ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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MARCH

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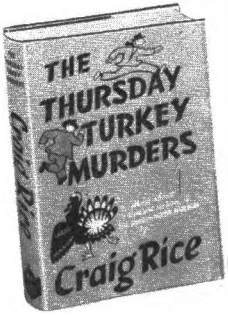

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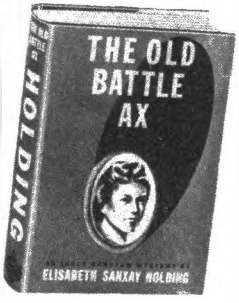

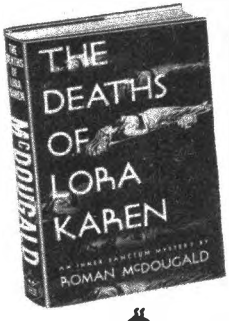

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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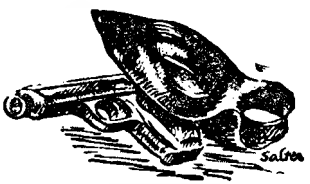

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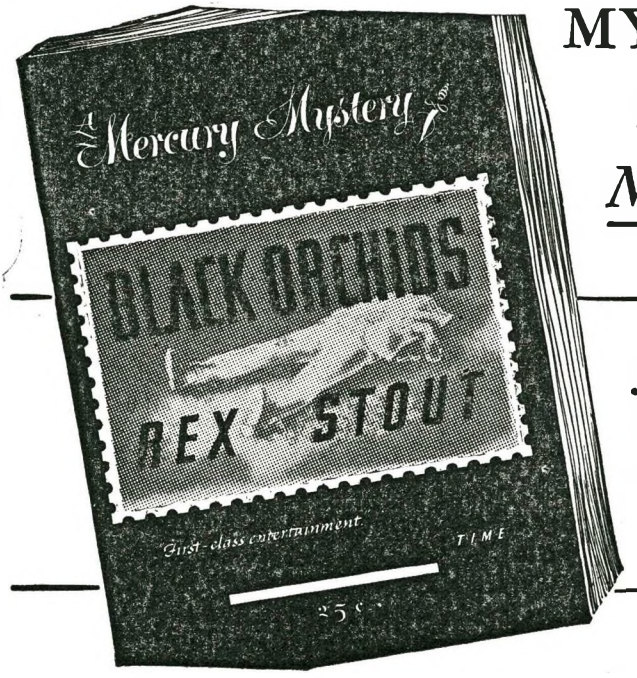

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FOOTPRINTS IN THE JUNGLE

by W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

THERE IS no place in Malaya that has more charm than Tanah Merah. It lies on the sea and the sandy shore is fringed with casuarinas. The government offices are still in the old Raad Huis that the Dutch built when they owned the land, and on the hill stand the grey ruins of the fort by aid of which the Portuguese maintained their hold over the unruly natives. Tanah Merah has a history and in the vast labyrinthine houses of the Chinese merchants, backing on the sea so that in the cool of the evening they may sit in their loggias and enjoy the salt breeze, families dwell that have been settled in the country for three centuries. Many have forgotten their native language and hold intercourse with one another in Malay and pidgin English. The imagination lingers here gratefully, for in the Federated Malay States the only past is within the memory for the most part of the fathers of living men.

Tanah Merah was for long the busiest mart of the Middle East and its harbour was crowded with shipping when the clipper and the

junk still sailed the China seas. But now it is dead. It has the sad and romantic air of all places that have once been of importance and live now on the recollection of a vanished grandeur. It is a sleepy little town and strangers that come to it, losing their native energy, insensibly drop into its easy and lethargic ways. Successive rubber booms bring it no prosperity and the ensuing slumps hasten its decay.

The European quarter is very silent. It is trim and neat and clean. The houses of the white men — Government servants and agents of companies — stand round an immense padang, agreeable and roomy bungalows shaded by great cassias, and the padang is vast and green and well cared for, like the lawn of a cathedral close, and indeed there is in the aspect of this corner of Tanah Merah something quiet and delicately secluded that reminds you of the precincts of Canterbury.

The Club faces the sea; it is a spacious but shabby building; it has an air of neglect and when you enter you feel that you intrude. It gives you the impression that it is closed really, for alterations and repairs, and that you have taken indiscreet advantage of an open door to go where you are not wanted. In the morning you may find there a couple of planters who have come in from their estates on business and are drinking a ginsling before starting back again; and latish in the afternoon a lady or two may perhaps be seen looking with a furtive air through old numbers of the Illustrated London News. At nightfall a few men saunter in and sit about the billiard-room watching the play and drinking sukus. But on Wednesdays there is a little more animation. On that day the gramophone is set going in the large room upstairs and people come in from the surrounding country to dance. There are sometimes no less than a dozen couples and it is even possible to make up two tables of bridge.

It was on one of these occasions that I met the Cartwrights. I was staying with a man called Gaze who was head of the police and he came into the billiard-room, where I was sitting, and asked me if I would make up a four. The Cartwrights were planters and they came in to Tanah Merah on Wednesdays because it gave their girl a chance of a little fun. They were very nice people, said Gaze, quiet and unobtrusive, and played a very pleasant game of bridge. I followed Gaze into the card-room and was introduced to them. They were already seated at a table and Mrs. Cartwright was shuffling the cards. It inspired me with confidence to see

the competent way in which she did it. She took half the pack in each hand, and her hands were large and strong, deftly inserted the corners of one half under the corners of the others, and with a click and a neat bold gesture cascaded the cards together.

It had all the effect of a conjuring trick. The cardplayer knows that it can be done perfectly only after incessant practice. He can be fairly sure that anyone who can so shuffle a pack of cards loves cards for their own sake.

"Do you mind if my husband and I play together?" asked Mrs. Cartwright. "It's no fun for us to win one another's money."

"Of course not."

We cut for deal and Gaze and I sat down.

Mrs. Cartwright drew an ace and while she dealt, quickly and neatly, chatted with Gaze of local affairs. But I was aware that she took stock of me. She looked shrewd but good-natured.

She was a woman somewhere in the fifties (though in the East, where people age quickly, it is difficult to tell their ages), with white hair very untidily arranged, and a constant gesture with her was an impatient movement of the hand to push back a long wisp of hair that kept falling over her forehead. You wondered why she did not, by the use of a hairpin or two, save herself so much trouble. Her blue eyes were large, but pale and a little tired; her face was lined and sallow; I think it was her mouth that gave it the expression which I felt was characteristic of caustic but tolerant irony. You saw that here was a woman who knew her mind and was never afraid to speak it. She was a chatty player (which some people object to strongly, but which does not disconcert me, for I do not see why you should behave at the card-table as though you were at a memorial service) and it was soon apparent that she had an effective knack of badinage. It was pleasantly acid, but it was amusing enough to be offensive only to a fool. If now and then she uttered a remark so sarcastic that you wanted all your sense of humour to see the fun in it, you could not but quickly see that she was willing to take as much as she gave. Her large, thin mouth broke into a dry smile and her eyes shone brightly when by a lucky chance you brought off a repartee that turned the laugh against her.

I thought her a very agreeable person. I liked her frankness. I liked her quick wit. I liked her plain face. I never met a woman who obviously cared so little how she looked. It was not only her head that was untidy, everything about

her was slovenly; she wore a high-necked silk blouse, but for coolness had unbuttoned the top buttons and showed a gaunt and withered neck; the blouse was crumpled and none too clean, for she smoked innumerable cigarettes and covered herself with ash. When she got up for a moment to speak to somebody I saw that her blue skirt was rather ragged at the hem and badly needed a brush, and she wore heavy, low-heeled boots. But none of this mattered. Everything she wore was perfectly in character.

And it was a pleasure to play bridge with her. She played very quickly, without hesitation, and she had not only knowledge but flair. Of course she knew Gaze's game, but I was a stranger and she soon took my measure. The team-work between her husband and herself was admirable; but he was sound and cautious, but knowing him, she was able to be bold with assurance and brilliant with safety. Gaze was a player who founded a foolish optimism on the hope that his opponents would not have the sense to take advantage of his errors, and the pair of us were no match for the Cartwrights. We lost one rubber after another, and there was nothing to do but smile and look as if we liked it.

"I don't know what's the matter with the cards," said Gaze at last, plaintively. "Even when we have every card in the pack we go down."

"It can't be anything to do with your play," answered Mrs. Cartwright, looking him full in the face with those pale blue eyes of hers, "it must be bad luck pure and simple. Now if you hadn't had your hearts mixed up with your diamonds in that last hand you'd have saved the game."

Gaze began to explain at length how the misfortune, which had cost us dear, occurred, but Mrs. Cartwright, with a deft flick of the hand, spread out the cards in a great circle so that we should cut for deal. Cartwright looked at the time.

"This will have to be the last, my dear," he said.

"Oh, will it?" She glanced at her watch and then called to a young man who was passing through the room. "Oh, Mr. Bullen, if you're going upstairs tell Olive that we shall be going in a few minutes." She turned to me. "It takes us the best part of an hour to get back to the estate and poor Theo has to be up at the crack of dawn."

"Oh, well, we only come in once a week," said Cartwright, "and it's the only chance Olive gets of being gay and abandoned."

I thought Cartwright looked tired and old. He was a man of middle

height, with a bald, shiny head, a stubbly grey moustache, and gold-rimmed spectacles. He wore white ducks and a black-and-white tie. He was rather neat and you could see he took much more pains with his clothes than his untidy wife. He talked little, but it was plain that he enjoyed his wife's caustic humour and sometimes he made quite a neat retort. They were evidently very good friends. It was pleasing to see so solid and tolerant an affection between two people who were almost elderly and must have lived together for so many years.

It took but two hands to finish the rubber and we had just ordered a final gin and bitters when Olive came down.

"Do you really want to go already, Mumsey?" she asked.

Mrs. Cartwright looked at her daughter with fond eyes.

"Yes, darling. It's nearly half-past eight. It'll be ten before we get our dinner."

"Damn our dinner," said Olive, gaily.

"Let her have one more dance before we go," suggested Cartwright.

"Not one. You must have a good night's rest."

Cartwright looked at Olive with a smile.

"If your mother has made up her mind, my dear, we may just as well give in without any fuss."

"She's a determined woman," said Olive, lovingly stroking her mother's wrinkled cheek.

Mrs. Cartwright patted her daughter's hand, and kissed it.

Olive was not very pretty, but she looked extremely nice. She was nineteen or twenty, I suppose, and she had still the plumpness of her age; she would be more attractive when she had fined down a little. She had none of the determination that gave her mother's face so much character, but resembled her father; she had his dark eyes and slightly aquiline nose, and his look of rather weak good nature. It was plain that she was strong and healthy. Her cheeks were red and her eyes bright. She had a vitality that he had long since lost. She seemed to be the perfectly normal English girl, with high spirits, a great desire to enjoy herself, and an excellent temper.

When we separated, Gaze and I set out to walk to his house.

"What did you think of the Cartwrights?" he asked me.

"I liked them. They must be a great asset in a place like this."

"I wish they came oftener. They live a very quiet life."

"It must be dull for the girl. The father and mother seem very well satisfied with one another's company."

"Yes, it's been a great success."

"Olive is the image of her father, isn't she?"

Gaze gave me a sidelong glance.

"Cartwright isn't her father. Mrs. Cartwright was a widow when he married her. Olive was born four months after her father's death."

"Oh!"

I drew out the sound in order to put in it all I could of surprise, interest and curiosity. But Gaze said nothing and we walked the rest of the way in silence. The boy was waiting at the door as we entered the house and after a last gin pahit we sat down to dinner.

