging exclusively to Penelope, but on show just the same. I came away feeling about 80, and cold, as though I'd been sitting in a howling draft.

The following time Tim brought me back in his car. It was a handsome affair, a red Alvis with a hood twice the size of the chassis. He drove well, I'll say that for him, but in a manner I can only describe as anti-social. Like most women drivers, I have a great sense of what I owe to my fellow drivers, but Tim was absolutely ruthless.

When we reached my door I asked him in—conversation had been impossible en route—and gave him a whiskey and soda. I wasn't going to waste my good sherry on him.

"I want you to tell me something, Mr. Driscoll," I said.

"Tim. After all, I call you Aunt Helen."

"Very premature of you," I snapped.

"It's no good, you know—you're not going to break us up," he warned me. "If you insist on a tug of war, I promise you there isn't a bookmaker between here and John o' Groats who'd give you evens."

"You do realize Penelope's a minor?"

"Of course. But I don't think even you would invoke the law. At best you could only get the wedding postponed, and at worst—well, it wouldn't do you any good."

"Strangely enough," I told him, "it's not my good I'm thinking of."

"People have such filthy minds, don't they. And an old maid—forgive me, Aunt Helen, but we have got the gloves off, haven't we?—who tries to stop a girl from getting married—well, jealousy has an ugly name."

"Jealousy!" I exclaimed. I couldn't stop myself. "What! Of you?"

I got him under the skin there, though he kept his temper. "Of her happiness," he said.

"I wish I could be persuaded it lies in your hands. But I wanted to ask you something, didn't I? I'm her only living relative. Are you in a position to support a wife?"

"Pen and I'll get by," he said.

"That's what I'm wondering. You see, she can't touch her money till she's twenty-one."

"You think that's the only reason I'm marrying her, isn't that so? Well, for your information I have a business of my own."

It turned out that the business consisted of a riding school in some place unnamed—Surrey, he finally said airily, when I pressed him. It hadn't been going long, but it would grow. Eventually—when he

could lay hands on Penelope's money, I suppose—he intended to branch out, to breed his own horses. Blood stock, he said, and with the export market being what it was, there should be a packet in it.

"Oh, no doubt," I agreed. "But it costs a packet to get started. Stud fees are pretty heavy, and you can't breed from inferior animals."

He gestured toward the decanter. "May I?" But he didn't wait for an answer.

"If there's one thing I do know about it's horses," he went on. "I don't say we shall be millionaires from the start, but—well, its like having a kid. At first you have to carry him about, but one day he may turn into the prizefighter of his time."

"I hope," I said drily, "your business is a little older than that."

"And, of course," he said, "Pen will keep on with her job to begin with. It's what she wants. Well, it would be ridiculous to throw her chances away."

"Penelope will want children," I assured him bluntly.

"Naturally. In due course. Look, Aunt Helen, why can't we be friends? We both love Pen. I'm going to marry her—make up your mind to that. If you think she's making such a bad bargain I'd have expected you to stick closer than ever."

"Oh, you could charm a hippopotamus out of its pool on a hot day," I acknowledged. "Unfortunately for you, I'm not a hippopotamus."

"That could be an advantage to me." His manner was as smooth as cream. "I've always heard hippos can do a lot of damage."

All the same, I had enough sense to know that I had been wasting my breath.

As soon as she left the hospital, Penelope spent every spare minute looking at apartments.

"I thought Tim's riding stables or whatever they are were out of London," I said.

"They are, of course, but he can commute. I have to be on the spot." She seemed to do about a fourteen-hour day. "What do you mean by whatever they are? Don't you believe they exist?"

Well, if they did I was pretty sure they weren't registered in his name. He might be a riding-master, but by temperament and profession he was a gambler, and that's no foundation for married life with a girl like Penelope. Now and again he might hit the jackpot and they'd unroll the red carpet, but the rest of the time Penelope would, as they say, "carry the can." I knew she'd be far too proud to let me help her, once she became Mrs. Driscoll.

I was pretty busy myself that summer. I was opening my second provincial office, and there'd been some tiresome setbacks. I was away from London a lot, but at last everything was ironed out. It was a Saturday when I started back to London.

I don't believe in predestination, a set pattern arranged by some invisible and inscrutable Deity, absolving us from personal responsibility. People have to answer for their own actions. But I do agree that chance plays a big part. If Jenny hadn't gone to Switzerland that summer, her first visit—if Penelope hadn't gone to the races—if I hadn't stopped at St. Aubyn Racecourses that afternoon on sheer impulse, all our lives would be different.

I hadn't intended to stop—I didn't even realize there was a racecourse there—but going past I saw there was a big meeting that afternoon. I had time on my hands, so I parked my car and bought a ticket. That was the first and last time in my life I felt any sympathy with Tim Driscoll.

I've always wanted perfection—in my office, in my work. You don't get it, of course, but you do aim for it, and it seemed to me that these splendid horses had achieved it. The noble carriage, the rolling eye, the velvet coats, the sheer majesty of them—oh, I could see how they'd appeal to a gambler like Tim Driscoll. Or did he only see them, as I was convinced he saw Penelope, as a source of personal profit?

Since I didn't expect to come a second time I decided to complete the experiment by making a few bets. I chose four horses haphazard, and backed them to place. Three of the four came home. I wasn't triumphant, I was horrified. If a month's pay could be gleaned in an afternoon under such thrilling circumstances, how could I expect a go-getter like Tim to turn his hand to honest work?

I decided not to stay for the last race, but get away before the roads were jammed with traffic. I went into the refreshment tent for a cup of tea that I was disgusted to find was being served in paper cups. The tent was packed—I didn't see how I'd ever manage to get my cup to my mouth. And, in fact, I never did. I was trying to maneuver a little space when I heard a voice behind me that turned me rigid.

I didn't have to turn to see who it was. I'd have known that voice if it had spoken beside my grave.

"But, darling," it coaxed, "I promise you it won't make any difference to us, none whatsoever."

I heard a woman's laugh. "What do you mean, no difference? You'll be a married man, won't you?"

I couldn't see the speaker, but it didn't matter. I'd heard that particular voice before, and other voices exactly like it. They came into my office—the greedy ones, the What's in-it-for-Walter ones, to whom scruple isn't even a word in the dictionary.

"So what?" Tim demanded. "I've got business all over the country, haven't I? I'm not tied to an office desk. And Pen's no camp follower. Anyway, she's got her own job."

The blatancy of it, the crudeness and cruelty of it, made me sick. But

Penelope's innocence was no match for a woman like this—the dove and the hawk, I thought, and the hawk knows no pity.

"But if she finds out—"

"Why should she? Even your husband hasn't a suspicion—after four years."

"Lucky for you. If he had he'd clap a divorce on me before you could wink. Would you marry me, if he did?"

"Flo, don't be absurd."

There was a warning note of impatience in Tim's voice. I could read the situation easily enough. He was one of those men who command women's love but never give it back—because he has no love to give. Pitiful? Perhaps. But it would take a more Christian woman than I am to spare compassion for such a rogue.

"If you got divorced," Tim went on brutally, "you couldn't even get alimony, and Teddy's such a vengeful type he'd probably claim fantastic damages. No, we're far better off as we are. Oh, darling, don't be like that. It's worked for four years—it'll be all right, you'll see."

"I suppose she's over the moon for you?" cried the jealous voice.

"Well, darling . . ."

I couldn't have moved if my life had depended on it. I found I was crushing the horrible paper cup till the tea spurted over the front of my dress. I've never been a violent type, but I understood in that moment how a person armed with a flick-knife or even a stone will employ direct action, on impulse, with reason driven out of the mind.

"If I thought you cared for *her*," began Flo slowly, and Tim laughed.

"Darling, she's a kid, a cute kid, but I've always preferred my women grown up. You'd love her, Flo—a sweet little innocent."

That was a bit thick, even for him. "Don't be a bloody fool," said the woman roughly. "I hate her before I've even seen her. If you're sensible you'll keep her out of my way. All right, Tim. If that's the situation, come round tonight. Teddy's away on some conference—I suppose you're not spending your *nights* with Little Miss Muffet yet?"

"I can't see you tonight, angel. I'm booked for dinner. As a matter of fact, we have to be damn careful for the next few weeks. That grisly horror of an aunt—well, she's a half sister really—would smash us if she had half an opportunity, and I can't afford to pass up a chance like this, not even for you, baby."

"Tomorrow night then?"

"I'll ring you," he said. "You can count on me, darling."

His voice dripped butter all over the place. I was afraid he might see me, but he didn't even turn his head.

"You'd better not forget," said Flo. "You're betting on lives now, Tim, not just horseflesh."

If I'd been capable of even a shred of pity I'd have been sorry for her. She might be worthless, but this was

love all right, the agonizing love that isn't sure of the object of its affections. In a way you could say she loved him even more than Penelope did—because she saw his rottenness, and she didn't care.

"Don't fret," Tim told her. "I have to keep sweetie pie happy for all our sakes. Even being seen here together is risky. You know what people are like—they have tongues for more than licking ice cream. And if it came to dear old Auntie's ears, she'd somehow lay hands on a poison dart and send it to me in an envelope with Happy Birthday written on it, and she's so bloody clever she'd have fourteen alibis at the inquest to prove it couldn't be her."

He was right about that, too. I caught sight of him as he moved away, saying, "Can't miss the last race. I've got something on Falconer. Let's hope he changes the luck or I'll be in Queer Street before I reach the altar."

Off he went, as graceful as one of the horses he loved. I really believe he loved horses, as it wasn't in him to love a woman.

When he was gone I ground my paper cup underfoot and went along to the cloakroom to bathe my burning face and make some repairs. I had the room to myself. People had either gone off already or were packing the rails for the start of the last race.

I looked like a glowing ember of a woman—it was as if in five minutes I'd aged 25 years. Somehow, I knew, I had to find some way to save Penelope from a future of humiliation and despair.

There were a number of gaps in the car park ranks when I arrived. I showed the attendant my ticket and went in. I was looking for a Red Alvis, and it wasn't hard to find. It was typical of Tim that he hadn't even bothered to lock the car.

I opened the door and put my bag on the seat. Then I lifted the hood. If anyone had seen me I'd have been an owner checking some trifling fault, but on occasions like these you're never truly *seen*. I only had a few minutes before the last race would be over, and I had to be away before Tim appeared.

Fortunately, I've always been independent. I'm a good mechanic, I can paper a wall, mend an electric socket, change a tire in record time. What I had to do now didn't take long, and by the time I had driven my own car out of the park I had insured that Penelope's marriage to Tim Driscoll would never take place.

The odd thing was I felt perfectly calm. As I saw it, my first duty was to Jenny's child. I'd tried everything else; this, it seemed to me—only I didn't phrase it in such a hifalutin fashion—was the love that is faithful unto death—in this case, Tim's death. But if it had involved mine it wouldn't have made any difference.

The cars were moving out fairly regularly now, and I was just one of

a crowd. I had no fear of detection —everyone knew I never went near a racecourse; besides, I'd placed my bets on the tote, so there were no records, and I destroyed my car park ticket a quarter of a mile away from the course.

It's a funny thing, but I never really thought about Flo. When you play chess, which is one of my relaxations, you know you may have to sacrifice a pawn to guard your Queen. Flo was just one of the pawns.

I slept quite peacefully that night. Next morning was Sunday, and I came down a little later than usual to collect my papers. There was nothing in the two literary ones, but the *Echo* had the full story. There was even a photograph of the scene of the disaster. Wherever I look these days, I see that story in letters of flame.

FATAL CRASH NEAR ST. AUBYNS

Mr. Tim Driscoll, a well-known racing enthusiast, was killed instantaneously when his Alvis car went out of control as he was returning from the races yesterday evening. With Mr. Driscoll was his fiancee, Miss Penelope Bryce, who was also killed.

You've heard the phrase—time stood still. Time stopped for me that morning—I can't even be certain how long ago.

How was I to guess that it was Penelope and not Flo whom he had brought with him? The meeting with Flo in the tea tent might have been just chance—or, more likely, Flo's jealousy had driven her there, perhaps to catch a glimpse of her rival.

I was brought up to believe in the immortal spirit of man. Eternity's a terrifying thought—time without end, a road that goes on and on and presumably leads you somewhere in the end.

It won't be like that for me. My share of eternity is approximately 18 hours—between teatime on a Saturday afternoon and ten o'clock the next morning. The wheel turns and I turn with it; the clock moves from four to ten, from four to ten, and back again, always back again. And on that wheel I'll go round and round and round—forever and ever.

There are different types of British crime writing—as, of course, there should be. In contrast with Anthony Gilbert's "The Dove and the Hawk" (also in this issue), which might almost be described as a quiet, sedate type of crime story, here is an altogether different kettle of fish —a monstrous story, but so effectively told that you may find it strangely moving; an under-the-surface study that will disturb you, that may even give you the shudders.