At first Gaze was inclined to be talkative. Owing to the restriction of the output of rubber there had sprung up a considerable activity among the smugglers and it was part of his duty to circumvent their knavishness. Two junks had been captured that day and he was rubbing his hands over his success. The go-downs were full of confiscated rubber and in a little while it was going to be solemnly burnt. But presently he fell into silence and we finished without a word. The boys brought in coffee and brandy and we lit our cheroots. Gaze leaned back in his chair. He looked at me reflectively and then looked at his brandy. The boys had left the room and we were left alone.

"I've known Mrs. Cartwright for over twenty years," he said slowly. "She wasn't a bad-looking woman in those days. Always untidy, but when she was young it didn't seem to matter so much. It was rather attractive. She was married to a man called Bronson. Reggie Bronson. He was a planter. He was manager of an estate up in Selantan and I was stationed at Alor Lipis. It was a much smaller place than it is now; I don't suppose there were more than twenty people in the whole community, but they had a jolly little club, and we used to have a very good time. I remember the first time I met Mrs. Bronson as though it was yesterday. There were no cars in those days and she and Bronson had ridden in on their bicycles. Of course then she didn't look so determined as she looks now. She was much thinner, she had a nice colour, and her eyes were very pretty — blue, you know — and she had a lot of dark hair. If she'd only taken more trouble with herself she'd have been rather stunning. As it was she was the best-looking woman there."

I tried to construct in my mind a picture of what Mrs. Cartwright — Mrs. Bronson as she was then — looked like from what she was now and from Gaze's not very graphic description. In the solid woman, with her well-covered bones, who

sat rather heavily at the bridge-table, I tried to see a slight young thing with buoyant movements and graceful, easy gestures. Her chin now was square and her nose decided, but the roundness of youth must have masked this: she must have been charming with a pink and white skin and her hair carelessly dressed, brown and abundant. At that period she wore a long skirt, a tight waist and a picture hat. Or did women in Malaya still wear the topis that you see in old numbers of the illustrated papers?

"I haven't seen her for — oh, nearly twenty years," Gaze went on. "I knew she was living somewhere in the F.M.S., but it was a surprise when I took this job and came here to run across her in the club just as I had up in Selantan so many years before. Of course she's an elderly woman now and she's changed out of all recognition. It was rather a shock to see her with a grown-up daughter, it made me realise how the time had passed; I was a young fellow when I met her last and now, by Jingo, I'm due to retire on the age limit in two or three years. Bit thick, isn't it?"

Gaze, a rueful grin on his ugly face, looked at me with faint indignation, as though I could help the hurrying march of the years as they trod upon one another's heels.

"I'm no chicken myself," I replied.

"You haven't lived out East all your life. It ages one before one's time. One's an elderly man at fifty and at fifty-five one's good for nothing but the scrap heap."

But I did not want Gaze to wander off into a disquisition on old age.

"Did you recognise Mrs. Cartwright when you saw her again?" I asked.

"Well, I did and I didn't. At the first glance I thought I knew her, but couldn't quite place her. I thought perhaps she was someone I'd met on board ship when I was going on leave and had known only by sight. But the moment she spoke I remembered at once. I remembered the dry twinkle in her eyes and the crisp sound of her voice. There was something in her voice that seemed to mean: you're a bit of a damned fool, my lad, but you're not a bad sort and upon my soul I rather like you."

"That's a good deal to read into the sound of a voice," I smiled.

"She came up to me in the club and shook hands with me. 'How do you do, Major Gaze? Do you remember me?' she said.

" 'Of course I do.'

" 'A lot of water has passed under the bridge since we met last. We're none of us as young as we were.

Have you seen Theo?'

"For a moment I couldn't think whom she meant. I suppose I looked rather stupid, because she gave a little smile, that chaffing smile that I knew so well, and explained.

" 'I married Theo, you know. It seemed the best thing to do. I was lonely and he wanted it.'

" 'I heard you married him,' I said. 'I hope you've been very happy.'

" 'Oh, very. Theo's a perfect duck. He'll be here in a minute. He'll be so glad to see you.'

"I wondered. I should have thought I was the last man Theo would wish to see. I shouldn't have thought she would wish it very much either. But women are funny."

"Why shouldn't she wish to see you?" I asked.

"I'm coming to that later," said Gaze. "Then Theo turned up. I don't know why I call him Theo; I never called him anything but Cartwright, I never thought of him as anything but Cartwright. Theo was a shock. You know what he looks like now; I remembered him as a curly-headed youngster, very fresh and clean looking; he was always neat and dapper, he had a good figure and he held himself well, like a man who's used to taking a lot of exercise. Now I come to think of it he wasn't bad looking, not in a big, massive way, but graceful, you know, and lithe. When I saw this bowed, cadaverous, bald-headed old buffer with spectacles I could hardly believe my eyes. I shouldn't have known him from Adam. He seemed pleased to see me, at least, interested; he wasn't effusive, but he'd always been on the quiet side and I didn't expect him to be.

" 'Are you surprised to find us here?' he asked me.

" 'Well, I hadn't the faintest notion where you were.'

" 'We've kept track of your movements more or less. We've seen your name in the paper every now and then. You must come out one day and have a look at our place. We've been settled there a good many years, and I suppose we shall stay there till we go home for good. Have you ever been back to Alor Lipis?'

" 'No, I haven't,' I said.

" 'It was a nice little place. I'm told it's grown. I've never been back.'

" 'It hasn't got the pleasantest recollections for us,' said Mrs. Cartwright.

"I asked them if they'd have a drink and we called the boy. I daresay you noticed that Mrs. Cartwright likes her liquor; I don't mean that she gets tight or anything like that, but she drinks her stengah like a man. I couldn't help looking at them with a certain amount

of curiosity. They seemed perfectly happy; I gathered that they hadn't done at all badly, and I found out later that they were quite well off. They had a very nice car, and when they went on leave they denied themselves nothing. They were on the best of terms with one another. You know how jolly it is to see two people who've been married a great many years obviously better pleased with their own company than anyone else's. Their marriage had evidently been a great success. And they were both of them devoted to Olive and very proud of her, Theo especially.

"Although she was only his step-daughter?" I said.

"Although she was only his step-daughter," answered Gaze. "You'd think that she would have taken his name. But she hadn't. She called him Daddy, of course, he was the only father she'd ever known, but she signed her letters, Olive Bronson."

"What was Bronson like, by the way?"

"Bronson? He was a great big fellow, very hearty, with a loud voice and a bellowing laugh, beefy, you know, and a fine athlete. There was not very much to him but he was as straight as a die. He had a red face and red hair. Now I come to think of it I remember that I never saw a man sweat as much as he did. Water just poured off him, and when he played tennis he always used to bring a towel on the court with him."

"It doesn't sound very attractive."

"He was a handsome chap. He was always fit. He was keen on that. He hadn't much to talk about but rubber and games, tennis, you know, and golf and shooting; and I don't suppose he read a book from year's end to year's end. He was the typical public-school boy. He was about thirty-five when I first knew him, but he had the mind of a boy of eighteen. You know how many fellows when they come out East seem to stop growing."

I did indeed. One of the most disconcerting things to the traveller is to see stout, middle-aged gentlemen, with bald heads, speaking and acting like schoolboys. You might almost think that no idea has entered their heads since they first passed through the Suez Canal. Though married and the fathers of children, and perhaps in control of a large business, they continue to look upon life from the standpoint of the sixth form.

"But he was no fool," Gaze went on. "He knew his work from A to Z. His estate was one of the best managed in the country and he knew how to handle his labour. He was a damned good sort, and if he did

get on your nerves a little you couldn't help liking him. He was generous with his money, and always ready to do anybody a good turn. That's how Cartwright happened to turn up in the first instance."

"Did the Bronsons get on well together?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. I'm sure they did. He was good natured and she was very jolly and gay. She was very outspoken, you know. She can be very amusing when she likes even now, but there's generally a sting lurking in the joke; when she was a young woman and married to Bronson it was just pure fun. She had high spirits and liked having a good time. She never cared a hang what she said, but it went with her type, if you understand what I mean; there was something so open and frank and careless about her that you didn't care what she said to you. They seemed very happy.

"Their estate was about five miles from Alor Lipis. They had a trap and they used to drive in most evenings about five. Of course it was a very small community and men were in the majority. There were only about six women. The Bronsons were a god-send. They bucked things up the moment they arrived. We used to have very jolly times in that little club. I've often thought of them since and I don't know that on the whole I've ever enjoyed myself more than I did when I was stationed there. Between six and eight-thirty the club at Alor Lipis twenty years ago was about as lively a place as you could find between Aden and Yokohama.

"One day Mrs. Bronson told us that they were expecting a friend to stay with them and a few days later they brought Cartwright along. It appeared that he was an old friend of Bronson's, they'd been at school together, Marlborough, or some place like that, and they'd first come out East on the same ship. Rubber had taken a toss and a lot of fellows had lost their jobs. Cartwright was one of them. He'd been out of work for the greater part of a year and he hadn't anything to fall back on. In those days planters were even worse paid than they are now and a man had to be very lucky to put by something for a rainy day. Cartwright had gone to Singapore. They all go there when there's a slump, you know. It's awful then, I've seen it; I've known of planters sleeping in the street because they hadn't the price of a night's lodging. I've known them stop strangers outside the Europe and ask for a dollar to get a meal, and I think Cartwright had had a pretty rotten time.

"At last he wrote to Bronson and asked him if he couldn't do some-

thing for him. Bronson asked him to come and stay till things got better, at least it would be free board and lodging, and Cartwright jumped at the chance, but Bronson had to send him the money to pay his railway fare. When Cartwright arrived at Alor Lipis he hadn't ten cents in his pocket. Bronson had a little money of his own, two or three hundred a year, I think, and though his salary had been cut, he'd kept his job, so that he was better off than most planters. When Cartwright came Mrs. Bronson told him that he was to look upon the place as his home and stay as long as he liked."

"It was very nice of her, wasn't it?" I remarked.

"Very."

Gaze lit himself another cheroot and filled his glass. It was very still and but for the occasional croak of the chik-chak the silence was intense. We seemed to be alone in the tropical night and heaven only knows how far from the habitations of men. Gaze did not speak for so long that at last I was forced to say something.

"What sort of a man was Cartwright at that time?" I asked. "Younger, of course, and you told me rather nice looking; but in himself?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I never paid much attention to him. He was pleasant and unassuming. He's very quiet now, as I daresay you noticed; well, he wasn't exactly lively then. But he was perfectly inoffensive. He was fond of reading and he played the piano rather nicely. You never minded having him about, he was never in the way, but you never bothered very much about him. He danced well and the women rather liked that, but he also played billiards quite decently and he wasn't bad at tennis. He fell into our little groove very naturally. I wouldn't say that he ever became wildly popular, but everybody liked him. Of course we were sorry for him, as one is for a man who's down and out, but there was nothing we could do, and, well, we just accepted him and then forgot that he hadn't always been there. He used to come in with the Bronsons every evening and pay for his drinks like everyone else, I suppose Bronson had lent a bit of money for current expenses, and he was always very civil. I'm rather vague about him, because really he didn't make any particular impression on me; in the East one meets such a lot of people, and he seemed very much like anybody else. He did everything he could to get something to do, but he had no luck; the fact is, there were no jobs going, and sometimes he seemed rather depressed

about it. He was with the Bronsons for over a year. I remember his saying to me once:

" 'After all I can't live with them for ever. They've been most awfully good to me, but there are limits.'

" 'I should think the Bronsons would be very glad to have you,' I said. 'It's not particularly gay on a rubber estate, and as far as your food and drink go, it must make precious little difference if you're there or not.' "

Gaze stopped once more and looked at me with a sort of hesitation.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I'm afraid I'm telling you this story very badly," he said. "I seem to be just rambling on. I'm not a damned novelist, I'm a policeman, and I'm just telling you the facts as I saw them at the time; and from my point of view all the circumstances are important; it's important, I mean, to realize what sort of people they were."

"Of course. Fire away."

"I remember someone, a woman, I think it was, the doctor's wife, asking Mrs. Bronson if she didn't get tired sometimes of having a stranger in the house. You know, in places like Alor Lipis there isn't very much to talk about, and if you didn't talk about your neighbours there'd be nothing to talk about at all.

" 'Oh, no,' she said, 'Theo's no trouble.' She turned to her husband who was sitting there mopping his face. 'We like having him, don't we?'

" 'He's all right,' said Bronson.

" 'What does he do with himself all day long?'

" 'Oh, I don't know,' said Mrs. Bronson. 'He walks round the estate with Reggie sometimes, and he shoots a bit. He talks to me.'

" 'He's always glad to make himself useful,' said Bronson. 'The other day when I had a go of fever, he took over my work and I just lay in bed and had a good time.' "

"Hadn't the Bronsons any children?" I asked.

"No," Gaze answered. "I don't know why, they could well have afforded it."

Gaze leant back in his chair. He took off his glasses and wiped them. They were very strong and hideously distorted his eyes. Without them he wasn't so homely. The chik-chak on the ceiling gave its strangely human cry. It was like the cackle of an idiot child.

"Bronson was killed," said Gaze suddenly.

"Killed?"

"Yes, murdered. I shall never forget that night. We'd been playing tennis, Mrs. Bronson and the doctor's wife, Theo Cartwright and

I; and then we played bridge. Cartwright had been off his game and when we sat down at the bridge-table Mrs. Bronson said to him: 'Well, Theo, if you play bridge as rottenly as you played tennis we shall lose our shirts.'

"We'd just had a drink, but she called the boy and ordered another round.

" 'Put that down your throat,' she said to him, 'and don't call without top honours and an outside trick.'

"Bronson hadn't turned up, he'd cycled in to Kabulong to get the money to pay his coolies their wages and was to come along to the club when he got back. The Bronsons' estate was nearer Alor Lipis than it was to Kabulong, but Kabulong was a more important place commercially, and Bronson banked there.

" 'Reggie can cut in when he turns up,' said Mrs. Bronson.

" 'He's late, isn't he?" said the doctor's wife.

" 'Very. He said he wouldn't get back in time for tennis, but would be here for a rubber. I have a suspicion that he went to the club at Kabulong instead of coming straight home and is having drinks, the ruffian.'

" 'Oh, well, he can put away a good many without their having much effect on him,' I laughed.

" 'He's getting fat, you know. He'll have to be careful.'

"We sat by ourselves in the card-room and we could hear the crowd in the billiard-room talking and laughing. They were all on the merry side. It was getting on to Christmas Day and we were all letting ourselves go a little. There was going to be a dance on Christmas Eve.

"I remembered afterwards that when we sat down the doctor's wife asked Mrs. Bronson if she wasn't tired.

" 'Not a bit,' she said. 'Why should I be?' "

"I didn't know why she flushed.

" 'I was afraid the tennis might have been too much for you,' said the doctor's wife.

" 'Oh, no,' answered Mrs. Bronson, a trifle abruptly, I thought, as though she didn't want to discuss the matter.

"I didn't know what they meant, and indeed it wasn't till later that I remembered the incident.

"We played three or four rubbers and still Bronson didn't turn up.

" 'I wonder what's happened to him,' said his wife. 'I can't think why he should be so late.'

"Cartwright was always silent, but this evening he had hardly opened his mouth. I thought he was tired and asked him what he'd been doing.

" 'Nothing much,' he said. 'I went

out after tiffin to shoot pigeon.'

" 'Did you have any luck?' I asked.

" 'Oh, I got half a dozen. They were very shy.'

"But now he said: 'If Reggie got back late, I daresay he thought it wasn't worth while to come here. I expect he's had a bath and when we get in we shall find him asleep in his chair.'

" 'It's a good long ride from Kabulong,' said the doctor's wife.

" 'He doesn't take the road, you know,' Mrs. Bronson explained. 'He takes the short cut through the jungle.'

" 'Can he get along on his bicycle?' I asked.

" 'Oh, yes, it's a very good track. It saves about a couple of miles.'

"We had just started another rubber when the barboy came in and said there was a police-sergeant outside who wanted to speak to me.

" 'What does he want?' I asked.

"The boy said he didn't know, but he had two coolies with him.

" 'Curse him,' I said. 'I'll give him hell if I find he's disturbed me for nothing.'

"I told the boy I'd come and I finished playing the hand. Then I got up.

" 'I won't be a minute,' I said. 'Deal for me, will you?' I added to Cartwright.

"I went out and found the sergeant with two Malays waiting for me on the steps. I asked him what the devil he wanted. You can imagine my consternation when he told me that the Malays had come to the police-station and said there was a white man lying dead on the path that led through the jungle to Kabulong. I immediately thought of Bronson.

" 'Dead?' I cried.

" 'Yes, shot. Shot through the head. A white man with red hair.'

"Then I knew it was Reggie Bronson, and indeed, one of them naming his estate said he'd recognized him as the tuan. It was an awful shock. And there was Mrs. Bronson in the card-room waiting impatiently for me to sort my cards and make a bid. For a moment I really didn't know what to do. I was frightfully upset. It was dreadful to give her such a terrible and unexpected blow without a word of preparation, but I found myself quite unable to think of any way to soften it. I told the sergeant and the coolies to wait and went back into the club. I tried to pull myself together. As I entered the card-room Mrs. Bronson said: 'You've been an awful long time.' Then she caught sight of my face. 'Is anything the matter?' I saw her clench her fists and go white. You'd have thought she had a presentiment of evil.

" 'Something dreadful has happened,' I said, and my throat was all closed up so that my voice sounded even to myself hoarse and uncanny. 'There's been an accident. Your husband's been wounded.'

"She gave a long gasp, it was not exactly a scream, it reminded me oddly of a piece of silk torn in two.

" 'Wounded?'

"She leapt to her feet and with her eyes starting from her head stared at Cartwright. The effect on him was ghastly, he fell back in his chair and went as white as death.

" 'Very, very badly, I'm afraid,' I added.

"I knew that I must tell her the truth, and tell it then, but I couldn't bring myself to tell it all at once.

" 'Is he,' her lips trembled so that she could hardly form the words, 'is he — conscious?'

"I looked at her for a moment without answering. I'd have given a thousand pounds not to have to.

" 'No, I'm afraid he isn't.'

"Mrs. Bronson stared at me as though she were trying to see right into my brain.

" 'Is he dead?'

"I thought the only thing was to get it out and have done with it.

" 'Yes, he was dead when they found him.'

"Mrs. Bronson collapsed into her chair and burst into tears.

" 'Oh, my God,' she muttered. 'Oh, my God.'

"The doctor's wife went to her and put her arms round her. Mrs. Bronson with her face in her hands swayed to and fro weeping hysterically. Cartwright, with that livid face, sat quite still, his mouth open, and stared at her. You might have thought he was turned to stone.

" 'Oh, my dear, my dear,' said the doctor's wife, 'you must try and pull yourself together.' Then, turning to me. 'Get her a glass of water and fetch Harry.'

"Harry was her husband and he was playing billiards. I went in and told him what had happened.

" 'A glass of water be damned,' he said. 'What she wants is a good long peg of brandy.'

"We took it in to her and forced her to drink it and gradually the violence of her emotion exhausted itself. In a few minutes the doctor's wife was able to take her into the ladies' lavatory to wash her face. I'd made up my mind now what had better be done. I could see that Cartwright wasn't good for much; he was all to pieces. I could understand that it was a fearful shock to him, for after all Bronson was his greatest friend and had done everything in the world for him.

" 'You look as though you'd be all the better for a drop of brandy

yourself, old man,' I said to him.

"He made an effort.

" 'It's shaken me, you know,' he said. 'I . . . I didn't . . .' He stopped as though his mind was wandering; he was still fearfully pale; he took out a packet of cigarettes and struck a match, but his hand was shaking so that he could hardly manage it.

" 'Yes, I'll have a brandy.'

" 'Boy,' I shouted, and then to Cartwright: 'Now, are you fit to take Mrs. Bronson home?'

" 'Oh, yes,' he answered.

" 'That's good. The doctor and I will go along with the coolies and some police to where the body is.'

" 'Will you bring him back to the bungalow?' asked Cartwright.

" 'I think he'd better be taken straight to the mortuary,' said the doctor before I could answer. 'I shall have to do a P.M.'

"When Mrs. Bronson, now so much calmer that I was amazed, came back, I told her what I suggested. The doctor's wife, kind woman, offered to go with her and spend the night at the bungalow, but Mrs. Bronson wouldn't hear of it. She said she would be perfectly all right, and when the doctor's wife insisted — you know how bent some people are on forcing their kindness on those in trouble — she turned on her almost fiercely.

" 'No, no, I must be alone,' she said. 'I really must. And Theo will be there.'

"They got into the trap. Theo took the reins and they drove off. We started after them, the doctor and I, while the sergeant and the coolies followed. I had sent my seis to the police station with instructions to send two men to the place where the body was lying. We soon passed Mrs. Bronson and Cartwright.

" 'All right?' I called.

" 'Yes,' he answered.

"For some time the doctor and I drove without saying a word; we were both of us deeply shocked. I was worried as well. Somehow or other I'd got to find the murderers and I foresaw that it would be no easy matter.

" 'Do you suppose it was gang robbery?' said the doctor at last.

"He might have been reading my thoughts.

" 'I don't think there's a doubt of it,' I answered. 'They knew he'd gone into Kabulong to get the wages and lay in wait for him on the way back. Of course he should never have come alone through the jungle when everyone knew he had a packet of money with him.'

" 'He'd done it for years,' said the doctor. 'And he's not the only one.'

" 'I know. The question is, how

we're going to get hold of the fellows that did it.'

" 'You don't think the two coolies who say they found him could have had anything to do with it?'

" 'No. They wouldn't have the nerve. I think a pair of Chinks might think out a trick like that, but I don't believe Malays would. They'd be much too frightened. Of course we'll keep an eye on them. We shall soon see if they seem to have any money to fling about.'

" 'It's awful for Mrs. Bronson,' said the doctor. 'It would have been bad enough at any time, but now she's going to have a baby . . .'

" 'I didn't know that,' I said, interrupting him.

" 'No, for some reason she wanted to keep it dark. She was rather funny about it, I thought.'

"I recollected then that little passage between Mrs. Bronson and the doctor's wife. I understood why that good woman had been so anxious that Mrs. Bronson should not overtire herself.

" 'It's strange her having a baby after being married so many years.'

" 'It happens, you know. But it was a surprise to her. When first she came to see me and I told her what was the matter she fainted, and then she began to cry. I should have thought she'd be as pleased as Punch. She told me that Bronson didn't like children and he'd be awfully bored at the idea, and she made me promise to say nothing about it till she had had a chance of breaking it to him gradually.'

"I reflected for a moment.

" 'He was the kind of breezy, hearty cove whom you'd expect to be as keen as mustard on having kids.'

" 'You never can tell. Some people are very selfish and just don't want the bother.'

" 'Well, how did he take it when she did tell him? Wasn't he rather bucked?'

" 'I don't know that she ever told him. Though she couldn't have waited much longer; unless I'm very much mistaken she ought to be confined in about five months.'

" 'Poor devil,' I said. 'You know, I've got a notion that he'd have been most awfully pleased to know.'