Indeed, it is only fair to warn some of you: "The Lonely Habit" is not for the queasy; if you tend to be squeamish—skip the next 7 pages . . .

THE LONELY HABIT

by BRIAN W. ALDISS

PEOPLE WITH MY SORT OF INTEREST in life are very isolated—that is, if they're intelligent enough to feel that kind of thing. My mother always says I'm intelligent. She's going to be annoyed when she hears I'm arrested for—well, no need to be afraid of the word—for murder.

We'll have a good laugh about it when I get out of here. That's one thing I do admire in myself. I may be intelligent, but I still have a sense of humor.

I dress well. Not too modern, to keep me apart from the younger set, but pretty expensive suits and a hat —I always wear a hat. Working for Grant Robinson's, see. They expect it. I'm one of their star representatives, and popular too, you'd say, but I don't mix with the others. And I would never—well, never do it to one of them. Or to anyone I know or am in any way connected with.

That's what I mean about intelligence. Some of these—well, some of these murderers, if you must use the word, they don't think. They do it to anyone. I do it only to strangers. Complete strangers.

Quite honestly—I say this quite honestly—I would not think of doing it to anyone I knew, even if I'd only just been introduced. My way, it's much safer, and I think I might claim it is more moral too. In the war, you know, they trained you to kill strangers; you got paid for it, and were even given medals. Sometimes I think that if I gave myself up and really told them *my* point of view—I mean really and sincerely from the heart—they would not, well, they'd give me a medal instead. I mean that. I'm not joking.

The first man I ever did it to, that was in the war. It was like a new life opening up for me. Since then,

I suppose I've never done more than two a year, but how my life has changed! They talk a lot of nonsense about it, all these criminologists, so called. They don't know. But the bad habits it's cured me of!

I used to sleep so badly, I used to be nervous, used to drink too much, and all sorts of bad habits you mustn't mention. I read somewhere it weakened your eyes. And a funny thing, after I did that first fellow, I never had asthma again, and it used to trouble me a lot. Mother still sometimes says, "Remember how you used to wheeze all night when you was a little chap?" She's very affectionate, my mother. We make a good pair.

But this first fellow. It was an East Coast port—I forget the name, not that it matters so much, although I sometimes think I wouldn't mind going back there, you know, just for sentiment. Of course, I suppose your first—well, your first, you know, *victim* (there's a daft word!) is very much like your first love affair, if you go in for that sort of thing.

All the others, however many of them there have been, have never come up to that first one. It's never been quite the same. I mean, they've been lovely and well worthwhile from my point of view—but not a patch on that first one.

He was a sailor, and he was drunk, and I was in this convenience on the sea front. Terrible night it was, raining like fury, and I was sheltering in there when this chap reels in, quite on his own. I was in my army uniform—rifle, bayonet, and all—and he knocked my rifle over into the muck.

Really I was more scared than annoyed. He was so big, see, well over six foot, and terribly heavy. He asked me if I had a girl friend and of course I said no. So then he came at me—I mean, there wasn't much room. I thought it was some sort of sexual assault, but afterwards I thought about it over and over, and I came to the conclusion that he was just attacking me. You know these stupid people: they just like to use their fists, given the chance, and I think he was attacking me because he thought I was standing there with a purpose and that I had abnormal ideas. Which of course was not so. Happily I am very very normal.

Obviously I am tremendously brave too, because I was not scared when he came at me, although I had been before. My brain went very clear, and I said to myself, "Vern, you can kill this drunk with your bayonet!"

A great and tremendous thrill ran through me as I said it. And when I stuck the bayonet into him, it was as if I had guidance from Above, because I did not hesitate or miss or strike in the wrong place or not strike hard enough, or anything that anyone else might have done. At that time, I really did think I had received guidance from Above, be-

cause I was praying a lot in that period of my life; nowadays, the Almighty and I seem to have lost our old rapport. Well, times change, and we must accept the changes they bring.

He made a loud noise—very much like a sneeze. His arms went up and he fell all over me, pushing me against the door as if he was embracing me. Again that tremendous thrill went through me. Somehow it has never had the same power since.

I hung on to him, and he kicked and struggled to be fully dead. It was a bit alarming, because I wasn't sure if he was really a goner; but when he was finally still, I stood there grasping him and wishing he had another kick left in him.

The problem of disposing of him came next. When I pulled myself together and thought, that one was easily solved. All I did was drag him out of the place, through the rain, to the sea wall. I gave him a push; over he went, into the sea. It was still pouring with rain.

This is a funny thing. I saw that he had left a trail of blood all the way to the edge, but I did not like to stop and do anything about it because I hate getting wet; I hated it then and I'm still the same.

Perhaps that may sound careless of me. Perhaps I trusted to Providence. The rain poured down and washed all the stains away, and I never heard anything more about the matter.

For a while I forgot about it myself. Then the war was finished, and I went home. Father was dead, no great loss, so Mother and me set up together. We'd always been good friends. She used to buy my vests and pants for me. Still does.

I got restless. The memory of the sailor kept returning. Somehow, I wanted to do it again. And I wondered who the sailor had been—it seemed funny I didn't even know his name. In a book I once read it talked about people having "intellectual curiosity." I suppose that's what I had, intellectual curiosity. Yet I've heard people say that I look rather stupid—meaning it in a complimentary way, of course.

To recapture that first thrill I bought a little bayonet in a junk shop and took to looking into conveniences. I don't mean the big ones that are so noisy and busy and bright. I like the quaint old Victorian ones, the sleepy ones with drab paint and no attendants and hardly any customers. I am an expert on them. To me, they are beautiful—like old trams. Call me sentimental, but that's how I feel about them, and a man has a right to express himself. They arouse artistic promptings in me, the real ones do.

It was pure luck I found the one in Seven Dials. Most of the area was demolished, but this fine old convenience has been left, dreaming in a side alley. It is still lit by gas, and the gas-lighter man comes round

every evening and lights it. That was the place I chose to—well, to repeat my success in, if you like.

It wasn't only a question of art, oh, no. In my job you have to be practical. I found that the inspection cover inside this place would come up easily. A ladder led down to another cover, eight feet below the first one. There were also pipes and things. When you opened this second cover, you were looking right into the main sewer.

It was as good as the seaside!

For my purpose this unhygienic arrangement could not have been better. I mean, when you've done with the—well, with the man's body—it must be disposed of. I mean, finally disposed of, or they'll be round after you, you know, the way they are in the films—like the Gestapo, you know, knocking at your door at midnight. Funny, here I sit in this cell and I don't feel the least bit scared. I didn't do it, really I didn't.

It's a very lonely habit, mine. When you're sensitive, you feel it badly at times. Not that I'm asking for pity. I reckon a lot of these chaps—well, a lot of *them* was lonely.

So I did it again. It was a sturdy little man this time—said he was some sort of a scout for a theatrical agent or something. Very soft-spoken, didn't seem to worry about what I was going to do. Most of them are really worried—wow! This scout, he just shed a tear as I let him have it, and did not kick at all.

Some hobbies start in a funny way—casually, if you like. I mean, as I got him down to the lower cover—I threw him down, of course—all the stuff came out of his inner pocket. I gathered it up and stuffed it in my own pocket before slipping him into the sewer, where the water was running fast to bear him away.

Frankly, it was a waste of effort. The glow just wasn't there. No inspiration and no relief. It just didn't come off. At the time I resolved never to do the trick again, in case—you never can be sure, you know—in case they found out.

Once back home with Mother, I made an excuse to slip up to my bedroom—naturally, we have separate rooms now—and I looked at what I had in my pocket. It was interesting—a letter from his sister, and two bills from his firm, and a clipping from a newspaper (two years old and very tattered) about a general visiting Russia, and a card about a pigeon race, and a little folder showing all the different shades of a shiny paint you could buy, and a union card, and a photograph of a little girl holding a tricycle, and another of the same little girl standing by herself and laughing. I stared at that photograph a lot, wondering what she could be laughing at.

One time I left it lying about and Mother found it and had a good look at it.

"Who's this then, Vern?"

"It's the son of a chap I work with—daughter, I mean."

"Nice, isn't it? What's her name?"

"I don't know her name. Give it here, Mum."

"Who's the chap? Her father, I mean, which is he?"

"I told you, I work with him."

"Is it Walter?" She had never met Walter, but I suppose I had mentioned his name.

"No, it's not Walter. It's Bert, if you must know, and I met his little girl when I went round to his place, so he thought I'd like a photo of her, because she took to me."

"I see. Yet you don't know her name?"

"I told you, Mother, I forgot it. You can't remember everyone's name, can you? Now give it here."

She can be very annoying at times. She and my father used to have terrible rows sometimes, when I was small.

As I said, mine is a lonely way of life. I began to dream of those hidden pockets, warm and safe and concealed, each with their secret bits and pieces of life. Everywhere I went I was haunted by pockets. I wished I had emptied all the pockets of that scout—wished it bitterly. You hear people say, "Oh, if I could have my time over again." That's how I felt, and I began wasting my life with regret.

Another man might have turned into a miserable little thief, but that was not my way. I've never stolen a thing in my whole life.

The third fellow was a disappointment. His pockets were almost empty, though he had some racecourse winnings on him that I was able to use towards some little luxuries for Mother.

And then I suppose my luck was in, for the next three I did gave me something of the relief I found with my first—well, my first *partner,* you might say, to be polite about it. They were all big men. And what they had on them, hidden in their pockets, was very interesting.

Do you know, one of those men was carrying with him a neatly folded copy of a boy's magazine printed twenty years earlier, when he must have been a boy himself. You'd wonder what he wanted that for! And another had a nautical almanac and a copy of a catalogue of things for sale in a Berlin store and a sickly love letter from a woman called Janet.

All these things I kept locked up. I used to turn them over and over and think of them, and wonder about them. Sometimes, when the men were found to be missing, I could learn a little more about them from the newspapers. That was fun and gave me a great kick. One man was something big in the film world. I think that if life had been different for me, I might have been a—well, a detective. Why not? Of course, I am much happier as I am.

So time went on. I got very careful, more careful after each one. I mean, you never know. Someone

may always be watching you. I remember how my dad used to peep round doors at me when I was small, and it gave me a start even when I hadn't done anything wrong.

Also I got more curious. It was the intellectual curiosity at work, you see.

Now this brings us up to date, right smack up to date. Today!

See, I mean, it's been eighteen months since I—well, since I had a partner, as I sometimes think of it. But you get terribly lonely. So I went back to the Seven Dials one, and this time I said to myself, "Vern, my son, you have been very patient, and as a result I've got a little treat for you with this one."

Oh, I was very careful. I watched and watched, and was sure to pick on a type who obviously wasn't local, just passing through the area, so that there would be nothing to connect him with the Seven Dials.

He was a businessman, quite smart and small, which suited me well. Directly he went in the convenience I was after him, strolling in very slowly and naturally.

This fellow was in the one and only cubicle with the door open—the door hinge was broken, so the door wouldn't close really. But I don't change my mind once it is sort of cold and made up, so I went straight over to him and held my little bayonet so that it pricked his throat. He was much smaller than me, so I knew there wouldn't be a nasty scene; being fastidious, or squeamish you might say, I hate anything nasty like that.

I said to him, "I want to hear about a big secret in your life—something you did that no one knows about! Make it quick, or I'll do you in!"

His face was a vile color, and he did not seem to be able to talk, though I could see by his clothes he was a superior man, rather like me in a way. I pricked his throat till it bled and told him to hurry up and speak.

Finally he said, "Leave me alone, for God's sake! I've just murdered a man!"

Well, that's what he said. It made me mad in a freezing sort of a way. Somehow I thought he was being funny, but before I could do anything, he must have seen the look in my eyes, and he grabbed my wrists and started babbling.

Then he stopped and said, "You must be a friend of Fowler's! You must have followed me from his flat! Why didn't I think he might be clever enough for that! You're a friend of Fowler's, aren't you?"

"I've never heard of him. I've nothing to do with your dirty business!"

"But you knew he was blackmailing me? You must know, or why are you here?"

We stood and stared at each other. I mean, I was really as taken aback by this turn of events as he was. For me this whole thing was meant to

be a—well, I mean it was a sort of relaxation; I mean, it really is *necessary* for me, else I'd probably be flat on my back with asthma and goodness knows what else, and quite unable to lead a normal life, and the last thing I wanted to do was get mixed up with—well, with murder and blackmail and all that.

Just as I had reached the conclusion that maybe I ought to let this one go, he started to draw a gun on me. Directly his hand went down, I knew what he was after—just like in those horrible films that they really should ban from showing where they go for their guns and shoot those big chaps kak-kak-kak out of their pockets!

So I let him have it, very cold and quick, a very beautiful stroke that only comes with practice.

This time I could not wait for any sentimental nonsense. I opened the inspection cover and dropped him down, and then climbed down after him. I took his gun because I wished to examine the beastly thing before disposing of it. And then I slipped my hand into his warm inner pocket.

I found an open envelope containing a strip of film together with some enlargements from the negatives. Those photographs were positively indecent—I mean, really indecent, for they showed a girl, a grown girl, with no clothes on whatsoever. I did not need telling they were something to do with this blackmailer Fowler. They just showed what sort of a mind *he* had! The world was well rid of him, and this beauty who had tried to shoot me.

In an agony of embarrassment I slipped those vile things into my pocket to be examined later, opened the other hatch, and tipped him into the fast-flowing water. Then I shut down everything, wiped my face on my handkerchief, and walked out into the alley.

Two plainclothes men were waiting for me outside.

I was just so astonished I could not say a word. They said they wished to question me about the shooting of Edward Fowler, and before I knew what was what, before I could even telephone Mother, they were taking me away in a police car.

Everyone says the police aren't what they were. This time, they really have made a big mistake! But I have got a solicitor coming to sort things out for me, and at least I was able to send a message to Mother telling her that I was fine and not to keep lunch waiting for me.

I didn't tell them a thing—I mean, I can still keep my wits about me. I keep on saying I never heard of any Edward Fowler, and that's all I say.

Of course, the little pistol and those revolting photographs are going to be rather difficult to explain.

But I'm innocent—absolutely innocent! You can't tell me otherwise.

COMPLETE detective *SHORT NOVEL* by KELLEY ROOS

The locale of this unusual short novel is a labyrinth of caves in western Pennsylvania—Ryan's Caverns, a scenic wonderland and, in its own grotesque way, Nature's fairyland. Dark, dark things happened in the darkness inside the earth. In the Devil's Parlor? In Hell's Grotto? In the newly opened tourist attraction called the Hanging Gardens? Dark, dark things—and the darkest of them was murder . . .

A short novel of terror and menace, of mystery and suspense, 450 feet below the surface of the earth . . .

MURDER UNDERGROUND

by KELLEY ROOS

ELSA LOGAN LOOKED UP FROM HER typing a moment to rest her eyes. She glanced across her cheerful little office in the Powell mansion, then walked across to the window and looked down the mountain at the river winding through the small town in the valley. It was a tastefully blended sun-bathed picture, western Pennsylvania at its best. It made her glad that she was Robert T. Powell's secretary.

People were wrong, Elsa thought, when they warned her a year ago against taking the job with Mr. Powell. The town people said he had turned vinegary, and was straitlaced to the point of austerity, a tyrannical bachelor. Once, that might have been true, but not lately. In fact, not since the fifty-two-year old Mr. Powell decided to marry Miss Lola Kramer.

The prospect of marrying Lola in about a month would be enough to cheer up any man. Elsa had gone to high school with her. Lola had been quite a girl, even then. People used to say she should be in the movies. Everyone said she was wasting her time here in Mottsville, Pa., population 6,947. They couldn't understand why Lola, when her family moved to Pittsburgh, had stayed on, working as a salesgirl in the Dress Box.

Then, suddenly, they did understand. Lola landed Robert T. Powell, which surprised the entire town. Why, it was plain as day she was marrying him for his money, everybody said. They could be right

about that, Elsa thought. Lola was marrying him, and he did have money.

Robert Powell's father had built his fortune on coal and timber. Robert had grown up here, an only, lonely child on this thousand-acre estate on top of the mountain. Then a motor accident orphaned his three much younger cousins, and Phoebe, Vivian, and Nick Powell came to live in this great stone fortress of a house.

Now, twenty years later, they were Robert's only relatives. People in town called them the Powell heirs and wondered maliciously how they felt about Lola stepping in between them and the Powell fortune.

Elsa didn't know about Vivian and Phoebe, but she did know about their younger brother. Nick cared only about finishing law school, then winning his own fame and fortune. Recently Elsa had been seeing a great deal of Nick, and she couldn't think of any nicer way to spend her time. She wasn't sure yet how Nick felt about her, but she was hoping. Now that Lola Kramer was out of circulation and Nick had stopped leading the town wolf pack in the chase, Elsa had finally managed to catch Nick's eye. He had, she thought, seemed pleasantly surprised.

A rough, croaking voice cut through Elsa's daydream. "Hello, girl."

"Why, hello, Walt."

Walt Carr ambled through the doorway and came to Elsa's desk. He was a trim little fellow of indeterminate years; he gave the impression of being a retired jockey. He winked at Elsa and cocked his head to one side.

"Got a new joke," he said. "Can I try it out on you?"

"Could I stop you?" Elsa asked.

"No."

This was a ritual between Elsa and the little guide from the nearby Ryan Caverns. He had stepped off the highway one day to ask Woody Ryan for a day's work. Woody and his wife, the former Phoebe Powell, had taken an immediate liking to him. Now, three years later, he was the cavern's star guide. Walt prided himself on his spiel; he loved to make his subterranean sightseeing audiences laugh.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Walt croaked, "you are about to enter the Devil's Parlor, four hundred and fifty feet underground. Sorry the Devil ain't in. He don't use the parlor much—can't stand the altitude."

Walt didn't see Elsa's smile; he always closed his eyes when he roared with laughter. He throttled his self-appreciative mirth as the door across the small office opened.

Robert Powell, a smile softening the sharpness of his pale face, waved a salute to the visitor. He said, "I heard that, Walt. Pretty good."

"Thanks . . . Say, here's your mail. Met the postman down at the

gate and saved him a trip up the lane."

"I'll take it, Elsa," Mr. Powell said. "Thank you, Walt."

"Sure," Walt said. "Mr. Powell, Woody sent me over to ask a favor. He gave his secretary a couple of days off, and now he finds he's got to get this publicity piece typed up and out to the papers tonight, or it won't make the Sunday editions. He thought maybe Elsa—"

"Of course," Elsa said. "How many copies?"

"Five will be fine."

She glanced at the scrawled yellow sheets that Walt handed her. "Oh, it's about the new section of caves that Woody's opening," she said. "It sounds so exciting."

"The Hanging Gardens," Walt said proudly. "I named it."

"Is it all ready?"

"Woody finished lighting it today. And it's really something—to delight and amaze!"

"I'm dying to see it," Elsa said. "I've heard Woody rave about that cave for at least ten years, but he'd never let me see it. Too dangerous to get into, he said."

"Well," Walt said, "you can walk right into it now. That was a tricky blasting job, enlarging the entrance . . . Why don't you do yourself a favor and come down and see it, Mr. Powell?"

Elsa saw Robert Powell's face tighten, and she shot Walt a quick look of warning. She was sure Walt must have heard of the accident six years ago, before the caves were opened to the public, an accident that almost cost Mr. Powell his life. He had stumbled one day onto a hidden entrance and ventured into the darkness, exploring it alone. On his way back a small avalanche blocked his passage, trapping him beneath the earth. It was a dreadful six hours before he was located by his cries for help, another horrifying twelve hours before they could dig him out.

When Woody, heading the rescue party, finally brought him up, he was half crazed with pain and shock. It took months in hospitals for him to recover, and he still hadn't overcome his fear of the caves. His injured left leg had turned the proud sportsman into an armchair athlete, and was a constant reminder of his frightful experience.

Walt, ignoring her warning glance, blustered blithely on. "I know you had a bad time down there once, Mr. Powell, but things are different now. Nothing to be afraid of any more. If you'd just pull yourself together and—well, I bet you'd like it. I can imagine what you went through, but—"

"You can, Walt, can you?" Robert Powell's face flushed at the subtle taunt in Walt's voice. "Have you ever gone through anything like that?"

"Well, no," Walt said uncomfortably. "But I—"

"Then you couldn't possibly

imagine what I went through."

He was quiet a moment, then began to speak softly, as if by compulsion, as if he had to justify his fear to Walt, to prove to Elsa that it was not cowardice. He told them how he had tried to quell the panic that rose in him, to think clearly. He had crawled slowly, carefully, in what he hoped was the right direction, his hands stretched out before him, groping. The second time his fingers had found the same peculiar, fan-shaped stone, he knew he had been moving in a circle.

The space he had fallen into was large and he was hopelessly lost. It was only after interminable hours of clawing his way round and round in the hideous blackness that he found the passage through which he had come. Then, at the moment when he saw a glimmer of fading daylight, the rock slide had imprisoned him.

There was death in Robert Powell's low voice and, as Elsa listened, the caverns no longer seemed the place of beauty and wonder she had always found them. They had become menacing, waiting—having waited millions of years—to trap the newcomer to earth, man. One mistake, one foolish risk by a mortal, and he was punished for his invasion from above.

There was a long silence when he finished speaking; then he said, "Do you still think I'm a pantywaist, Walt?"

"No, wait," Walt said. "I didn't mean that. I—Look, Mr. Powell. I don't blame you for staying out of that hole in the ground. I would, too."

The happy smile that had become his habit in the past few months was back again on Robert Powell's face. "Phoebe says I turn pale at the sight of a cellar door." He turned toward his office. "Well, I'll look at this mail."

"Say, Mr. Powell," Walt said, "I never did congratulate you on getting married next month. I wish you and Lola all the best."

"Thank you, Walt!" The smile threatened now to dislodge his ears. "Thank you!"

The office door closed behind him.

"Walt," Elsa said, "I have some letters to do for Mr. Powell, then I'll get at Woody's publicity."

"Want me to wait?"

"No, I'll take it to Woody on my way home."

"I'd appreciate that, Elsa. I got things to do. So long."

"So long, Walt."

It took about fifteen minutes for Elsa to type Mr. Powell's dictated letters. She started for the inner office to get his signature, opened the door, and then stopped, looking at Robert Powell in astonishment.

He was standing rigidly behind his desk. One hand was replacing the telephone, the other was a tight, white fist pounding an agonized rhythm on the green blotter. His

face was contorted in a grimace of angry misery.

Involuntarily, Elsa spoke his name. Without looking at her, he whispered harshly, "No. Not now, Elsa. Go home."

She quietly closed the door and stood uncertainly in her office. It was obvious he wanted no help from her. She thought of finding Nick, then realized he wasn't home. He would still be at the country club where he was working as golf pro.

She wondered if his sister Vivian were in, then rejected the idea of alerting anyone about Mr. Powell. He wouldn't welcome any offer of help or advice. More likely he would be furious with her meddling.

After a few minutes she managed to compose herself and get to work on Woody's typing chore. She was jumpy, and it took nearly an hour to finish. She gathered together the papers, got her purse from the desk drawer, and went to the inner office door.

She knocked hesitantly. There was no answer. Either Robert Powell had left his office by the other door or he was ignoring her knock. She turned away and went out of the big house into the lovely July evening.

She climbed into her elderly, tired sedan, coasted down the long graveled lane to the highway, and drove half a mile to the newly painted sign, large and bright, that pointed the way to the fabulous Ryan Caverns, western Pennsylvania's scenic wonder. It announced that on next Monday the caves would reopen to the public with the unveiling of the Hanging Gardens, a breath-taking new addition to the thrilling subterranean tour. Growing competition from a cavern across the mountain had inspired Woody Ryan to make this addition.

The approach to the caves was a climbing, half-mile private road. It cut across a finger of the great Powell estate and snaked through the now fallow Ryan farm, past the ramshackle farmhouse where Woody Ryan brought the lovely Phoebe Powell as a bride ten years ago, past the glittering structure of stone and glass that he built for her when his caves became a success. The road glided across the crest of the mountain and rolled down to the huge log lodge that housed the entrance to the caves. Woody's black convertible was the only car in the two-acre packing lot when Elsa pulled into it.

The lodge was empty. She walked through the groups of leather chairs and sofas, past the souvenir counter beside the gigantic fieldstone fireplace, through the ticket turnstile. She slipped into one of the heavy jackets provided for the unprepared visitor's comfort in the fifty-two-degree year-round coolness of the caverns. One of the large elevators was locked, the oth-

er was on the lower level. She used the iron staircase that wound over 250 feet down into the earth.

She set out to locate Woody Ryan, starting along one of the paved walks that narrowed and widened between the glistening jumbled walls of limestone. In the glow of the electric lights the colors ranged the spectrum of the rainbow. Ryan Caverns were really a scenic wonder; they were breathtaking, they were all the adjectives in all the ads, and Elsa never tired of wandering through them.

She passed through the great fiery-colored gallery known as Hell's Grotto, and took a passage to her left. Now she could hear the hum of water and in a minute she reached the underground waterfall, and its hum became a roar. Through the shimmering spray she could see a tall familiar figure beyond the falls moving away from her.