"We drove in silence for the rest of the way and at last came to the point at which the short cut to Kapulong branched off from the road. Here we stopped and in a minute or two my trap, in which were the police-sergeant and the two Malays, came up. We took the head-lamps to light us on our way. I left the doctor's seis to look after the ponies and told him that when the policemen came they were to follow the path till they found us. The two coolies, carrying the lamps,

walked ahead and we followed them. It was a fairly broad track, wide enough for a small cart to pass, and before the road was built it had been the highway between Kabulong and Alor Lipis. It was firm to the foot and good walking. The surface here and there was sandy and in places you could see quite plainly the mark of a bicycle wheel. It was the track Bronson had left on his way to Kabulong.

"We walked twenty minutes, I should think, in single file, and on a sudden the coolies, with a cry, stopped sharply. The sight had come upon them so abruptly that notwithstanding they were expecting it they were startled. There, in the middle of the pathway lit dimly by the lamps the coolies carried, lay Bronson; he'd fallen over his bicycle and lay across it in an ungainly heap. I was too shocked to speak, and I think the doctor was, too. But in our silence the din of the jungle was deafening; those damned cicadas and the bull-frogs were making enough row to wake the dead. Even under ordinary circumstances the noise of the jungle at nights always seems to me uncanny; because you feel that at that hour there should be an utter silence it has an odd effect on you, that ceaseless and invisible uproar that beats upon your nerves. It surrounds you and hems you in. But just then, believe me, it was terrifying. That poor fellow lay dead and all round him the restless life of the jungle pursued its indifferent and ferocious course.

"He was lying face downwards. The sergeant and the coolies looked at me as though awaiting an order. I was a young fellow then and I'm afraid I felt a little frightened. Though I couldn't see the face I had no doubt that it was Bronson, but I felt that I ought to turn the body over to make sure. I suppose we all have our little squeamishnesses; you know, I've always had a horrible distaste for touching dead bodies. I've had to do it fairly often now, but it still makes me feel slightly sick.

" 'It's Bronson, all right,' I said.

"The doctor — by George, it was lucky for me he was there — the doctor bent down and turned the head. The sergeant directed the lamp on the dead face.

" 'My God, half his head's been shot away,' I cried.

" 'Yes.'

"The doctor stood up straight and wiped his hands on the leaves of a tree that grew beside the path.

" 'Is he quite dead?' I asked.

" 'Oh, yes. Death must have been instantaneous. Whoever shot him must have fired at pretty close range.'

" 'How long has he been dead?"

" 'Oh, I don't know, several hours.'

" 'He would have passed here about five o'clock, I suppose, if he was expecting to get to the club for a rubber at six.'

" 'There's no sign of any struggle,' said the doctor.

" 'No, there wouldn't be. He was shot as he was riding along.'

"I looked at the body for a little while. I couldn't help thinking how short a time ago it was since Bronson, noisy and loud-voiced, had been so full of hearty life.

" 'You haven't forgotten that he had the coolies' wages on him,' said the doctor.

" 'No, we'd better search him.'

" 'Shall we turn him over?'

" 'Wait a minute. Let us just have a look at the ground first.'

"I took the lamp and as carefully as I could looked all about me. Just where he had fallen the sandy pathway was trodden and confused; there were our footprints and the footprints of the coolies who had found him. I walked two or three paces and then saw quite clearly the mark of his bicycle wheels; he had been riding straight and steadily. I followed it to the spot where he had fallen, to just before that rather, and there saw very distinctly the prints on each side of the wheels of his heavy boots. He had evidently stopped there and put his feet to the ground, then he'd started off again, there was a great wobble of the wheel, and he'd crashed.

" 'Now, let's search him,' I said.

"The doctor and the sergeant turned the body over and one of the coolies dragged the bicycle away. They laid Bronson on his back. I supposed he would have had the money partly in notes and partly in silver. The silver would have been in a bag attached to the bicycle and a glance told me that it was not there. The notes he would have put in a wallet. It would have been a good thick bundle. I felt him all over, but there was nothing; then I turned out the pockets, they were all empty except the right trouser pocket, in which there was a little small change.

" 'Didn't he always wear a watch?' asked the doctor.

" 'Yes, of course he did.'

"I remembered that he wore the chain through the buttonhole in the lapel of his coat and the watch and some seals and things in his handkerchief pocket. But watch and chain were gone.

" 'Well, there's not much doubt now, is there?' I said.

"It was clear that he had been attacked by gang robbers who knew he had money on him. After killing

him they had stripped him of everything. I suddenly remembered the footprints that proved that for a moment he had stood still. I saw exactly how it had been done. One of them had stopped him on some pretext and then, just as he started off again, another, slipping out of the jungle behind him, had emptied the two barrels of a gun into his head.

" 'Well,' I said to the doctor, 'It's up to me to catch them, and I'll tell you what, it'll be a real pleasure to me to see them hanged.'

"Of course there was an inquest. Mrs. Bronson gave evidence, but she had nothing to say that we didn't know already. Bronson had left the bungalow about eleven, he was to have tiffin at Kabulong and was to be back between five and six. He asked her not to wait for him, he said he would just put the money in the safe and come straight to the club. Cartwright confirmed this. He had lunched along with Mrs. Bronson and after a smoke had gone out with a gun to shoot pigeon. He had got in about five, a little before perhaps, had a bath and changed to play tennis. He was shooting not far from the place where Bronson was killed, but never heard a shot. That, of course, meant nothing; what with the cicadas and the frogs, and the other sounds of the jungle he would have had to be very near to hear anything; and besides, Cartwright was probably back in the bungalow before Bronson was killed. We traced Bronson's movements. He had lunched at the club, he had got money at the bank just before it closed, had gone back to the club and had one more drink, and then started off on his bicycle. He had crossed the river by the ferry, the ferryman remembered distinctly seeing him, but was positive that no one else with a bicycle had crossed. That looked as though the murderers were not following, but lying in wait for him. He rode along the main road for a couple of miles and then took the path which was a short cut to his bungalow.

"It looked as though he had been killed by men who knew his habits, and suspicion, of course, fell immediately on the coolies of his estate. We examined them all — pretty carefully — but there was not a scrap of evidence to connect any of them with the crime. In fact, most of them were able satisfactorily to account for their actions and those who couldn't seemed to me for one reason and another out of running. There were a few bad characters among the Chinese at Alor Lipis and I had them looked up. But somehow I didn't think it was the work of the Chinese; I had a feeling that Chinese would have used revolvers

and not a shot gun. Anyhow, I could find out nothing there. So then we offered a reward of a thousand dollars to anyone who could put us in the way of discovering the murderers. I thought there were a good many people to whom it would appeal to do a public service and at the same time earn a tidy sum. But I knew that an informer would take no risks, he wouldn't want to tell what he knew till he knew he could tell it safely, and I armed myself with patience. The reward had brightened the interest of my police and I knew they would use every means they had to bring the criminals to trial. In a case like this they could do more than I.

"But it was strange, nothing happened; the reward seemed to tempt no one. I cast my net a little wider. There were two or three kampongs along the road and I wondered if the murderers were there; I saw the headmen, but got no help from them. It was not that they would tell me nothing. I was sure they had nothing to tell. I talked to the bad hats, but there was absolutely nothing to connect them with the murder. There was not the shadow of a clue.

" 'Very well, my lads,' I said to myself, as I drove back to Alor Lipis, 'there's no hurry; the rope won't spoil by keeping.'

"The scoundrels had got away with a considerable sum, but money is no good unless you spend it. I felt I knew the native temperament enough to be sure that the possession of it was a constant temptation. The Malays are an extravagant race, and a race of gamblers, and the Chinese are gamblers, too; sooner or later someone would start flinging his money about, and then I should want to know where it came from. With a few well-directed questions I thought I could put the fear of God into the fellow and then, if I knew my business, it shouldn't be hard to get a full confession.

The only thing now was to sit down and wait till the hue and cry had died down and the murderers thought the affair was forgotten. The itch to spend those ill-gotten dollars would grow more and more intolerable till at last it could be resisted no longer. I would go about my business, but I meant never to relax my watch, and one day, sooner or later, my time must come.

"Cartwright took Mrs. Bronson down to Singapore. The company Bronson had worked for asked him if he would care to take Bronson's place, but he said, very naturally, that he didn't like the idea of it; so they put another man in and told Cartwright that he could have the job that Bronson's successor had

vacated. It was the management of the estate that Cartwright lives on now. He moved in at once. Four months after this Olive was born at Singapore, and a few months later, when Bronson had been dead just over a year, Cartwright and Mrs. Bronson were married. I was surprised; but on thinking it over I couldn't help confessing that it was very natural. After the trouble Mrs. Bronson had leant much on Cartwright and he had arranged everything for her; she must have been lonely, and rather lost, and I daresay she was grateful for his kindness, he did behave like a brick; and so far as he was concerned I imagined he was sorry for her, it was a dreadful position for a woman, she had nowhere to go, and all they'd gone through must have been a tie between them. There was every reason for them to marry and it was probably the best thing for them both.

"It looked as though Bronson's murderers would never be caught, for that plan of mine didn't work; there was no one in the district who spent more money than he could account for, and if anyone had that hoard buried away under his floor he was showing a self-control that was superhuman. A year had passed and to all intents and purposes the thing was forgotten. Could anyone be so prudent as after so long not to let a little money dribble out? It was incredible. I began to think that Bronson had been killed by a couple of wandering Chinese who had got away, to Singapore perhaps, where there would be small chance of catching them. At last I gave it up. If you come to think of it, as a rule, it's just those crimes, crimes of robbery, in which there is least chance of getting the culprit; for there's nothing to attach suspicion to him, and if he's caught it can only be by his own carelessness. It's different with crimes of passion or vengeance, then you can find out who had a motive to put the victim out of the way.

"It's no use grizzling over one's failures, and bringing my common sense to bear I did my best to put the matter out of my mind. No one likes to be beaten, but beaten I was and I had to put as good a face on it as I could. And then a Chinaman was caught trying to pawn poor Bronson's watch.

"I told you that Bronson's watch and chain had been taken, and of course Mrs. Bronson was able to give us a fairly accurate description of it. It was a half-hunter, by Benson, there was a gold chain, three or four seals and a sovereign purse. The pawnbroker was a smart fellow and when the Chinaman brought the watch he recognised it at once.

On some pretext he kept the man waiting and sent for a policeman. The man was arrested and immediately brought to me. I greeted him like a long-lost brother. I was never so pleased to see anyone in my life. I have no feeling about criminals, you know; I'm rather sorry for them, because they're playing a game in which their opponents hold all the aces and kings; but when I catch one it gives me a little thrill of satisfaction, like bringing off a neat finesse at bridge. At last the mystery was going to be cleared up, for if the Chinaman hadn't done the thing himself we were pretty sure through him to trace the murderers. I beamed on him.

"I asked him to account for his possession of the watch. He said he had bought it from a man he didn't know. That was very thin. I explained the circumstances briefly and told him he would be charged with murder. I meant to frighten him and I did. He said then that he'd found the watch.

" 'Found it?' I said. 'Fancy that. Where?'

"His answer staggered me; he said he'd found it in the jungle; I laughed at him; I asked him if he thought watches were likely to be left lying about in the jungle; then he said he'd been coming along the pathway that led from Kabulong to Alor Lipis, and had gone into the jungle and caught sight of something gleaming and there was the watch. That was odd. Why should he have said he found the watch just there? It was either true or excessively astute. I asked him where the chain and the seals were, and he produced them immediately. I'd got him scared, and he was pale and shaking; he was a knock-kneed little fellow and I should have been a fool not to see that I hadn't got hold of the murderer there. But his terror suggested that he knew something.

"I asked him when he'd found the watch.

" 'Yesterday,' he said.