She called out, "Nick! Nick, wait!"

He didn't stop or turn, and she called again as he disappeared into one of the passages ahead of her. Quickly she skirted the churning pool into which the water cascaded and started to hurry after him. Then she stopped, realizing that she could have been wrong, that it probably hadn't been Nick.

Nick had never shared her enthusiasm for Woody's caves. He'd seen them; they were okay, they were fine, he said, but he'd seen them. Woody had hired a number of workmen to prepare the new chamber for its opening; it was probably one of them she had seen.

She moved on down the passageway, then took a branch tunnel to the right which brought her out at the Chamber of Gold on the main guide route. She stopped and hesitantly called, "Woody?"

As the sound bounced off the high cavern walls, she walked rapidly up a side tunnel toward the Dunce's Cap. Then she heard the clank of metal on metal and headed toward the sound. She rounded a bend and found Woody working—no, *playing* was the word—with a lighting effect at the Twin Witches.

Woody looked up as she approached, and a big friendly grin widened on his face. He would soon be forty, almost twice her age, yet somehow she had always felt that he was one of the gang.

"Hi," he said. "Look, I've almost got it. Wait a second." He fiddled with a small spotlight. "How's your mother and dad?"

"Fine. They're always asking about you."

"Haven't seen them for a month—hardly been in town at all. Tell them I've been so darned busy here at the caves—there! That does it!"

He switched out all the lights in the passageway except the spot. Its beam struck the overhang of rock that was shaped like two witches' faces in profile. Now, if you used

just a little imagination, there was another witch.

"Woody! How wonderful!"

"The Three Witches. You know. Shakespeare."

"Macbeth, wasn't it? Congratulations."

"Thanks. Kind of like it myself." He saw the sheaf of papers in her hand. "Those mine, Elsa? Remind me to do something nice for you some day."

"How about right now?"

"Name it."

"Let me look at the new room."

"The Hanging Gardens? It's not quite ready yet. Why don't you wait for the grand opening?"

"Walt said it was— Oh, please, Woody!"

"There are still a few things I want to do in there."

"All right! Forget I asked you. I'm going to sneak in."

She went down the long passage, past the Dunce's Cap, back into the Chamber of Gold. There she turned left, went through a smaller cavern named the Little Temple, and then on to the Hanging Gardens. She stood in its newly blasted entrance, staring at the room in delight.

The chamber was about as long as a freight car, three times as high, four times as wide. Its four walls were golden cascades of flowstone, its ceiling an arch of countless tiny stalactites, building at the approximate pace of a cubic inch a century. Few men would ever live long enough to discern any difference in them.

The colors of the room were predominantly gold and bronze, but there were splashes of ivory, soft old rose, shining icy blue. It was a fairyland, completely enchanting.

Then she saw the feature of the room, the Sailfish, and moved to the center of the chamber to stand before it. From the floor there bulged a rounded rectangle of rock and on it nature had painted a huge fish in silver-blue. From its back she had miraculously sculpted its sail fin, perfectly fluted and silver-touched. It took no imagination at all to see it as a sailfish.

She stepped closer to it, reached out her hand to touch its smooth coldness, and she saw the still, twisted legs that protruded from behind the rock. She forced herself to move around the rock, forced her eyes to move from the sprawled legs up to the blood-streaked, lifeless face.

Robert Powell had been brutally, savagely beaten to death. She screamed as she ran from the chamber . . .

Elsa closed the door of Woody's office, leaving Chief of Police Haney alone. It had been a harrowing half hour, answering his seemingly endless questions.

She walked slowly down the corridor. When she reached the place where she could see into the main room of the lodge, she stopped, not

wanting to go on, dreading to face the five persons whom murder had brought together.

There was Nick, his buoyant attractiveness blurred by the tenseness, the haggardness of him. There were Nick's two sisters—Phoebe, looking more ravaged because hers was a softer, warmer beauty. Vivian's features were sharp; the tragedy had wrought less change in her habitually brooding, restive face. There was Woody, whose shock and incredulity had given way now to sorrow. Then, sitting apart from the family group, staring at them in helpless commiseration, was Walt Carr.

Elsa heard a footstep behind her. Wes Gelb, a young town policeman, leaned against the wall beside her. In a low voice he said, "You know you're looking at the murderer, Elsa."

"Oh, Wes, no!"

"Sure; it's one of them—Nick or Vivian Powell, Phoebe or Woody Ryan. They get the Powell money now, don't they?"

"And you think one of them would have killed to get it? Oh, Wes!"

"All right. If Lola Kramer had married old Powell she would have got the money, wouldn't she?"

"Wes, I don't want to talk about it."

"She would have got most of it, you can bet on that! You know Lola. Why else would she marry him? A man more than twice her age. And he gets murdered a month before the wedding, before Lola can get her hands on all that dough. But now, with him dead, the cousins are the only heirs."

Elsa turned her back on him, took a step away, but Wes moved beside her again.

"No alibis, not one. Any one of them could have killed him. Vivian says she was out walking—alone. Phoebe was at home, she says, but there's no one to prove it."

"I know, Wes," Elsa said wearily.

"We found the weapon—a two-foot length of pipe. Any of them could have used it. This was a real, cool customer. Not a fingerprint, the thing all wiped clean except for some blood. Sorry, Elsa. But this is murder and—"

She walked away from the policeman. She'd always known Wes Gelb as a pleasant young man whose main concern was traffic regulations, and Chief of Police Haney as the jovial guardian of a quiet, friendly village. A murder changed them, Elsa thought, just as it changed the rest of those in this room.

Chief Haney had been grim, relentless in his questioning of her. He made her realize her importance, her responsibility. She had been the last person known to see Robert Powell alive; and it was she who had discovered his bludgeoned body.

All the questions seemed pointed to one answer: Why had Robert

Powell gone down into the caves? What made him overcome his psychopathic fear of the caves which years before had almost taken his life?

Elsa had told Haney how happy, even gay, Mr. Powell had been all morning, all afternoon until the phone call. Even telling Walt Carr and her of his dreadful accident hadn't spoiled his good humor for long. He had even joked about it later. But after the phone call— She described how she found him at his desk, stricken, anguished, just putting down the telephone.

Haney had asked, "You've no idea who he was talking to?"

"None at all."

"You're his secretary, Elsa. Wouldn't you have answered—? Oh, I see. He must have made the call."

"Yes. There's no switchboard, only an extension."

"He called someone," Haney said, "who told him something that upset him, that made him go into the caves. He didn't tell you where he was going?"

"No, I didn't even see him leave. He must have gone out the French doors in his office to the garage. I suppose he did drive—"

"Yes, we found his car in the small parking lot behind the lodge."

"That's why I didn't see it when I got here."

"Elsa, who could he have possibly called?"

"I don't know. Usually he asked me to get a number for him, but this time—"

"All right." Then Haney had left her alone in the office. When he came back he said, "Both Woody and Phoebe say he didn't phone them. It might have been Lola Kramer. I've sent for her."

Then more questions about Elsa's arrival at the caves, her talk with Woody Ryan, her discovery of the body in the Hanging Gardens.

"You didn't see anyone else down there, Elsa? Only Woody Ryan?"

"Yes, I—there was another person, a man. He was by the falls when I saw him, before I found Woody."

"Recognize him?"

"I—I only caught a glimpse of him through the falls. It might have been one of the workmen." She rubbed her hands across her eyes. "Mr. Haney, I don't know any more. I've told you everything I can."

He had dismissed her from the office and asked her to wait with the others in the lodge.

Now Wes Gelb's callousness seemed more than she could bear. She didn't join the group at the far end of the lodge. Instead, she sank quietly into a chair by the cold fireplace. She closed her eyes, pressing her hands against the throbbing in her temples. She was grateful that no one, not even Nick, came to her.

She heard a car pull to a stop before the lodge. Then a policeman

was holding open the door, and Lola Kramer walked past him into the room. He motioned her toward the office, but Lola ignored him. She stood looking at the group across the room, at Phoebe and Woody, at Nick and Vivian.

Elsa felt a tremor of revulsion at the sight of the pretty, voluptuous young woman. Lola's full, bright-red lips were pressed in the pout of a greedy, spoiled child suddenly deprived of what it wanted most. She wasn't mourning the death of Robert Powell; she was resenting it.

Woody and Nick rose from their chairs, but it was Phoebe who spoke. "Lola, we've been thinking about you."

"Yes?" There was a challenge in her husky voice. "Not one of you thought enough about me to come and tell me what had happened."

Vivian said sharply, "We had to stay here, Lola. The police—"

Lola interrupted her. "But you've been thinking about me. Thinking what?"

"Lola," Phoebe said, "please don't — It's been dreadful for all of us."

Lola said, "I know what you've been thinking! And it hasn't been dreadful for you."

"Now, Lola," Woody said.

"You, too, Woody," Lola said viciously. "You hated my engagement to Bob just as much as those three! And why? You're a local boy who made good, aren't you? You married one of the fancy Powells."

"There you are!" The shrillness of Vivian's voice silenced Lola. She was speaking to Nick, but she made very sure that Lola heard. "There's your 'good kid at heart,' Nick. There's the wife who would make a human being out of Bob! Don't you see now how cheap she is, how heartless and—?"

Lola's lip curled in a scornful smile. "Is that why you didn't want me to marry Bob, Vivian? Because I'm cheap and heartless? I don't remember you thinking that when I ran around with Nick. I was good enough for your brother. But when it was Bob and me—then, suddenly, I'm cheap and heartless! Why, Vivian? It couldn't be because, if I married Bob, I'd be moving in on money you considered yours, could it?"

"How dare you talk about money," Vivian said chokingly, "at a time like this, you—"

"You don't care anything about money, Vivian?" The sarcasm almost foamed from Lola's mouth. "You've been living the life you have—a housekeeper for Bob—because you're so fond of him? You didn't mind getting what amounted to a salary—no, an allowance, from him? Stop it, Vivian! You've only been staying with him in that big ugly house on top of that lonely mountain because some day there'd be money for you. If you were a real, good girl, there'd be lots of money."

"Lola!" Phoebe's voice rose angrily in defense of her sister. "You

don't know Vivian; you don't know any of us well enough to talk like this!"

"No? No, Phoebe? I know more than you think. Bob didn't have any secrets from me. So don't try to be so high and mighty. Don't pretend that money didn't mean anything to you. I know different. I know how much you want to get your hands on some of it, and right away! You Powell girls, you wonderful, wonderful Powell girls! Think you're above anything so low-down dirty as money, but I know better."

"Lola," Nick said urgently, "please."

"Okay, Nick, I'll shut up." But the echo of her bitter tirade still rang in the silence of the big room. She looked slowly around the circle of shocked, hostile faces and for a moment there was fright in her eyes. Then her chin lifted defiantly. "I'll shut up. Just don't any of you overdo the grief act. I know how you felt—all of you except Nick. You'd rather have Bob dead than married to me—or anyone."

Walt Carr moved over toward Lola, stepped between her and the others. He said, "Lola, baby, Mr. Haney wants to see you. That's why you're here. Remember?"

"What does he want me for?"

"I'll tell you," Haney said. He walked by Elsa from out of the corridor. She had no idea how long he'd been standing there, listening.

"Lola," he said, "did Mr. Powell telephone you this afternoon?"

"No. I talked to him before lunch, that's all."

"You're still working at the Dress Box?"

"Yes, tomorrow was to be my last day." Her face darkened; there was that childish anger in it again. "I guess I won't be quitting, after all."

She half turned back to the Powells, and Haney spoke quickly, "Were you at the Dress Box all afternoon? Could he have called and you not know about it? He made a call around four o'clock."

"He might have; I don't know. I knocked off early, a little before four."

"What did you do?"

"I took a ride. In my new car."

She hurled the last words at the Powells, as if serving notice that this was one thing they couldn't take away from her—the sleek convertible that her fiancé had given her. The town gossips had been chattering for days about it.

Haney said, "Were you alone?"

"Yes. Say, what are you doing to me? Seeing if I have an alibi? Me?"

"Alibis," Haney said gently, "are very nice things for everybody to have at a time like this. All right, folks, that's it for now. Stay close to home, all of you."

Twenty minutes later Elsa finally got a chance to be alone with Nick. Except for two police squad cars, theirs were the only two left in

the vast parking lot. Nick closed the door of her car and stood beside it, looking through the window.

"I wish I could take you home, Elsa, but Vivian—I can't leave her alone in that big house. She's expecting me to follow her."

"That's all right, Nick—" She stopped, uncertain of what to say.

"What is it, Elsa?"

She said hesitantly, "Nick, I thought— Were you in the caves today? Before—before it happened, I mean."

"Why, Elsa?"

"I thought I saw you by the falls when I was looking for Woody. I called, but you didn't answer."

"I didn't hear you, Elsa. Probably the roar of the falls—"

"Then it was you, Nick? You were down there?"

He nodded. "Yes. For a little while."

"But, Nick, why? You hardly ever go down in the caves. Why today, of all days?"

He smiled ruefully. "Woody'd been talking so much about the new room I thought I'd take a look at it. I just happened to pick today to go there, that's all."

"But, Nick, the new room— That's where he was. Didn't you see him there?"

"I didn't even get to the new room, Elsa. I got lost and wandered around for a while, then gave up and went home. I didn't see Bob, or anybody, except one of the electricians who was working down there."

"Did the electrician see you?"

"Yes. Why, Elsa?"

"Won't he tell Mr. Haney you were there, Nick? Shouldn't you tell him before—"

"But I have told Haney—I told him right away." He looked down at her in surprise. "Elsa, is that what's troubling you? You didn't tell Haney you saw me because you were afraid I might have— Look, stop worrying. I didn't see Bob, and I had no idea he was down there."

"I believe you, Nick. And I didn't tell because I wasn't positive it was you. I didn't want to involve you."

"Elsa." He reached through the window, pulled her close to him, and held her briefly. "I'm not involved. But thanks for worrying about me. Feel better now?"

"Yes, Nick. You'd better go after Vivian."

"All right, Elsa. Good night."

She drove away as Nick climbed into his car. She dreaded going home. Her mother and father would be waiting for her, waiting with sympathy and understanding, but with a hundred inevitable questions.

She drove slowly down the mountain and into the town, reminding herself constantly that Nick was in no more trouble than his two sisters. All three of them had conceivable motives, if you thought about it. She parked in front of her house, then walked

across the freshly sprinkled lawn to the trim little white house.

The next morning, after some hesitation, and against the will of her mother, she set out for the Powell mansion. It was possible she could help; there would be phone calls, telegrams, other details that she could handle for Vivian and Nick. She backed her car out of the drive and was on her way.

The town was quiet. There was a subdued air about the people as they talked somberly to one another on the streets. Mottsville would miss Robert Powell. There had been a time, long ago, when the townspeople resented the invasion of the Powells, when old Mr. Powell had bought up hundreds of acres of their mountain land for his family playground.

But over the years the Powells had endeared themselves to the villagers. It was Phoebe's marriage to a favorite native son, Woody Ryan, that made Mottsville completely accept the whole family as one of them. Since this event they spoke of the Powells with possessive pride, pointed out the great mountain house as a local landmark.

Elsa could remember Robert Powell before his accident, the times she had seen him play and, seemingly, always win the golf and tennis tourneys at the Country Club. He had been a vivid, if somewhat arrogant, figure until his harrowing accident in the Ryan Caverns. After that, his robust health ruined, he had lived a quiet, retiring life.

He converted a part of the great mansion into an office and until Lola burst into his life, had devoted himself entirely to the management of the family fortune. Old Mr. Powell, his father, had stripped the countryside of its coal and timber, but the Powell fortune still remained, and under Robert's direction grew even larger.

Elsa sped past one of the big gaudy signs extolling the wonders of Woody's caves. How ironic, she thought, that the place where Powell had once so narrowly escaped death and where, finally, he had met it, should prove to be the caverns whose success he had made possible. Without his help, Woody could never have turned them into the rich commercial venture that they were.

The building of the new Dixie Highway five years ago had brought a flood of tourists through this part of the country. It had been that fact which made Woody realize the commercial possibilities of the caves on his farm. But the fulfillment of his dream would have been impossible without Robert's help.

A generation ago, when Robert's father bought up the mountainous land, Woody's father had refused to part with his homestead. A feud of sorts developed, but it was known that old Mr. Powell had had a grudging respect for old Mr.

Ryan's love of his land, now surrounded by the great Powell estate.

In order to open the caves to the public, Woody had to build a road from the new highway across a corner of the Powell land. In spite of his own feelings about the caves, Robert Powell had cooperated in every way to help Phoebe's husband achieve this financial success. And now, hating and fearing the caves as he did, something had made him go down into them one more time —to be murdered there.

As Elsa parked in the estate's wide garage, she noticed Nick's car was gone. She walked around to the front of the house. An old gardener, poking aimlessly at a flowerbed, shook his head sadly at Elsa, saying nothing, needing to say nothing. Elsa knew how he felt; he had first worked for Robert Powell's father.

Phoebe's bright-red coupé stood before the veranda steps and, behind it, a black police car.

Elsa was crossing the foyer toward her office in the business wing when she heard her name called. She turned, saw Chief of Police Haney beckoning to her from the living room. She found Phoebe there, and Vivian.

Phoebe had withstood the ordeal of the past sixteen hours more successfully than her sister. She looked tired, spent, but she was composed. Vivian's thin face was lined and haggard, her hands trembled; all resemblance to her more beautiful, glamorous sister had been obliterated, and Elsa was shocked by the sight of her.

Haney said, "Elsa, I wanted to ask you about the mail delivery here, the afternoon mail. What time does it come?"

"Why, usually between three and four."

"And yesterday it came at that time?"

"Yes, Walt brought it in yesterday. He'd met the postman on the road. He gave it directly to Mr. Powell."

"I see. And he took it into his office to read?"

"Yes."

"And the next time you saw him he seemed upset?"

"Yes, he was just hanging up the phone and—"

"The phone, yes. We've been able to track down that call he made. It was to Lola Kramer."

"Then she lied, didn't she?" Vivian said vindictively. "It was something Lola said to him that upset him so, that sent him down to the caves."

"No, she didn't lie," Haney said. "Lola didn't get the call; she'd already left the store. One of the girls at the dress shop answered the phone . . . Mrs. Ryan," he said, turning to Phoebe, "I want to talk to both of you about Lola Kramer."

"Lola Kramer is a town girl, Mr. Haney," Phoebe said. "I'm sure you know quite as much about her as Vivian and I."

"You know more about her relationship with your cousin than I do. How long had they known each other?"

"Several months. They met last winter."

"How did they meet?"

"How? Why, through Nick, I suppose. Isn't that right, Vivian?"

"Yes," Vivian said shortly. "Yes, Nick introduced them."

"And your cousin became interested in Lola right away?"

"Probably. But none of us realized it for some time." Vivian's pale lips tightened. "Suddenly it seemed Bob was giving me a present from the Dress Box almost every other day. It took me a while to realize that the inspiration for his generosity was one of the salesgirls there. For weeks he acted like a college boy smitten by a chorus girl. It seems the whole town was talking before he finally screwed up enough courage to tell his own family he was going to marry Lola Kramer."

"How did Nick take it?"

"He was shocked at first, of course. We all were."

"Wasn't he more than shocked? Angry, maybe? After all, Nick and Lola—"

"No!" Phoebe said. "Lola never meant anything to Nick! They had fun together, that's all. You know that chasing Lola Kramer is almost a town game for the boys." Phoebe smiled faintly. "And Nick had a strong sense of competition. But when he saw that Bob was serious about Lola, he gave her up completely."

"Somebody," Haney said, "doesn't agree with you, Mrs. Ryan. Somebody thinks that Nick and Lola were still pretty much interested in each other."

"Who?" Phoebe demanded.

"A letter writer," Haney said. "A letter writer with a poison pen. We have one or two of those snakes in town."

He drew a crumpled piece of white paper from his pocket and gingerly, holding it at the very edges, flattened it out on the desk. "We found this on the floor of Mr. Powell's car . . . No, don't touch it. We'll have it tested for fingerprints. But, you see, it wasn't the phone call that knocked Mr. Powell for a loop. It was this letter."

Elsa moved to the desk and her eyes widened in angry disbelief as she read the typewritten words:

"Dear Mr. Powell:

Are you so old and feeble-minded you believe that Lola Kramer would marry you for anything but your money? Haven't you realized that she and Nick Powell are as crazy about each other as they ever were? If you don't believe me, you might go to the Ryan Caverns this afternoon around five o'clock—where your dear cousin and your fine fiancée are in the habit of meeting."

Elsa said chokingly, "Mr. Haney, you don't—you don't believe that—you can't! It's a lie, a dreadful lie!"

"Of course it's a lie!" Phoebe had come to stand close beside Elsa; her arm was comforting around her shoulders. "A nasty anonymous letter! No one in his right mind would believe it!"

"I don't know," Haney said slowly. "Perhaps I'll know better after I've talked to Nick, and to Lola. But at the moment I know someone was sure enough that Lola and Nick were meeting in the caves to write this letter. And Bob Powell at least believed it enough to phone Lola, to try to check on her. And when he found she wasn't at the store, he went to the caves."

"No," Phoebe said. "You know how Bob hated those caves. Nothing as ridiculous as that vile letter could have driven him there."

"You mean he wouldn't have believed the letter? He wasn't jealous of Lola?"

"Yes, he was jealous," Phoebe said reluctantly. "I have to admit that. Bob was a terribly possessive person. But he trusted Nick. He never would have believed this of Nick."

Haney turned to Vivian. "What do you say about that, Miss Powell?"

"I—I agree with Phoebe, of course."

The policeman regarded her for a moment, then sighed. "It's natural for you to want to protect your brother, but—"

"Protect him!" Phoebe cried. "But we're telling you the truth!"

"You may think you are, Mrs. Ryan. Perhaps you don't know the truth. But your sister does, and she isn't telling it. Miss Powell, one of your servants overheard a quarrel between Bob Powell and Nick. You were present. The quarrel was about Lola. The servant only knows that much. Will you tell me more? Or shall I use my imagination?"

Vivian looked to her sister for help. "Phoebe—"

"The truth," Phoebe said tonelessly. "Tell it—whatever it is."

"Yes, they—they did quarrel, Bob and Nick. Lola was spending a good deal of time at the Country Club, swimming mostly. She and Nick were together a lot. I imagine Lola still found Nick more exhilarating than Bob, though not so financially stimulating. Anyway, Bob heard about it, and he was furious. He didn't believe that Nick's interest in Lola was just friendly; he tried to make Nick promise to stay away from her. Nick got angry; he refused to be dictated to. There was quite a battle."

"And then," Haney said, "on top of that, this note came. I think perhaps it was just enough to send Bob Powell down into the caves. If he found Nick there with Lola, if there was a quarrel, another battle —Nick's young and hot-tempered and strong. He might have—"

"No!" Phoebe said. "No, it's all a lie! Bob didn't find them together; they weren't there!"

"Nick was there," Haney said.

"He's admitted that. I don't know about Lola Kramer—not yet."

He started for the door, hesitated, then turned back to Phoebe. "Mrs. Ryan, I might as well get this over with now."

"Yes?"

"Last night Lola Kramer made a remark to you that puzzled me. She implied that you were anxious to get hold of some money—very anxious."

"Yes," Phoebe said. "I didn't think you'd miss that."

"What did she mean, Mrs. Ryan? Woody may not be really wealthy yet, but those caves of his are on the way to making him just that. Why do you need money?"

"She doesn't," Vivian said. "Certainly you don't believe every word that Lola—"

"Don't, Vivian," Phoebe said. "I think Mr. Haney already knows the answer. Don't you, Mr. Haney?"

"I'm afraid I do, Mrs. Ryan. I talked to Lola last night. Bob Powell told her about you and Woody. She knew that you wanted to leave him."

"Phoebe!" Elsa said. "No, that isn't true! Why, you and Woody—"

"Yes," Phoebe said quietly, "it is true. I've wanted to leave Woody for a long time now."

"But your cousin didn't approve, did he?" Haney said. "You wanted him to stake you, finance you, if you divorced Woody. He refused, didn't he?"

"Yes. He refused to help me."

Haney nodded. "I can imagine how Bob Powell would have felt about any scandal. And I know how much he always thought of Woody. Did he go so far, Mrs. Ryan, as to threaten to disinherit you if you left Woody?"

"Lola told you that, too, didn't she? Yes, she's right. He did go that far. He begged me to stay with Woody and I—I said I'd think it over. And I did think it over—"

"But now," Haney said flatly, "you're free to leave him, you can afford it now. The murder arranged that for you. The money's yours without asking."

Vivian stepped forward and said angrily, "You've accused Nick of murder—and now Phoebe."

"I'm not enjoying it, Miss Powell," Haney said sharply. "Tell Nick I want to see him." Abruptly he turned and left the room.

Elsa heard the front door slam. She looked at Phoebe, at the lovely, gracious woman she had always thought so happy, so content, and she said, "Phoebe, it isn't true, it can't be! You and Woody have always been—"

"I know, Elsa. You're like all the rest. Phoebe and Woody, the marriage made in heaven. Well, it hasn't been exactly that. I'm not sure what went wrong with us. Maybe those first years when we had so little, when we struggled and scrimped and saved, when Woody wanted so frantically to be as rich and impor-

tant as Bob—maybe those years were too much for both of us. Anyway, there was nothing good left in our marriage. There hasn't been for a long time. I tried to show Bob that."