"I asked him what he was doing on the short-cut from Kabulong to Alor Lipis. He said that he'd been working in Singapore and had gone to Kabulong because his father was ill, and that he himself had come to Alor Lipis to work. A friend of his father, a carpenter by trade, had given him a job. He gave me the name of the man with whom he had worked in Singapore and the name of the man who had engaged him at Alor Lipis. All he said seemed plausible and could so easily be verified that it was hardly likely to be false. Of course it occurred to me that if he had found the watch as he said it must have been lying in the jungle for more than a year. It

could hardly be in very good condition; I tried to open it, but couldn't. The pawnbroker had come to the police-station and was waiting in the next room. Luckily he was also something of a watchmaker. I sent for him and asked him to look at the watch; when he opened it he gave a little whistle, the works were thick with rust.

" 'This watch no good,' he said, shaking his head. 'Him never go now.'

"I asked him what had put it in such a state, and without a word from me he said that it had been long exposed to wet. For the moral effect I had the prisoner put in a cell and I sent for his employer. I sent a wire to Kabulong and another to Singapore. While I waited I did my best to put two and two together. I was inclined to believe the man's story true; his fear might be ascribed to no more guilt than consisted in his having found something and tried to sell it. Even quite innocent persons are apt to be nervous when they're in the hands of the police; I don't know what there is about a policeman, people are never very much at their ease in his company. But if he really had found the watch where he said, someone had thrown it there. Now that was funny. Even if the murderers had thought the watch a dangerous thing to possess, one would have expected them to melt down the gold case; that would be a very simple thing for any native to do; and the chain was of so ordinary a pattern they could hardly have thought it possible to trace that. There were chains like it in every jeweller's shop in the country. Of course there was the possibility that they had plunged into the jungle and having dropped the watch in their hurry had been afraid to go back and look for it. I didn't think that very likely: the Malays are used to keeping things tucked away in their sarongs, and the Chinese have pockets in their coats. Besides, the moment they got into the jungle they knew there was no hurry; they probably waited and divided the swag then and there.

"In a few minutes the man I had sent for came to the police-station and confirmed what the prisoner had said, and in an hour I got an answer from Kabulong. The police had seen his father who told them that the boy had gone to Alor Lipis to get a job with a carpenter. So far everything he had said seemed true. I had him brought in again, and told him I was going to take him to the place where he said he had found the watch and he must show me the exact spot. I handcuffed him to a policeman, though it was hardly necessary, for the poor

devil was shaking with fright, and took a couple of men besides. We drove out to where the track joined the road and walked along it; within five yards of the place where Bronson was killed the Chinaman stopped.

" 'Here,' he said.

"He pointed to the jungle and we followed him in. We went in about ten yards and he pointed to a chink between two large boulders and said that he found the watch there. It could only have been by the merest chance that he noticed it, and if he really had found it there it looked very much as though someone had put it there to hide it."

Gaze stopped and gave me a reflective look.

"What would you have thought then?" he asked.

"I don't know," I answered.

"Well, I'll tell you what I thought. I thought that if the watch was there the money might be there, too. It seemed worth while having a look. Of course, to look for something in the jungle makes looking for a needle in a bundle of hay a drawing-room pastime. I couldn't help that. I released the Chinaman, I wanted all the help I could get, and set him to work. I set my three men to work, and I started in myself. We made a line — there were five of us — and we searched from the road; for fifty yards on each side of the place at which Bronson was murdered and for a hundred yards in we went over the ground foot by foot. We routed among dead leaves and peered in bushes, we looked under boulders and in the hollows of trees. I knew it was a foolish thing to do, for the chances against us were a thousand to one; my only hope was that anyone who had just committed a murder would be rattled and if he wanted to hide anything would hide it quickly; he would choose the first obvious hiding-place that offered itself. That is what he had done when he hid the watch. My only reason for looking in so circumscribed an area was that as the watch had been found so near the road, the person who wanted to get rid of the things must have wanted to get rid of them quickly.

"We worked on. I began to grow tired and cross. We were sweating like pigs. I had a maddening thirst and nothing in the world to drink. At last I came to the conclusion that we must give it up as a bad job, for that day at least, when suddenly the Chinaman — he must have had sharp eyes, that young man — uttered a guttural cry. He stooped down and from under the winding root of a tree drew out a messy, mouldering, stinking thing. It was a pocket-book that had been out in the rain for a year, that had been

eaten by ants and beetles and God knows what, that was sodden and foul, but it was a pocketbook all right, Bronson's, and inside were the shapeless, mushed-up, fetid remains of the Singapore notes he had got from the bank at Kabulong. There was still the silver and I was convinced that it was hidden somewhere about, but I wasn't going to bother about that. I had found out something very important; whoever had murdered Bronson had made no money out of it.

"Do you remember my telling you that I'd noticed the print of Bronson's feet on each side of the broad line of the pneumatic tyre, where he had stopped, and presumably spoken to someone? He was a heavy man and the prints were well marked. He hadn't just put his feet on the soft sand and taken them off, but must have stopped at least for a minute or two. My explanation was that he had stopped to chat with a Malay or a Chinaman, but the more I thought of it the less I liked it. Why the devil should he? Bronson wanted to get home, and though a jovial chap, he certainly was not hail-fellow-well-met with the natives. His relations towards them were those of master and servants. Those footprints had always puzzled me. And now the truth flashed across me. Whoever had murdered Bronson hadn't murdered him to rob and if he'd stopped to talk with someone it could only be with a friend. I knew at last who the murderer was."

I have always thought the detective story a most diverting and ingenious variety of fiction, and have regretted that I never had the skill to write one, but I have read a good many, and I flatter myself it is rarely that I have not solved the mystery before it was disclosed to me; and now for some time I had foreseen what Gaze was going to say, but when at last he said it I confess that it gave me, notwithstanding, somewhat of a shock.

"The man he met was Cartwright. Cartwright was pigeon-shooting. He stopped and asked him what sport he had had, and as he rode on Cartwright raised his gun and discharged both barrels into his head. Cartwright took the money and the watch in order to make it look like the work of gang robbers and hurriedly hid them in the jungle, then made his way along the edge till he got to the road, went back to the bungalow, changed into his tennis things and drove with Mrs. Bronson to the club.

"I remembered how badly he'd played tennis, and how he'd collapsed when, in order to break the news more gently to Mrs. Bronson,

I said Bronson was wounded and not dead. If he was only wounded he might have been able to speak. By George, I bet that was a bad moment. The child was Cartwright's. Look at Olive: why, you saw the likeness yourself. The doctor had said that Mrs. Bronson was upset when he told her she was going to have a baby and made him promise not to tell Bronson. Why? Because Bronson knew that he couldn't be the father of the child."

"Do you think that Mrs. Bronson knew what Cartwright had done?"

"I'm sure of it. When I look back on her behaviour that evening at the club I am convinced of it. She was upset, but not because Bronson was killed; she was upset because I said he was wounded; on my telling her that he was dead when they found him she burst out crying, but from relief. I know that woman. Look at that square chin of hers and tell me that she hasn't got the courage of the devil. She has a will of iron. She made Cartwright do it. She planned every detail and every move. He was completely under her influence; he is now."

"But do you mean to tell me that neither you nor anyone else ever suspected that there was anything between them?"

"Never. Never."

"If they were in love and knew that she was going to have a baby, why didn't they just bolt?"

"How could they? It was Bronson who had the money; she hadn't a bean and neither had Cartwright. He was out of a job. Do you think he would have got another with that story round his neck? Bronson had taken him in when he was starving and he'd stolen his wife from him. They wouldn't have had a dog's chance. They couldn't afford to let the truth come out, their only chance was to get Bronson out of the way."

"They might have thrown themselves on his mercy."

"Yes, but I think they were ashamed. He'd been so good to them, He was such a decent chap, I don't think they had the heart to tell him the truth. They preferred to kill him."

"Well, what did you do about it?" I asked after a moment's silence.

"Nothing. What was there to do? What was the evidence? That the watch and notes had been found? They might easily have been hidden by someone who was afterwards afraid to come and get them. The murderer might have been quite content to get away with the silver. The footprints? Bronson might have stopped to light a cigarette or there might have been a tree trunk across the path and he waited while the

coolies he met there by chance moved it away. Who could prove that the child that a perfectly decent, respectable woman had had four months after her husband's death was not his child? No jury would have convicted Cartwright. I held my tongue and the Bronson murder was forgotten."

"I don't suppose the Cartwrights have forgotten," I suggested.

"I shouldn't be surprised. Human memory is astonishingly short and if you want my professional opinion I don't mind telling you that I don't believe remorse for a crime ever sits very heavily on a man when he's absolutely sure he'll never be found out."

I thought once more of the pair I had met that afternoon, the thin, elderly, bald man with gold-rimmed spectacles, and that white-haired untidy woman with her frank speech and kindly, caustic smile. It was almost impossible to imagine that in the distant past they had been swayed by so turbulent a passion, for that alone made their behaviour explicable, that it had brought them in the end to such a pass that they could see no other issue than a cruel and cold-blooded murder.

"Doesn't it make you feel a little uncomfortable to be with them?" I asked Gaze. "For, without wishing to be censorious, I'm bound to say that I don't think they can be very nice people."

"That's where you're wrong. They are very nice people; they're about the pleasantest people here. Mrs. Cartwright is a thoroughly good sort and a very amusing woman. It's my business to prevent crime and to catch the culprit when crime is committed, but I've known far too many criminals to think that on the whole they're worse than anybody else. A perfectly decent fellow may be driven by circumstances to commit a crime and if he's found out he's punished; but he may very well remain a perfectly decent fellow. Of course society punishes him if he breaks its laws, and it's quite right, but it's not always his actions that indicate the essential man. If you'd been a policeman as long as I have, you'd know it's not what people do that really matters, it's what they are. Luckily a policeman has nothing to do with their thoughts, only with their deeds; if he had, it would be a very different, a much more difficult matter."

Gaze flicked the ash from his cheroot and gave me his wry, sardonic, but agreeable smile.

"I'll tell you what, there's one job I *shouldn't* like," he said.

"What is that?" I asked.

"God's, at the Judgment Day," said Gaze. "No, sir."

At the time of this writing, Stuart Palmer is Lieut. Stuart Palmer of the U. S. Army. Good luck, Stu, and best wishes from millions of fans!

"The Lady from Dubuque" (none other than our old friend Hildegarde Withers) is one of the last stories Lieut. Palmer wrote before entering the service of his country. It is a tale of that volcanic phenomenon, the scorned woman, full of sound and fury signifying — murder.

THE LADY FROM DUBUQUE

by STUART PALMER

THE MOST potent weapon known to Hermione Lapham was the big flat checkbook on her desk. She took it out, but the girl shook her stringy blonde curls and cried, "Oh, no!"

"Well then, Miss Pender, what do you want?"

"I want Paul Severance! He mustn't marry your daughter next week, like it says in the society pages." Elsie Pender's eyes were dark-rimmed, and of the particularly muddy shade of blue which a child might achieve with its first paint box. "Not after what we've been to each other. It isn't fair. I — I —"

Mrs. Lapham was calm. "There there, my dear. I'll get you a glass of something." She rose quickly and went out of the room, her long velvet tea gown swishing over the deep pile of the Aubusson carpet. As she came into the hall she thought that she heard the sound of scurrying footsteps, and frowned. Leave it to the servants to make a point of overhearing something like this, she told herself.

It could not have taken her more than two or three minutes to reach the library and pour out a glass of cognac, but when she returned to the drawing-room Elsie Pender was gone.