"Phoebe, I'm sorry."

She smiled bitterly. "Bob was sorry, too—about my unhappiness. But everybody, including Mr. Haney, knows how he felt about Woody, how fond and proud of him he was. He thought I was out of my mind to want to leave him. He wouldn't help me. And because I'm like Vivian I've stayed with Woody. Money means as much to me as it does to her."

"Phoebe, how can you!" There was acid in Vivian's tone. "You sound like Lola Kramer, you—"

Phoebe smiled ruefully at her sister. "Not quite, I hope, dear. But Lola's right about both of us. We can't bear to face a life without money, without luxuries."

"You did once, Phoebe—when you married Woody. But me—yes, I guess you're right about me. If only I'd had the courage to leave this house, if only I hadn't let Bob run my life for me!"

"Don't be too hard on Bob. He didn't realize—"

"Yes, he did. But he was so afraid of being left alone here that he discouraged every young man who was ever interested in me. He drove them all away. And then to take up with that girl—Lola, Lola Kramer of all people! He dared disapprove of my beaux and then wanted to marry a thing like her."

"It's over now, Vivian," Phoebe said.

"No. Mr. Haney's wondering now which of us killed Bob. All three of us are being suspected of murder. And Nick—what will this do to Nick?"

"He'll be all right," Phoebe said. She was looking at Elsa. "You mustn't believe those things about Nick and Lola, Elsa."

"I don't!" Elsa said fiercely. "I know they're not true."

Vivian covered her face with her hands. "Where is Nick? I've got to see him. I've got to talk to him before Haney does!"

"He didn't tell you where he was going?" Phoebe asked.

"No, he just went out for a drive. He didn't sleep at all last night and—"

Elsa said, "He might have gone up to Lookout Rock—he often does."

"Yes!" Vivian said eagerly. "I'll drive up there and find him."

"No, Vivian." Phoebe's hands were on her sister's shoulders. "You're going to lie down—you need some rest. Elsa will go, won't you?"

"Yes," Elsa said. "Right away."

Phoebe was leading Vivian up the broad staircase to her room when Elsa left the house. She drove down to the highway and turned off at the road to the caverns, a short cut to Lookout Rock—if her old

car could climb the last rough, steep mile of dirt road. The car's noisy motor pounded out a rhythm as it chugged along. Nick and Lola—Nick and Lola—Nick and . . .

"No," she thought, trying to thrust it from her mind, "no, Phoebe's right; it isn't true. It's a mistake, a lie. Nick will explain it. He'll be able to explain it all."

Then she saw his car parked in the paved turnabout in front of the Ryan house. She jerked her car into the drive, swerved to a stop. She ran across the flagstoned terrace, pounded the brass knocker until the maid opened the door for her.

The maid shook her head. "There's no one at home now, Miss Logan. Mrs. Ryan went over to her sister's, and Mr. Ryan's out, too."

"But isn't Nick here? His car's out there."

"Yes, he was here a little while ago. I think he went to look for Mr. Ryan."

"Is Mr. Ryan over at the caves?"

"I don't know, ma'am. He might be, seems like he always is."

She left her car at the Ryan house and raced across the lawn to the caverns. The big lodge was empty, and she looked hastily into Woody's office, then in the smaller room where his secretary worked. One of the elevators was up, the other down. Slowly she dropped down into the caverns.

There was no one in sight when she stepped out of the elevator, but the lights were burning in each of the three wings that stretched out from the portal where she stood. She called out for Woody, for Nick. She heard no answer, but the acoustical tricks the caverns played made it possible that someone might be within fifty feet of her and still not hear her call.

She started down the central passage that led to the new Hanging Gardens. She was in the deepest part of the caverns, approaching the long slender finger of gently moving water that Woody called the Lake of the Moon. He had contrived lighting effects that produced spectacular reflections of the overhanging rock formations in the shallow water—the Sunken City, the Pirate's Shipwreck, the Ocean Volcano. She hurried past it, not stopping this time to admire it, and came to the entrance of the Chamber of Gold.

This, actually, was a widening of the passage into a chamber, partitioned by walls of rocks into a maze, a catacomb. There were jagged openings, windows, portholes, arches in the walls. In many places the glistening flowstone gave the impression of golden altars. Now the chamber divided itself into two passageways, and she took the one to the left.

She went past the stalagmite that was called the Dunce's Cap and started down the aisle. She found herself hurrying, anxious to find someone, to be with someone. It was so still, so very lonely down

here inside the earth. She had never felt that way about the caves before, but now, after last night—she walked faster, almost running.

She had gone a good 75 yards toward the Three Witches when she heard the sound of footsteps ahead of her—perhaps, she thought, around the next twist of the passage. She moved ahead quickly and in a moment had rounded the turn. The passage before her was empty.

"Woody!" she called. "Woody—Nick!"

There was no answer. She took a breath to call out again, and it exploded in a gasp. The lights in the caves suddenly blackened out and the passage plunged into total, incredible darkness.

She stood a moment, trying to calm herself, knowing that the lights would come back on immediately. Groping her way to a wall, she put her hand on its comfortless, damp coldness, and waited. She called out, and the echo of her voice bounced back at her so quickly that it frightened her.

She called again, but there was still no answer but the echo of her own voice. She stood very still, listening. There was nothing in the caves but the ghostly, primeval silence.

Involuntarily, though she knew she should remain where she was until the lights came on, she turned and started blindly back toward the entrance to the Chamber of Gold. She kept one hand on the wall, the other stretched out before her, moving cautiously, but still she stumbled and fell. She got to her feet and went on, even more slowly now, anxiously waiting for her hand to touch the Dunce's Cap and tell her where she was.

She called out again for Woody, for Nick, but her voice was the only sound in the blackness.

A cold fear began to rise inside her. She should have reached the Dunce's Cap by now; she should be almost back to the Chamber of Gold. With both hands she reached out about her, touching each outcropping of rock, hoping its identity would establish her position. There was nothing familiar to her, no rock, or stone, or jutting wall, and the thought lurking in her mind grew until she must accept it as more than a possibility.

Somehow she had stumbled into a section of the caves that were not open to the public, a place not yet wired for lighting, not yet explored. Perhaps she had blundered into a tributary that not even Woody Ryan knew about.

Her foot missed a step and she plunged headlong to the floor. She heard a clatter as her things spilled from her shoulder bag, and she groped wildly about, finding a comb, a pen, a lipstick, and stuffed them back into her purse.

She knew then that panic had taken hold of her. She forced herself to stop scrabbling in the blackness; she fought to regain her con-

trol. She had lost touch with the wall; first, she knew, she must make contact again with a wall. She moved along on her hands and knees, finding nothing but space.

She got to her feet and moved forward again, both hands outstretched, feet shuffling to make sure her next step would not send her hurtling down into nothingness. Her knee bumped against a stone. She stooped and felt a jutting blade of rock, caressed it with her hands. It was delicate, distinctive—a fan of stone, a lady's fan, opened for use.

With a little cry she jerked back from it. She knew now where she was. The fan-shaped formation must be the same one that Robert Powell had come upon; the chamber was the one he had discovered—and his flight from it had almost caused his death.

She knew now that the fear she had been fighting was justified; she had blundered into an unexplored section of the caverns. No one could ever find her in this chamber; no one but Robert Powell had ever been in it before. The passage he had used was blocked now, its entrance sealed. She had only one chance, she knew—to find her way back, miraculously, as she had come.

She forced the fear from her mind, made herself inch forward into the awful emptiness. But slowly the fear seeped back into her. Her slow walk became a running stumble; she was sobbing, and she knew that she had again lost control.

She staggered on, and when she touched stone wall she made no attempt to be logical, to even consider which direction to take. She only knew she had moved from one chamber into another; now she was in a passageway.

Her hand touched a smooth, rounded rock as she passed it. She stopped and turned back again to it, clasped it feverishly with both hands. Her fingers felt the droll outline of the Dunce's Cap, and her relief exploded in a cry. She knew now where she was. The impossible had happened.

Somehow she had found her way back into the developed part of the caves, into the Chamber of Gold. Now she could find her way, even in the blackness, back to the cavern's portal and up to the lodge above it.

She was still sobbing hysterically as she ran across the lawn to the Ryan house. She saw Nick step from behind his car and stop short at the sight of her. Then he was running toward her; his arms were tight around her.

"Elsa, what is it? What's happened?"

She couldn't speak; she sagged against Nick. He picked her up, and in a minute she was lying on a sofa in the Ryans' living room. Woody was at her side with a jigger of brandy.

After a few moments she sat up. She said, "I'm all right now."

"Have a little more brandy," Woody said.

"No, I'm all right now."

Nick said, "What happened, Elsa?"

"I went down into the caves, looking for you and Woody, and I —I got lost."

"Lost?" Woody looked at her in worried surprise. "You, Elsa? How?"

"The lights went out and I—I got panicky. I know I should have stayed where I was, but I was so sure I could find my way back to the portal."

"Wait a minute," Woody said. "The lights went out? Why?"

"I don't know. I thought I heard someone, and I called out, but no one answered. Then, right away, the lights went off. Maybe someone turned them off, or maybe a fuse blew. I didn't stop to think about it then, I—"

Nick spoke, interrupting her. "What about the lights down there, Woody? Is it possible that a fuse could just blow?"

"It's possible, but I doubt it. The wiring, the whole system's just been overhauled for the reopening." Woody strode to the picture window across the room, stood looking through it toward his caves. "Someone must have turned those lights out. But why anyone should have done it, or who could have done it—"

"Who's down there now, Woody?"

"That's just it. No one's supposed to be. The police sent the workmen home when they came this morning."

"Walt?"

Woody shook his head. "I don't think so. I sent him into the village this morning to do some errands for me." He turned abruptly and started for the doorway. "I'll take a look in the caves." They heard his footsteps cross the terrace.

Nick said, "I'd better go with him, Elsa."

"No, Nick, wait! There's something else—that's why I was trying to find you. They—Nick, the police found a letter. It was written to Mr. Powell. They know now why he went down into the caves."

His voice was very quiet. "Tell me about it, Elsa."

She turned her face away from him. "He thought that you and Lola were in love with each other, that you were meeting in the caves. That's what the letter said."

Nick said nothing, and at last she made herself turn to him. He was looking at her with a blank, white face.

"Nick," she said, "I know it isn't true! I know you didn't go down there to meet Lola."

"But I did, Elsa. When you saw me yesterday, that's what I was doing—looking for Lola."

"Nick—"

"But that's the only part that is true, Elsa. The rest of it is a lie. Elsa, listen to me: the steward took

a message for me at the Club yesterday. Someone said she was Woody's secretary, that she was calling from the caves."

"But Woody's secretary isn't working now. He gave her a few days off!"

"Yes, I know," Nick said grimly. "I didn't know it then. This person said Lola was at the caves, and she wanted to see me there at once, that it was urgent. I thought it was crazy, and I hadn't any idea why Lola would want to see me, but I went. I didn't find Lola, and I didn't see Bob, either. I never did go into the new room, Elsa, and that's the truth."

"I believe you, Nick."

"Right after I got home, the police phoned. I saw what the setup was then: Bob murdered in the caves, Lola and I both down there. It would have been fairly obvious what had happened—Bob found us together, he and I quarreled, I killed him. That's the way it was planned; only something went wrong. Lola wasn't in the caves."

"You're sure, Nick?"

"I didn't get to talk to her until this morning. She didn't get a message to meet me, but that was probably because she'd left work early. She couldn't be reached. I'm sure she was supposed to get the same message I did. We were both supposed to have been in the caves at the time of the murder."

"But, Nick, if Lola can prove she wasn't there, then they'll know it couldn't have happened that way. They'll know you were tricked."

"She can't prove it. She went for a ride, alone; she was gone for a couple of hours." Defeat crept into his voice. "It looks as if the plan is working out, after all, doesn't it? They know I was in the caves, and we can't prove that Lola wasn't. They'll probably find out that Bob and I had a fight a few days ago—over Lola."

"They know about it already. One of the maids overheard you."

He said, "Bob was wrong, Elsa. There wasn't anything serious between Lola and me; there never has been. But I doubt if I can convince the police. I wasn't able to even convince Bob. He believed strongly enough to go down into the caves."

"Nick," Elsa said slowly, "the person who wrote that letter, who phoned you—that's the murderer. Mr. Haney will see that."

"He will if he believes that the letter is a lie—if he believes that I was tricked into going down into the caves, and that Lola wasn't there at all. If not—No, don't worry, Elsa. I'll go to him right away; I'll tell him the truth. There isn't anything else I can do now."