Hermione Lapham came closer to the desk, stared for a moment into the open drawer, and then closed it carefully. She lifted the glass of brandy and tossed it off at one gulp, then reached for the telephone. "Spring 3-100 please. Yes. Police department? This is Mrs. J. Vance Lapham, 1324 Park Avenue. I want to report the theft of a .32 automatic."

It was a late afternoon threesome

in the inner sanctum of Inspector Oscar Piper, head of the Homicide Division, Headquarters. "And that's why," Mrs. Lapham was concluding, "I asked the Inspector here for assistance." She beamed at the spinster in the peculiar hat, an angular, prim-looking schoolteacherish person.

"But I'm not, properly speaking, a detective at all," Miss Hildegarde Withers objected.

"Well, you've appointed yourself gad-fly to the department," the Inspector put in. "And you have time to fool around with this sort of thing, while we have not. The Homicide Squad is concerned with murders after they happen, not before."

"Moreover," added Mrs. Lapham, "the usual detective person with the derby hat and the flat feet would be quite impossible. Perhaps I should have let matters rest with reporting the theft of the gun, but I do feel it my duty . . ."

"A .32 automatic is a bad plaything for a hysterical girl," admitted Miss Withers thoughtfully. "May I ask why you think this Elsie Pender might choose your dinner party tonight as the proper scene for a murder?"

The dowager smiled feebly. "I'm a little to blame for that. When I heard the girl's tragic story — the old, old story — I suggested that Miss Pender appear at my apartment tonight and face the doctor, whom she says has refused to see her. I thought —"

"You thought it might be an immediate cure for your daughter, isn't that it?" The Inspector gnawed his cigar. "You wanted her to take it quick, on the chin?"

Mrs. Lapham nodded. "But I didn't imagine there would be any danger of — of violence." She shuddered. "I have requested that there be no placing of uniformed men about, no shadowing. If the girl puts in an appearance, I hope to get at the truth quietly and without scandal. Perhaps I can reason with her. But I thought it might be a good idea to have some responsible person on hand just in case."

"I see," said Miss Withers. "I'm a precautionary measure."

"Rather, yes. You will be introduced as Corinne's aunt — her aunt Martha, from Dubuque. You should have no difficulty in passing as an eccentric relative from the Far West."

"Thank you so much," came back the schoolteacher, with a wry smile. "Dinner at 8? I'll dig out my coral earrings and the dotted Swiss."

Miss Withers swept into the Lapham apartment early, in time for a brief chat with Corinne, who contrived somehow to resemble both her dowager mother and a hot-

house flower. Something orchidaceous and expensive, the school teacher decided.

"Delighted to have you as an aunt," the girl was saying. "But I haven't the slightest idea what this is all about. Is somebody after the family jewels? Because if they are, they'd better try the safety deposit vault."

"I don't know much more than you," Miss Withers admitted. "I'm just here, that's all. Perhaps it has something to do with your late father's contributions to the police welfare fund. But enough of that. Tell me who's to be here tonight."

Corinne smiled. "Just the Hemples — old neighbors of ours from when we lived in Georgetown. And their son Vaughan, my first beau. Then there's Dr. Parkhill, looks like a frog but he's rather a dear. And Paul Severance, of course —"

"Your fiancé, yes? Tell me about him."

"Oh, Paul is quite passable. Notice this scar on my chin?"

Mrs. Withers, puzzled, shook her head.

Corinne beamed. "That's because of Paul. I went through a windshield up on the Post Road one night last summer when Vaughan Hemple forgot to turn out for a tree. I was pretty well scrambled but Paul Severance lifted the scar as neat as you please. Cleverest beauty doctor in America, they say. Anyway, that's how I met him."

"You're very much in love, aren't you?"

"In love?" Corinne shrugged, with all the worldly wisdom of twenty. "What's love anyway? All I know is, he's not too bad looking and his rumba isn't to nauseating . . ."

Mrs. Lapham interrupted at this point to inform Corinne that the other guests were arriving. A moment later Miss Withers was introduced to Dr. Severance, a tall man with a plump boyish face. A little on the smooth side, she thought. But in spite of what she had heard about him, she felt herself warming to the man when he took her hand in his own lean sensitive fingers. "So you're Corinne's Aunt Martha! Just as she described you to me . . ."

"A good glib liar," she noted mentally.

"I'd better practice calling you Aunt Martha too, eh?"

She nodded. "You're a beauty doctor, aren't you? I suppose that when you're in the family I'll get all my plastic surgery free?"

"But my dear lady!" Severance flashed a wide friendly smile. "You would be insane to have anything done to your face. Character is rare these days. And who wants to look like everyone else . . ."

"I wouldn't mind —" began Miss Withers. Then she saw that the doctor was looking across the room, where Corinne was signalling for help. She seemed surrounded by a brawny fullback, a tanned youth with big pawing hands and a loud laugh. This would, of course, be Vaughan Hemple.

"Excuse me," said Dr. Severance quickly. When he was gone Miss Withers felt quite deserted. Some men have that quality, blast them.

It was a quality unshared by her dinner companion, a frog-faced, completely bald person who turned out to be Dr. Parkhill, Severance's office associate. "Oh, yes," he said with a smile. "I'm his junior. Some men would resent being second in command to a younger man. But that's fiddlesticks. Paul Severance can teach anybody. He can take the skin off your stomach —"

"Really!" gasped Miss Withers, conscious that all conversation had stopped and everyone was looking at her.

"— and move it up to replace any destroyed skin on your face. Wonderful in treatment of burns."

Vaughan Hemple cut in, with a somewhat bitter note in his voice. "But after all, isn't it a sort of silly job for a grown man in times like this — fixing up women to look younger than they are, and all that?"

Somebody hushed him, but young Hemple had downed a couple of glasses of wine, and an inner bitterness seemed to rise up within him. "Seems to me, this is a time for a man to get in and pitch. . . ." He was looking pointedly at Severance.

"Vaughan just got his questionnaire from the draft board," his mother's voice came, proud and a bit quavery. "I suppose, Dr. Severance, you'll be in uniform any day?"

Severance said nothing. He was looking across the table at Corinne, and a slow reddish flush rose along his neck. There was a dead silence for a moment, and then everyone jumped as the distant ringing of the doorbell came with dramatic suddenness.

Mrs. Lapham dropped her fork, and looked at Miss Withers, who in turn looked at Dr. Severance. She wondered just what she should do to prevent him from being murdered, supposing this was the Pender girl and she came rushing into the room blazing away with the stolen gun? One couldn't very well ask him to get under the table . . .

But the butler appeared, to announce with shocked horror in his voice: "A policeman, madam!" He was only a breathless step ahead of the policeman, who turned out

to be Inspector Oscar Piper.

Mrs. Lapham rose quickly. "But really, Inspector! I thought it was clearly understood —"

He nodded wearily. "Sorry, ma'am. Won't be a minute." He came closer to the table, looked along the faces of the guests. Finally he passed Miss Withers without even a friendly wink, and paused before Dr. Severance. "You're wanted at your office, Doctor."

Severance looked extremely blank. "What for?"

"You'll understand when you get there." The Inspector flashed open his palm, with the gold badge cupped in it. The doctor slowly rose to his feet, turned as if to say something to Corinne, and then — with the Inspector's hand on his arm — went toward the door, where two plain-clothes men took over and hustled him away.

Inspector Piper turned back toward the dinner party, rocked back on his heels and surveyed them. But Miss Withers had no eyes for him. She was watching Corinne Lapham, frozen in her chair. She did not even seem to realize that Vaughan Hemple was patting her shoulder.

Mrs. Lapham started to explode, but the Inspector held up his hand. "Save your breath, ma'am. Mind if I sit down?" He sank into the chair Severance had just vacated. "You may as well know, folks," he said conversationally, "that when Dr. Severance gets down to his office my boys are going to show him the body of a girl named Elsie Pender, stretched out on the floor behind his desk. Shot through the left breast at close range, with a .32 automatic."

Inspector Piper obviously intended to say more, but there was an interruption. Corinne Lapham silently crumpled and slid out of sight under the table. "So she does love the scalawag," Miss Withers murmured. "God help her."

That broke up the gathering in the dining room. Corinne was borne upstairs to her room in the strong arms of her first beau, while the women gasped and fussed around her.

In the hall Miss Withers cornered the Inspector.

"Oscar, if you ask me —"

"I don't ask you. This is one time it's really cut and dried and laid on the line." All the same, the Inspector looked a little worried, remembering past conflicts. "Look, Hildegarde. The girl came down to Severance's office and threatened him, so he grabbed the gun away from her and plunked her through the pump. There's no other answer."

"I can think of half a dozen," Miss Withers told him. "How about suicide?"

He smiled a superior smile. "We looked into that. Especially since there was a suicide note beside the body."

"Aha!"

"Aha yourself. The note was written in pretty flowery language for the Pender girl to use. Moreover, it was written on the office typewriter — and signed on the typewriter!"

Miss Withers said nothing.

"Severance didn't dare try to forge her handwriting, see? Besides —"

"How about the girl's hands? Any powder burns?"

He shook his head. "Nitrate test drew a blank. Yes — we tested her gloves, too. They were brand new, and unsullied." Piper then delivered the knockout blow. "But what really kills the suicide theory is the fact that the girl was shot twice!"

Miss Withers started to say something, then subsided as the Inspector nudged her. Dr. Parkhill was approaching. Piper beckoned to him. "You work for Severance, don't you?"

"With him, please. I have a one-fourth interest in the clinic. But Inspector, the idea of Severance having anything to do with —"

"You knew this Pender girl?"

"She worked for us last summer, for about four months. Severance did a skin transplantation job on her face and neck a year ago. Acid burns, nasty job. She didn't have any money, so she worked it off as receptionist. I always thought her a stiff, hands-off sort. But with a mug like mine, all women seem that way." Dr. Parkhill smiled philosophically.

"You knew of the affair between Severance and little Elsie?"

Parkhill hesitated. "If there was one, they certainly kept it quiet. I thought he brushed her off the way he brushed off all the girls who fell in love with him."

"The wrong way, this time," Piper said grimly. "What time did Severance leave the clinic this afternoon?"

"About 2. I stayed until after 4, developing some photographs. We take before and after shots of all our patients —"

"Then Severance came back. Maybe he had an appointment with the girl for later. Or he brought her there, knowing the place would be deserted." Piper shrugged. "That's all, Doctor. Leave your address with the officer at the door, in case we want you."

Miss Withers went up the stairs, intending to offer her help in the resuscitation of the lovely Corinne. But she came to the bedroom door-

way in time to hear Mrs. Lapham's clear, insistent voice —

"But Vaughan is right, dear. Think how fortunate you are that it happened before you were married to the man! I should have realized something was wrong when he insisted on such a precipitate marriage. . . ."

"He wanted it soon because — because he expects to be called to service — he's to be a lieutenant-commander in the Naval Reserve Medical Corps!" Corinne's voice was weak. "That's what he says plastic surgery is for — they practice in peace time so they can develop technique to use on wounded men —"

"That's his story, anyway." Vaughan's voice was throbbing with earnestness. "Look, honey. There's just one way to beat the publicity. Elope with me, tonight. Greenwich, or North Carolina. You'll be out of it —"

"Oh, I — I couldn't —" but Corinne's voice was weaker still. Miss Withers turned and tiptoed away again.

The Inspector waited in the lower hall. "Ready, Hildegarde? I'll just stop at the office for a minute to turn in my report, and then I'll run you home."

They were in the headquarters car, headed south, when the Inspector leaned towards her. "Come out of it, Hildegarde. Can't you accept, just once, that I'm right? Do you always have to look for the improbable, the impossible? There never was a case so simple. . . ."

"All but the new gloves," the schoolteacher said cryptically.

"Huh? Now relax, Hildegarde. Severance realized that this Pender girl was going to ruin his chances of marrying seven million dollars, so he bumped her off and then tried to make it look like suicide."