"Nick, Vivian's terribly upset. She wants to see you before you talk to Mr. Haney. She sent me to get you."

"She knows about the letter?"

"Yes, Mr. Haney showed it to us—Vivian and Phoebe and me. They

don't believe it, Nick, any more than I did. But Vivian's so worried she's almost sick."

"All right. I'll see her first."

"I'll follow you back."

"You?" A little smile chased the somberness from his face. "Come here a minute."

He took her hand, led her across the room to a mirrored panel of wall. She stared at the reflection of a grimy, muddy girl with tangled hair and dirt-streaked face. Her stockings were shredded, her dress torn and clay-smudged. She turned away with a gasp of dismay.

Nick said, "Use Phoebe's bath, borrow some of her clothes. She won't mind."

She went down the hall past Woody's suite of rooms into Phoebe's exquisitely feminine ones. She took a quick, steaming shower and slipped into a robe that hung on the bathroom door. She was crossing Phoebe's bedroom to the solid wall of closets when Phoebe rushed into the room.

"I saw Nick outside," she said. "He told me what happened. Elsa, are you all right?"

"Yes, of course."

Phoebe ran her hand distractedly through her hair. "What's happening now in those caves? Is something else horrible going on?"

"But nothing happened, Phoebe. The lights went out, that's all, and I—"

"Those lights didn't just go out," Phoebe said tensely. "You don't really believe that, do you? Someone turned them out. And there was a reason for it, there must have been."

"Phoebe, it might have been an accident. I just got lost."

"Yes, Nick told me." Her hand reached out to grasp Elsa's wrist, tightened on it. "And you managed to find your way out. Elsa, do you realize how lucky you were? Do you know how dangerous those caves are in the dark? There are a hundred places where you might have fallen, hurt yourself. You might have been killed."

"But, Phoebe, I'm all right." Phoebe's intensity was suddenly frightening. Her arm hurt where Phoebe's hand clutched it. "I did get out—"

"Yes." Phoebe dropped her hand and her voice softened. "I'm sorry, Elsa. You've had enough for one day, haven't you? Was it horrible, Elsa? Were you terribly frightened?"

"No, not at first. I felt sure I could find my way back. Even when I realized I was lost, I still thought I'd be all right. Then I got into a part of the caves that's new, that hasn't even been explored, and I—"

"You got into new caves?" Phoebe said incredulously. "Elsa, how could you have?"

"I don't know. But I did. I was in the same cave where Mr. Powell was lost. He described it yesterday —that's how I knew where I was.

I was frightened then, Phoebe. I—" She tried to repress the shiver that ran through her at the memory.

"Elsa, you might never have got out of there."

"I know. Believe me, I thought of it, that I might be trapped there, that they might never find me."

She stopped at the sound of Woody's voice calling from outside. Phoebe heard it, too, and moved quickly to the glass doors. Elsa saw her face suddenly sharpen with alarm, and she ran to the doors. Woody was crossing the lawn toward the house, his shoulders sagging, his head bent.

Phoebe thrust open the door and stepped out onto the terrace. "Woody!" she said.

"It's Walt," he said tonelessly. "I found him in the caves, I've called the police."

"Found him?" Phoebe whispered. "Woody, Walt is—dead?"

"Yes. He was killed with a pick handle. I think he must have been struck down from behind."

He stopped as he heard Elsa's gasp. He turned slowly to look at her. "Yes, Elsa, you were in the caves when it happened. That's why the lights went out—so that you wouldn't see the murderer."

He turned away from them toward the wail of the police siren coming up the mountain road.

Slowly Elsa moved from the window that framed the glowing mountain sunset, forced herself to face the ugly reality here in the lodge of the caverns. In a far corner of the big room Chief of Police Haney was still talking quietly with his assistant, Wes Gelb. In another corner, watching them, were Nick Powell and his sister Vivian, Woody and Phoebe Ryan, and Lola Kramer.

It had been almost two hours since Walt Carr's body had been found, and the pattern of the night before had repeated itself. There had been the same unanswerable questions, the same absence of clues, the same lack of alibis for the Powell heirs.

Woody tried to provide one for Phoebe. He had been wandering aimlessly in the fields beyond his house when he saw his wife drive past, heading toward the village. But Phoebe couldn't prove that she had gone into the town looking for Nick, after she left Vivian.

Nick said he had gone looking for Woody, but in half an hour had given up and returned to the Ryan house. And Vivian, like the others, couldn't prove that she had stayed in her room after Phoebe left her, trying to rest.

Elsa saw their tenseness heighten now as Haney strode to the center of the silent, waiting group. His attention was directed at Vivian and with visible effort she pulled herself forward on the leather couch until she was sitting on the edge.

Haney hesitated as he saw the pitiful attempt she made to still her

trembling hands. Then his jaw hardened and he looked at her with a coldness which gave no hint that he had known Vivian Powell for most of his life.

"What is it, Mr. Haney?" Vivian said. "What do you want now? What more can I tell you?"

Woody rose. "I'm afraid Vivian's at the breaking point. I don't think she can take any more, not without some rest. Let me take her home. You can talk to the rest of us—"

"I'm sorry, no," Haney said flatly. "Miss Powell, it's about the letter we found this morning."

"Letter?" Vivian said with weary vagueness. "Oh, the letter to Bob. But that—that certainly can't matter now, Mr. Haney?"

"It matters very much, Miss Powell."

"How can it? Hasn't Walt Carr's death made that letter, and everything else you considered so important, meaningless now? No one could have had a reason to kill Walt. This murderer is a madman, someone who's killing for the sake of killing, insanely."

"No. Part of the information Wes just brought me is about Walt Carr. I think we know the reason for his murder."

Impatiently Nick said, "What about Walt?"

"He had a prison record. Larceny, extortion."

"No," Phoebe said. "That nice little man—"

Lola Kramer's laugh was jeering. "I always thought there was something wrong about your nice little man. He joked about his past so much because he was hiding it. But you and Woody thought he was so cute—"

"All right, Lola; that's enough." Woody turned to Haney: "So Walt Carr had a prison record. What are you thinking?"

"I think he probably learned somehow who murdered Robert Powell. I think he tried to blackmail the murderer and ended up by being killed himself. That makes sense to me."

Lola's sharp voice interrupted him. "You said you wanted to talk about the letter. That letter involves me—Nick and me. Why don't you talk about it?"

Haney's eyes moved back to Vivian as he spoke. "I took for granted that the letter had been written by some crank in town, but of course I had it tested. Wes just brought me the report. Your fingerprints were found on it, Miss Powell."

"Mine? Then I—I must have touched it when you showed it to us this morning."

"No. None of you touched it then. I made sure of that."

"Then I don't understand—"

"You saw that letter before I showed it to you. We know that; it's a certainty, a fact. Would you prefer to tell me about it here or down at headquarters?"

"I—yes, I'll tell you." Vivian's control had broken in a torrent.

Her words came pouring out in an almost incoherent rush. "Bob—he showed me the letter, he asked me to read it. I told him it wasn't true, it couldn't be true. I begged him not to go down to the caves, but he wouldn't listen to me—"

Haney was looking at her coldly. "Don't lie to me, Miss Powell. I want to know why you wrote that letter."

"Why I *wrote*—you don't think that I—?"

"That letter was written on the typewriter in your room, Miss Powell. Your prints are on the letter because you wrote it."

Haney's accusation shocked the group into a stunned silence. Now that silence exploded in a blasting chorus of voices. Lola was on her feet, raging wildly at Vivian, before Nick had grasped her arms and forced her back into her chair. Phoebe stood before her sister, shaking her head in revulsion

"You did that?" she whispered. "You did that to Bob and to Nick? Vivian, how could you?"

With a sob Vivian sank back on the couch, her hands shielding her face. "I didn't think Bob would ever go down into the caves, I never dreamed he'd go. I only wanted him to know what Lola was really like, that she didn't care anything about him, just his money. That's why I wrote it—"

"You wrote that letter," Lola Kramer said. "You knew it was a lie, you knew he wouldn't find Nick and me in the caves; we wouldn't be there." With a jerk she tore herself from Nick's grasp and moved menacingly toward Vivian. "You're the one who phoned the Club and left word for Nick to come to the caves. You tried to call me, too, didn't you? You knew there was nothing between Nick and me, nothing for Bob to find out, so you tried to frame us. You tried to get us together in the caves with your lying message."

"No!" Vivian cringed back from Lola's furious advance, turned fearfully to Haney. "I didn't do that! They were going to meet there; they planned a meeting."

"Vivian!" Nick's voice was a desperate whisper. "That isn't true! You've got to tell them it isn't true."

Haney stepped between them and looked gravely down at Vivian, huddled on the couch. "You're sure of what you say, Miss Powell? You know for certain that Nick and Lola planned to meet?"

"I—I heard them on the phone," Vivian said. "The extension in my bedroom. Yes, I'm sure."

"All right, Miss Powell. Lola, Nick, you'll come with me now. The rest of you may leave."

Lola said, "You believe her! You believe that hysterical, lying woman!"

"I'll know better what to believe after I've talked to you and Nick alone." He touched Lola on the arm and nodded curtly toward Nick. "Let's go."

He started for the door, but stopped at the rumble of the rising elevator. A uniformed policeman hurried across the lodge toward Haney. For a moment they talked together, then Haney turned back to the others, his eyes singling out Elsa from the rest. He came to her, with a flat silver disk in his open hand.

"Is this yours, Elsa? Your initials are on it."

"Yes," Elsa said dully. "It's my compact. Thank you, Mr. Haney."

She reached out to take it, but his fingers tightened upon it. "Sandy just found it in the caves, Elsa, in the new room—the Hanging Gardens. When were you there?"

"But you know. Yesterday—when I found Mr. Powell. That's when I must have dropped it."

"That room was thoroughly searched after his murder, every inch of it. Your compact wasn't there then."

"But it must have been. Somehow you must have missed it."

He shook his head. "Even if it had been hidden there, we would have found it. But it wasn't. Sandy Martin says it was on the floor in the center of the room, beside the sailfish. You went back to that room, Elsa, didn't you? I want to know when, and why."

"But I didn't! Yesterday was the last time, the only time I was ever in that room. I don't know how it could have got there—but, Mr. Haney, why does it matter? What difference can it make?"

"I want to know how this compact got in the Hanging Gardens if you didn't lose it there. Think, Elsa. When did you have it last?"

"I—Yes, you're right, Mr. Haney. I didn't lose it yesterday. I had it this morning, in my purse." She stopped, remembering at last when she had dropped the compact. "It must have been today, when I was lost in the caves. I fell, my purse spilled, and I tried to find my things in the darkness. The compact—I must have missed that . . ." Her voice dwindled off, and she looked up at Haney with a puzzled frown.

"Yes, Elsa?"

"But I wasn't in the Hanging Gardens when I fell. I was in some room that I'd never been in before—some unopened part of the caves. That's where I dropped my purse."

Haney looked inquiringly at Woody Ryan. "Could she be right about that, Woody? Could she have got into some undeveloped caves?"

"It's not impossible," Woody said slowly. "There are several entrances, natural ones, into the other caves. But, for safety, I've blocked them. I doubt if Elsa could have stumbled onto one I've never found."

"But I did, Woody! I was in the same cave that Mr. Powell was lost in. He described it all to Walt and me."

She turned to the policeman. "You remember, Mr. Haney, I told

you last night. He said there was a formation in that cave, shaped like a fan, an open fan. I found that fan when I was lost today. I recognized it from his description. That's how I knew."

"In that case," Haney said, "there was someone in that unexplored cave *after* you were. Someone who found your compact there and took it to the Hanging Gardens."

"But why?" Elsa said. "Why would anyone do that?"

"I don't know," Haney said slowly. "Maybe my guess is all wrong."

He walked away from her to the fireplace. He stood, staring down into its emptiness for a moment, then abruptly turned back to the group. "I want you to wait here, all of you."

He beckoned to Sandy and the two of them disappeared into the elevator foyer. They heard the doors slam shut, the elevator descend, and they sat waiting, silent and tense under Wes Gelb's watchful eyes, while the minutes ticked away.

It was a quarter of an hour before Sandy reappeared, bringing Haney's order to them. They were to be brought immediately to the Hanging Gardens. Shepherded by the two policemen, they trooped into the elevator, then dropped down into the earth.

The caves, as far as they could see into them, were flooded with light. They walked in single file down the long, twisting passageway, past the Chamber of Gold and the Little Temple, and there was no sound but the slap of their footsteps on the wet rock floors and the soft, rhythmic dripping of water. At last they came to the Hanging Gardens, and they stood mutely, questioningly, before the Chief of Police.

He moved at once to Elsa, took her arm, and led her to the center of the room, stopping in front of the Sailfish.

Over his shoulder he said, "Nick, the switch is beside you, just at your left. Will you turn the lights off?"

"No!" Vivian cried, "No, please —"

There was a click and the room was plunged instantly into blackness, the same awful, deathly blackness that Elsa remembered from that morning. Even with the others standing so near her, with Nick still at the light switch, she knew the terror of the caves again, and she shuddered.

Haney was close beside her; gently he urged her forward. "The Sailfish," he said. "Touch it, Elsa; feel it."

Slowly she reached out her hands; her fingers touched the cold, damp stone. Then, quickly now, she ran her hands over its fluted surface, and back again, and she caught her breath in a sharp gasp.

"It's the same," she said. "It's the same rock—"

"It's the fan, isn't it, Elsa?"

"Yes, I—I'm sure."

"It's the fan you touched when you were lost this morning. It's the

one Robert Powell found when he was trapped down here." In a louder voice, he said, "Will you turn the lights on again, Nick?"

With an almost blinding flash the room lit up and Elsa stood staring at the Sailfish before her. This was where she had been when she thought herself hopelessly lost—here in the Hanging Gardens. And the fan that she had been so horrified to touch was only the sail of the fish.

Looking at it, at the brilliant-hued body topped by the sculptured sail, it was a fish. But in the darkness the vivid body of the fish was nothing more than a slab of stone, and the sail seemed simply a fan, a lady's huge fan.

She turned away from the formation, looked slowly, wonderingly about the big beautiful room and remembered the tortured hours that Robert Powell had spent in it, so that it seemed suddenly a place of horror. She tried in vain to suppress the shiver that ran through her.

"This is the place where he was trapped," she whispered. "It was right here, in this room, where Mr. Powell almost died."

Woody was moving toward Haney, his face puzzled. "Is this why you brought us down here?" he asked. "Is this what you're trying to prove?"

"Yes, I had to find out. I had to know for sure that this is the room where Bob Powell was trapped."

"And you think you have proved it?" Woody asked. "Just because Elsa thinks this is the same information that Bob described to her?"

"Elsa is sure," Haney said, his voice tight. "You heard her."

Woody turned to Elsa, and the corners of his eyes crinkled as he smiled down at her. "Elsa, you know these caves pretty well. You know how many strange formations there are in them. There are hundreds, Elsa, thousands, maybe. And simply because one in this room is shaped like a fan, it doesn't mean it's the same room where Bob was trapped."

"But he described it to me, Woody! It must be the same one, it —Oh, no! No, Woody, I'm wrong; of course I'm wrong!" She stepped toward the policeman. "You see, don't you, Mr. Haney? Woody's known about this cave for years and years, long before the accident. He knew how to get here through the other caves. If this was where Mr. Powell was trapped, Woody could have got to him; he could have rescued him—"

She stopped, and the room was deathly still.

It was Phoebe Ryan who spoke at last, looking at her husband with dazed, tragic eyes. "Is that it, Woody? Is that what happened? You could have got to Bob, you could have brought him up safely. And you didn't. You left him here all those hours while the men dug through to him. You knew every

minute counted, that Bob might be dead before they reached him—but you left him here."

Woody looked at her dumbly, unable to speak his protests, only shaking his head in denial.

"That's what Bob found out yesterday when he came down here and saw this room. He learned the truth about you at last, didn't he, Woody?"

"No—Phoebe, listen to me—"

She turned away from him. "Woody murdered Bob. That's what you wanted to show us, isn't it, Mr. Haney? That's why you brought us down here."

"Yes, that's what I think, Mrs. Ryan. That's how it happened, isn't it, Woody? You found Robert Powell in this room yesterday. He told you what he had discovered, and you killed him."

"No, you can't realize what you're saying. Don't you remember why Bob came down here yesterday? What he found down here? He saw Lola and Nick together. Do you believe that at a time like that he'd give a single thought to an accident that happened years ago—or to me."

"He didn't find Lola and Nick here, Woody." Haney moved to stand in front of Vivian, forcing her to meet his eyes. "There's nothing to be afraid of now, Miss Powell. You're not going to be accused of murder; you don't have to lie any longer. You didn't hear Nick and Lola arranging to meet here, did you?"

"No," Vivian whispered. "I lied."

"It was you who called Nick?"

"Yes."

"And Lola—what about her?"

"No, I—I tried to call her. I couldn't get her. She wasn't down here; she couldn't have been."

Haney came slowly, heavily back to Woody Ryan. "You heard, Woody. It wasn't Nick and Lola that Bob Powell found down here. It was the truth about you. He learned that you had wanted him to die—and he knew why. That accident was a long time ago. You didn't know then that the highway would be built here, that you could turn these caves into the gold mine they are today. You thought the only way you could get your hands on that money was if Bob Powell died and your wife inherited it. He realized all that yesterday when he saw this room—and you had to murder him."

"No," Woody said, "listen to me."

"Elsa," Haney said, "Walt Carr was with you yesterday, wasn't he? He heard Bob Powell's story about being trapped in the caves, about the fan?"

"Yes," Elsa said. "Walt was with us."

"He put the facts together, didn't he, Woody—just as I have? And he tried to blackmail you. That's why Walt was killed."

"No, you're wrong, you're all wrong! Why would I murder Walt? Why would I have murdered either of them? What if everything you've

said is true? What if I could have rescued Bob and didn't? There's nothing he could have done to me now. I didn't commit any crime; he couldn't prove that I'd done anything."

Haney shook his head. "He wouldn't have needed any proof, Woody. He didn't need the law for his revenge. The road to the caves goes through his property; he controlled it. If he closed that road, there'd be no way to get up here from the highway. That would be the end of your caves, Woody. You'd be back where you started—a farmer again, with nothing but a lot of worthless mountain land. That's what he threatened to do to you, isn't it? And that's why you murdered him, to save yourself, your fortune."

Woody lowered his head. "All right. It's just like you said. I was surprised when I saw Bob going down into the caves, so I followed him. When he recognized the Hanging Gardens, I tried to bluff it out. But he knew. After I—I killed him, I planned to hide the body, but Elsa came down, so I rushed over to the Three Witches, where she found me. Funny thing, I guess she blundered onto the same entrance this morning in the dark. I didn't mean it to end up this way. I hoped things might work out all right."

Then he hunched his shoulders and said, "Let's get out of here, Haney. Let's get it over with."

Silently, in a dreary procession, they filed from the room. In a moment Lola Kramer walked slowly away. Elsa heard the parade of footsteps echoing back through the passages outside; then it was quiet. She turned uncertainly toward the others, Vivian huddled against the cold wall, Phoebe and Nick standing like stone beside her.

"Vivian," Nick said at last, "I'll take you home now."

"No." With an effort Phoebe seemed to rouse herself. She stepped between them. "I'll take her; I'll stay with her tonight. You go with Elsa, Nick. It's going to be all right with you and Elsa now."

"Yes," Nick said. He turned to Elsa and she came to him, felt his arms strong and comforting about her. Then, her hand tight in his, they went out of the caves, up into the warm clean air.

Exciting
beyond
Question
this important
Memo
to all
Mystery fans!

There is a new development in magazine mystery stories . . .

As you know, virtually every issue of EQMM contains a complete short novel (usually 18,000 to 20,000 words). Nearly all these short novels have been reprints—for the simple reason that in recent years most topflight mystery writers have not worked in this challenging length.

In 1965 we published only two *new* short novels—the only new short novels we could find that were high enough in quality to satisfy EQMM's standards. The reprints in 1965 included short novels by Rex Stout, Hugh Pentecost, Patrick Quentin, Raymond Chandler, Philip Wylie, and Cornell Woolrich; the two new short novels were by A. H. Z. Carr and Hugh Pentecost.

But this year a startling change has occurred—some of the best mystery writers have turned again to the 18,000-to-20,000-word length. It began in the January 1966 issue with Michael Gilbert's *C12: Department of Bank Robberies.* Then came short-novel reprints by Agatha Christie and Erle Stanley Gardner. Next, a new short novel by your Editors in the April 1966 issue—Ellery Queen's *Mum Is the Word.* Then reprint short novels again—by Ed McBain and Kelley Roos.

And then the big new development—*5 more NEW short novels!*

Here's what readers of EQMM have to look forward to:

—in the September 1966 issue: Michael Gilbert's *"E" Branch: The Eliminators*— a spy-and-counterspy short novel about a terrify-

ing situation that faces the Prime Minister and threatens the British government, and featuring secret agents Behrens and Calder . . .

—in the November 1966 issue: MICHAEL INNES' *The End of the End*— a classical detective short novel about the mysterious events at Gore Castle, and featuring Sir John Appleby . . .

—in the December 1966 issue: RUFUS KING's *Anatomy of a Crime* —an "inverted" detective short novel about two stepbrothers and the $3,000,000 that comes between them, and featuring Stuff Driscoll of Florida's Gold Coast . . .

—in the February 1967 issue: STANLEY ELLIN's *The Twelfth Statue* —about a motion picture producer in Rome who walks out the door of his office and vanishes from the face of the earth—the first short novel ever written by Stanley Ellin . . .

—and in a later 1967 issue: CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG's *The Second Commandment*— in which Charlotte Armstrong handles a "taboo theme" with honesty and without sensationalism—one of the most daring short novels ever to appear in EQMM . . .

Is it a trend? Have mystery writers returned to the short-novel form? We certainly hope so! We would like nothing better than to give you more and more *new* short novels, especially by the top performers in the field, and we promise to do everything in our editorial power to encourage the "big names" to continue this new and exhilarating development.

There is wonderful reading in store for you in EQMM—not only these new short novels but also new short stories by Cornell Woolrich, Lawrence G. Blochman, Anthony Gilbert, Hugh Pentecost, Lawrence Treat, James Yaffe (the first new Mom story in 10 years!), Phyllis Bentley, Julian Symons, Michael Gilbert, Avram Davidson, and Victor Canning—every name a guarantee of the best detective-crime-suspense-and-spy stories being written today . . .

—ELLERY QUEEN

INDEX TO VOLUME FORTY-SEVEN—JANUARY-JUNE 1966

(Continued on page 66)

(Continued from other side)

Great News for PERRY MASON Fans and ALL Mystery Lovers

Get 9 Great Mysteries [worth $32.95 in publishers' editions] FOR ONLY $1.00

Including 6 Perry Mason Hits by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

THRILL to tense courtroom battles, spellbinding action, baffling clues—in these great suspense-filled stories of mystery, intrigue, and amazing detection! You get *six* of Erle Stanley Gardner's best Perry Mason thrillers — in six full-size, hard-bound books. Then you get a *seventh* big book — a 3-in-1 volume containing THREE MORE thrilling new full-length mysteries! These nine mysteries would cost $32.95 in the publishers' original editions — but YOU get them ALL for only $1.00 as your introduction to the many advantages of membership in The Detective Book Club.

"Cream" of New Mysteries for LESS than 97¢ EACH

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop" — by outstanding authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, A. A. Fair, Mignon G. Eberhart, John Creasey, and Van Wyck Mason. ALL THESE and many other famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many are members themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them complete in one handsomely bound Triple Volume (a $10.50 to $11.95 value in publishers' editions) for ONLY $2.89.

Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview" which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume before or after receiving it. NO money in advance; NO membership fee. You may cancel membership at any time.

SEND NO MONEY

Mail Postcard for ALL 7 Volumes

Simply mail postcard promptly and we will send you at once the *SIX* full-length Perry Mason thrillers (including his *latest* case) — PLUS the THREE MORE exciting mysteries described on the other side. But don't delay. Mail postcard NOW to:

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I., New York 11576

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR NINE MYSTERIES

●

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

SEND NO MONEY — JUST MAIL THIS POSTCARD 97-285

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB QA
Roslyn, L. I., New York 11576

Please enroll me as a member and send me at once the SIX full-length hard-bound editions of Perry Mason thrillers. PLUS the brand-new 3-in-1 volume Club selection containing 3 more great new mysteries. I enclose NO MONEY IN ADVANCE; within a week after receiving my books, I will either return them all and owe nothing, or keep ALL SEVEN volumes, containing NINE first-rate mystery stories, for the special new-member introductory price of ONLY $1.00 (plus a few cents mailing charge)

As a member, I am to receive advance descriptions of all future selections, but am not obligated to buy any. For each future Triple Volume I decide to keep, I will send you only $2.89 (plus a few cents mailing charges). I may reject any volume before or after I receive it, and I may cancel my membership at any time. *(Books shipped in U.S.A. only.)*

Mr.
Mrs.
Miss } .....
(Please Print Plainly)

Address.....

City.....State..... ZIP CODE ZONE NO.