"A very clumsy attempt, Oscar. And he didn't strike me as a clumsy man."

"Lots of people are clumsy when they turn to murder."

"Granted. And Severance isn't the only man who wants to marry Corinne and her bankroll." The Inspector only grunted at this somewhat obvious remark. And then Miss Withers jogged his elbow. "Oscar, would you mind very much if we dropped in at the Severance clinic for a moment?"

"But why?" Piper frowned. "You don't like dead bodies. And Severance will be getting a going-over from the boys. . . ."

Still she insisted. "Not that I doubt he's the murderer. Nobody else has enough motive. But for the sake of that girl, I'd like to clarify the situation just a bit. . . ."

"Okay, okay," agreed the weary Inspector. And so it was that Dr. Paul Severance looked away from the accusing fingers of three homicide squad detectives to see the equine visage of Miss Hildegarde Withers appearing through the doorway of his consulting room.

"Why, Aunt Martha!" he said, in his mellow voice. "This is good of you."

She put him right about the relationship, in no uncertain terms. "I came here, young man, to give you one chance to confess. No, not to the murder. But when you found the body of Elsie Pender, why did you feel it necessary to write that phony suicide note?"

He waited a long time to answer. "I didn't write it," said Paul Severance finally.

Miss Withers obviously lost all interest in him. She looked for a moment at the sprawled body of Elsie Pender behind the desk, noted the worn but modish dark-brown coat, the pert red hat. She peered down at the suicide note, the obviously contrived suicide note with the glaringly phony signature in typescript. She picked up and studied the pair of gloves which had passed the nitrate test, the brand-new black suede gloves.

"Satisfied, Hildegarde?" demanded the Inspector. "Because if you are, I'd like to get down to Headquarters and turn in my report."

"Quite," she told him, and obediently followed Piper out of the room, without a backward glance at the suave but perspiring medico surrounded by the three detectives.

But once in the Headquarters car she tapped the Inspector gently on the shoulder. "Oscar, would you do me a favor? Would you send out a broadcast to stop a car driven by a Mr. Vaughan Hemple? As a passenger he has Miss Corinne Lapham, and he's bound either for Greenwich or for North Carolina."

"Huh?" was all the Inspector could manage.

"Oh, I don't mean he should be arrested, exactly. Can't you hold him as a material witness or whatever it is?"

"I could," said the Inspector cautiously. "Look, Hildegarde —"

"And after you arrange that," she went on, "I wish you'd come with me to the residence of another witness. I haven't the address, but your detective who stood at Mrs. Lapham's door is sure to have it. . . ."

The Headquarters car pulled up before a small neat apartment house in the east Sixties. "Look, Hildegarde," the Inspector burst forth, "I'm stringing along with you because once or twice in the past you've

been right. But I warn you —"

"I know what I'm doing," she told him. And fervently hoped that she did. They came into the little lobby, and the Inspector started to reach for one of the bell-buttons. "Anyone but that," said Hildegarde Withers hastily. She went him one better by pushing half a dozen buttons. Somebody upstairs clicked the door, and they opened it and started up.

The stairs were dark and narrow, smelling faintly of ancient cabbage, of varnish, and of insecticides. "Here we are," the schoolteacher said. "3A."

She paused, about to knock. Then she sniffed, wrinkling her long tilted nose and blinking. "Heavens above, I'm right!" she whispered softly. Another scent, new and harsh, came through.

"What is this?" exploded the Inspector, and knocked heavily upon the door.

After an appreciable pause it was opened from within by Dr. Parkhill. His froglike face was a human question-mark as he saw who it was, but he stepped back and bowed. "Come in, come in!" said the Doctor.

They came into a small living room in which an open fire blazed merrily. "Sit down, please," Parkhill invited them genially. "I had an idea you might want some further information."

"Yes," Miss Withers told him quickly. "Especially since what happened. Or haven't you heard? Dr. Severance has proved a perfect alibi. He simply couldn't have murdered the Pender girl.

"He was appearing before a Navy Board from 5 to 7. The Pender girl was shot around 6.

"Would you care to make any changes or additions to your statement?" the schoolteacher prodded. Parkhill didn't answer, but stared at the fire. Finally he shook his head.

But the schoolteacher stood up. "You'd better change your story," she advised the doctor. "I see you've burned the gloves that Elsie Pender wore when she shot herself. How about the real suicide note?"

He was on his feet suddenly. "Yes, I burned that too! So what are you going to do about it!"

Miss Withers heaved a deep sigh. But the man went on. "Sure, I was in the dark room, and I heard a shot outside. I came out, and there she was, with a scribbled note blaming it all on Paul. I knew the girl was a manic-depressive — she threw acid on herself last year because some movie star she'd never met wouldn't accept her proposal of marriage. She had a terrific crush on Paul — but I saw a chance to get back at

him for keeping me in the background all these years. I just substituted a phony note for the real one, and clean new gloves for the ones she'd worn —"

"Next time," said Miss Withers gently, "remember that a girl with good taste in clothes would never wear black gloves with a dark brown suit. That was the big mistake you made —"

Parkhill didn't seem worried. "I know where I stand," he said. "You can't pin much on me. Two or three years, for concealing evidence . . ."

"That's right," the Inspector agreed. They were all standing up now, and Miss Withers edged toward the door. "You have it all figured out, Parkhill," Piper was continuing. "Only you forgot one thing. The Pender girl was shot twice — the first one missed the heart, but the second one hit dead center. Her own attempt wouldn't have been fatal, but you picked up the gun and —"

It was a forceful, dramatic delivery, but ill-timed. Because suddenly, from underneath the sofa cushion beside him, Parkhill produced a nasty little snub-nosed automatic.

The Inspector froze and Miss Hildegarde Withers fainted. Or seemed to faint. Anyway, she slumped back against the wall with a heart-rending shriek, and perhaps it was only by blind luck that she hit the light switch and threw the room into comparative darkness.

The gun spat twice, and then went sailing against the farther wall as Oscar Piper kicked it out of the doctor's hand. Miss Withers put the lights on and all lights went out for Dr. Parkhill, over whose head the Inspector crashed the butt of his own gun.

"I get the whole thing," Piper was saying, as they sat in a night coffee pot a block from Headquarters. "Except one thing. Why did you make me send out a broadcast for this Vaughan kid? We picked him and his parents up and made them madder than wet hens, all for nothing."

"Corinne wasn't with him, then?"

The Inspector shook his head. "With him! Listen, that gal's been busier than a one-armed paperhanger. She's retained a criminal lawyer and the Pinkertons in behalf of her precious Doc Severance, called up two senators and an assemblyman, and practically kicked down the front door of the Tombs." He sighed. "All between 9 and 11 P.M."

"I knew she loved him," murmured Hildegarde Withers. "Some men are like that, blast them."

Mr. Albert Campion was merely looking for a house called "Grey Peacocks." There should have been no difficulty — he had the complete address. And yet "in the place where the house might ordinarily be expected to stand, was a large rectangular hole, partly full of water . . ."

Mr. Albert Campion, "the Universal Uncle," can be depended on to help a damsel in distress — especially when she is "one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen in a long and by no means misspent youth."

This story — another Campion! — has never before been published in the United States.

SAFE AS HOUSES

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

MR. ALBERT CAMPION came gingerly down the steep staircase of the White Lion Inn at Little Chittering in Sussex with two important queries occupying his mind. One was the comparatively simple question, where was the bar, and the other a more philosophical matter concerning the Blood Tie, or how much need the average man endure for his relations before he is entitled to sneak quietly home to London and go to earth in his club?

He had just set foot upon the uneven floor of the narrow passage and had caught a welcome glimpse of a promising oak-and-pewter interior a step or so ahead, when there was a rustle at the top of the stairs behind him and a muffled voice inquired pathetically: —

"Any luck with her, my boy?"

The thin man with the horn-rimmed spectacles swung round guiltily and glanced up. At the top of the staircase stood a sad and somewhat fantastic figure. He was a small man approaching sixty, who wore at the moment a long tweed coat which descended almost to his shoes, and an old school muffler which bound up his head so thoroughly that only a triangular patch of worried face and a tuft or two of bedraggled pepper-and-salt moustache showed among its brightly-coloured folds. One eye, too, was visible, a watery, red-rimmed affair with a depressed glaze. Mr. Campion felt a twinge of pity for him and resented the emotion. Things were bad enough without adding Second Cousin Monmouth's troubles to them.

"I did have a word or two with Great Aunt Charlotte," he admitted cautiously, "but I'm afraid she still

clings to the idea that this is the place to operate from."

The unhappy figure at the top of the stairs groaned.

"It's this infernal head of mine, you know," he complained wretchedly, "as I made it quite clear to everybody at the time. I knew the drive down here in that draughty old car of mother's would give me neuralgia, and so it has. I've been lying on my bed, and I don't mind telling you it's as hard as a board and probably damp. Still, you can't expect any sympathy for that. That's mother all over. If she'd made up her mind to stay in a mission hut at the South Pole there we'd all remain if I'd got pneumonia and you were crippled with rheumatism."

"Well, come down into the bar," said Campion, softening, against his better judgment, for Second Cousin Monmouth was not a beautiful personality with whom to drink. "It must open eventually. All these things happen in time."

"That's an idea." The old man brightened visibly through the swathing folds of his scarf, but he changed his mind again almost immediately. "Better not," he said regretfully. "This head of mine is playing me up, don't you know. Besides, if mother gets it into her mind that I've been drinking there'll be the devil to pay. I don't suppose she'll keep such a tight rein on you, my boy, but I should certainly look out. She's a very determined woman."

He spoke wistfully and shuffled back towards his room, leaving Campion ashamed for his Great Aunt.

"The whole thing is pure tommy-rot, anyway. You realise that, don't you? That at least is obvious. I saw that before we left home."

Second Cousin Monmouth put his head out of the door to fire the Parthian shot.

"It's probably some sort of joke," he shouted. "As I tell mother, people do play jokes."

"Not on me!" The retort, coming unexpectedly as it did from the door between them, silenced the older man, who disappeared like a shadow into his room, and stopped Campion in his tracks.

Lady Charlotte Lawn came out on to the little landing and caught him before he could escape.

"Well, Albert," she said briskly, "have you made those inquiries?"

"Not yet, Aunt. I —"

"Good heavens, boy, don't talk to me from the bottom of the stairs as if I were a builder's labourer on a ladder. Come up here at once."

Campion pocketed most of his thirty-eight years and went up meekly. He offered the old lady his arm and conducted her back to the sitting-room which she had

just commandeered from a reluctant management.

As usual, he found her terrifying. She was small and wiry, with a sharp nose and eyes like a bird's. He knew for a fact that she must be almost eighty, although there was no indication from her manner or appearance that she was within twenty years of that age.

"I've sent Dorothy down to the kitchen," she said briskly. "We shall have to eat here and probably spend the night, and I do like to know that my food is prepared in clean cooking utensils. I've told her to look at everything."

"That should make us all very popular," murmured Campion affably.

"Not at all." Great Aunt Charlotte picked him up immediately. "Dorothy has been in my service for over forty years and during that time she has acquired some of my tact. We very seldom give offence. Now then, how far have you got on? Have you discovered the house?"

"No, I'm afraid I haven't. Not yet. As a matter of fact I had hardly got downstairs from talking to you before."

"That comes of gossiping with poor Monmouth," said the old lady frankly. "You young men will waste time. I've noticed it over and over again. From the moment you open your eyes in the morning to the instant you close them at night you dawdle and idle through life like children unless someone comes running behind you the whole time. Of course with poor Monmouth laziness is a disease. You've only got to think of his attitude towards this extraordinary business to see that. He thinks it may be a joke. He'd rather be burnt in his bed than stir himself for an instant."

"Burnt in his bed?" said Campion, taken off his guard.

"Well, why not?" Great Aunt Charlotte's stare did not flicker. "A serious burglary may easily lead to a fire. It doesn't take much imagination to see that. They tell me you're very good at finding out things, but upon my word I can't say I'm very impressed by your performance so far. You arrived at my house at ten o'clock last night but only after I had sent you five telegrams in succession. I've spent most of the night explaining the extraordinary thing that has happened, and then, early this morning, we motored a hundred and forty miles over here and what have you found out? Precisely nothing."

Campion felt himself wince.

"I've been thinking, though," he said sternly, "and quite frankly, Aunt, if I didn't know you I should certainly begin to wonder what you were playing at."

"Perhaps you would care to ex-

plain just exactly what you mean by that?"

Campion was not intimidated. It had been a long and tiring morning and his patience was not inexhaustible.

"Nothing was stolen, you see," he said. "That's always fishy. I am making no vulgar accusations in the moment, but believe me the police always look with deep distrust at the householder whose premises are burgled but not robbed."

Great Aunt Charlotte smiled.

"Naturally," she said placidly. "That was why I didn't send for the police. That was why I sent for you. Now would you like me to go all over it again?"

"No," said Campion hastily. "No, darling, I think I've got it all as clear as it'll ever be. Let me see, you returned yesterday after being away for a fortnight —"

"Yes. At Tunbridge Wells. Dorothy has been with me, and Monmouth spent the last week there, coming on from his sister's place in Bedfordshire."

Once Great Aunt Charlotte was started there was no stopping her. As in certain old musical boxes her tunes always had to be heard out to the end.

"I let my other two maids, Phyllis and Betty, go home on board wages," she said. "We locked the house, and the gardeners, of course, are not in the grounds after five at night."

Campion nodded. "It's an old house," he said thoughtfully. "Very easy to burgle."

"Waverley is a remarkable house," said the old lady. "Some of the beams in it must be nearly six hundred years old. That was one of the reasons why I bought it. I remember Monmouth was almost excited by it when we first discovered it over twelve years ago. Still, it's no use talking about its age. That's not the point. The fact remains that as soon as I went into the drawing-room last night I knew at once that it had been used while I was away."

She paused, as she always did at this part of her story, for dramatic effect, but Campion was no longer the perfect audience.

"That's all very well, darling," he said, "but you know it is possible to imagine a thing like that very easily."

"Not about my drawing-room." The old lady was decided. "You see, no one is allowed in it but me. Even Dorothy never dares to clean it unless I'm there. I keep my Spode there and my father's decorations. It's a most sacred room. Of course I could tell if it had been used."

"You're sure it had?"

"Absolutely certain." Lady Char-

lotte Lawn shut her mouth as if it had possessed a zip-fastener, and a brief silence ensued. "There was the mark of a glass on my walnut lowboy," she said at last, her voice dropping at the enormity of the crime. "An odious white ring; I saw it at once. Then there was the cigarette ash in the coal scuttle and of course the notepaper — surely you're not going to ignore the notepaper?"

Campion hesitated. Yes, of course, she was right. There was the notepaper. The notepaper was the mystery, and even now, at high noon, with an exasperating morning behind him and an impossible evening ahead, he was forced to admit that the notepaper and its unexplained presence in Great Aunt Charlotte's walnut escritoire was still mysterious.

He took out his pocket-book and extracted from it the half-dozen sheets of pale blue bond which he had carried away from the Waverley drawing-room. He looked again at the embossed address which had brought Aunt Charlotte herself steaming out of Kent into Sussex with her son and her grand-nephew in tow. There it was, clear and bald and ugly in semi-Old English script.

"*Grey Peacocks*
Little Chittering
near Horsham
Sussex."

"Burglary or not," said Great Aunt Charlotte, "someone sat down at my writing-desk and wrote a note there on his or her own notepaper. I want to meet the person who did that. Here we all are at the place. It should be very simple for you to find the house."

The thin man glanced across the room at her and his wide mouth twisted helplessly as he laughed.

"Well, the Post Office hasn't heard of such a house," he said regretfully. "The postmistress says she's been here fifteen years and has never heard of any Peacock, let alone a grey one."

"Then we've come to the wrong village."

"Well, I thought that myself at first, naturally, but I'm afraid we've drawn a blank there too. There is only one Little Chittering in Sussex and this is it." He hesitated. "You see, Aunt," he went on at last, "I do hope you'll forgive me for saying so, but the entire thing is absolutely nuts. The more I think of it the more inclined I am to agree with Monmouth, that it's some sort of misguided effort at the humorous. Don't stationers sometimes send round samples of notepaper stamped with fictitious addresses?"

"They may, young man, but not by the half-dozen quires." Aunt Charlotte was not troubling to con-

ceal her contempt. "That notepaper was put in my writing-table by someone who intended to write letters there. I've got the evidence of my own eyes. If this village is Little Chittering, Sussex, then you can depend upon it that a house called Grey Peacocks is somewhere near at hand. Go and find it. And when you have done so come back in the car and drive me over to make a call on the owners, for I have something to say to them. I know exactly what I want to do, and I do not intend to leave this place until I have done it."

She dismissed him with a bright little nod and he went downstairs again, irritated by a problem which he felt must obviously have some very simple explanation but which was as yet entirely beyond him.

He found the bar open at last, and stood leaning on the scored oak, looking into his glass with a gloomy and introspective eye. It did not make sense. The picture of any sane criminal breaking into an unoccupied house for the sole purpose of leaving a stack of falsely stamped notepaper in the drawing-room writing-table did not appeal to him as in any way convincing.

The landlord of the Lion was sympathetic, but neither he nor his wife was helpful. They had only been in the place fifteen years, they said apologetically, but in all their time there had been no house called Grey Peacocks in Little Chittering or in any other village nearby.

Regretfully Campion gave it up. He was just formulating an elaborate plan to get Aunt Charlotte temporarily interested in something else while he made a dignified escape back to Town when something happened.

First there was the sound of a car braking sharply on the dusty road outside, and then one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen in a long and by no means misspent youth put her head round the door of the bar and said distinctly: —

"Excuse me, but could anyone direct me to Grey Peacocks?"

Instantly there was one of those long silences which inevitably follow a direct question delivered to a room full of acquaintances. Campion felt his scalp rising, and he shot a suspicious glance at his glass before looking at the girl again. She was still there, however, and, meeting his eye, repeated the house name obligingly.

"Grey Peacocks."

No one answered her immediately. There was a general exchange of blank glances and several breathy denials, and then somebody cackled behind the window curtain.

The entire company appeared to

resent this insult to so attractive a stranger, and a red-faced old man in a dilapidated bowler and collarless pink shirt was hustled out of his shelter there without ceremony.

"Come on, come on, Mr. Richart." The landlord was gently reproving. "Say what you've got to say. Do you know where the house is?"

Mr. Richart began to laugh again. He had a face like something seen among the embers of a dying wood fire. A fluffy ash-grey beard and moustache flowed from his flaming cheeks.

"Don't act silly," said a dour man beside him. "Tell the lady if you know, and if you don't, stop making a fool of yourself."

Mr. Richart's grin died in anger, and he turned on the girl and directed her in a high-pitched sing-song which sounded frankly vindictive.

"Half a mile down the road you come to a pair o' white gates. Don't goo in they but keep straight on till you come to a mill. Branch off by the side o' that, goo through the woods, and you'll come to some owd stone pillars. Goo between they and very likely you'll come to Grey Peacocks. That's where that stood when I were last in they gates."

"Oh, thank you so much. I'm so sorry to have troubled you." The girl flashed a set of glistening teeth at him and was gone, leaving a general sense of gratified chivalry behind her.

Old Mr. Richart scrambled into the window again.

"Piled high wi' luggage," he gloated deliriously. "A great Lunnon car piled high wi' luggage." The sight seemed to be too much for him altogether, for he lay back on the settle and laughed until he choked and had to be thumped on the back.

"Seems to have been took funny," remarked the landlord to Campion as he let himself out from behind the bar. "Wasn't that the house you wanted, sir? Here, Mr. Richart, you don't want to carry on like that. You'll give yourself veins. Come and talk to the gentleman. He's looking for that house you was telling the lady about."

This last intelligence proved too much for Mr. Richart altogether. He lay panting against the bar with streaming eyes and a mouth like the mask of comedy, emitting faint high-pitched crows of laughter. However, he recovered himself when the landlord got angry, and finally agreed to drive down to the address with Campion to show him the way.

He turned out to be a very silent passenger who was either deaf or contemptuous towards his host's efforts at conversation. He sat bolt

upright in the front of the car, his face glowing and imperturbable, yet every now and again his whole body shook with some deep inward convulsion.

Campion drove quietly, hoping to see the joke.

They passed the white gates and turned by the mill, found the wood and drove for some time through a tunnel of trees until, at a croak from his companion, Campion pulled up before a dark gap in the greenery where two ancient stone posts could just be seen among the tall grasses.

"Here?" inquired Campion dubiously.

"Ah," said Mr. Richart, his voice shaking with suppressed excitement. "This is Grey Peacocks. Scratch away the moss on they stones and you'll see the pictures of the birds theirselves. Goo on, turn into drive."

Campion was edging the car slowly round the gatepost when the other car met him as it swooped out and they pulled up with a flurry of brakes, and the bonnets not two inches apart. Peering through his own windscreen, Campion saw a yellow-haired fury backed by a pile of luggage which rose in tiers behind her. She was white with indignation, and her large dark eyes were smouldering wickedly. She backed her overladen car with spiteful deliberation and came slowly alongside until she was level with Campion.

"I suppose you think you're terribly funny?" she said savagely, clipping the words so that they came out packed with venom. "Let me tell you I think you're frankly disgusting and I hope you fall in and k-k-kill yourselves."

The final quiver in her voice betrayed her, and at Campion's side Mr. Richart let out a whoop of triumph. The girl flushed, included them both in a single glance of withering hatred, and then, letting in the clutch, swung round Campion's car at suicidal speed and disappeared back down the tree tunnel in a shower of dust and small stones.

Campion glanced after her with genuine regret. He didn't know when he had made such a bad impression on a woman at first bow. He turned to Mr. Richart.

"What's the joke?" he demanded.

The old man roused himself with an effort from dazed delight and glowed at the prospect of further delectation.

"Drive on," he commanded. "Drive on."

Campion steered his big car down a narrow overgrown chase where briars and laurels almost met across the mossy gravel. It was so overgrown that the midday light was pale green and uncertain. With Mr. Richart palpitating at his side a sense

of deep misgiving seized Campion.

"Don't you think you'd better explain?" he said ominously.

"No," gasped his passenger, writhing with anticipation. "Drive on."

Campion did not reply. The chase turned abruptly, and he was some seconds negotiating a fallen branch which lay in his path. An instant later he trod sharply on the brakes and brought the great car up on her haunches.

Before them, lying at the end of the drive, in the place where a house might ordinarily be expected to stand, was a large rectangular hole, partly full of water and depressingly overgrown.

Campion looked coldly at Mr. Richart, who, now that the cream of the jest was presented to him at last, had scarcely any stomach left for it, but who sat forward, his eyes glazed, a slightly sick expression overlaying his joy.

"Is this Grey Peacocks?" inquired Campion.

"This is where it were," said Mr. Richart. "Noo it's gorn."

"So I see. When did that happen?"

"When I were a youngish man. He sold that, the old owner did, to some American, and they pulled it down. 'Twere nothing but an old ruin when they bought it. That's twenty-five years ago, I should think."

"Twenty-five years." Campion repeated the words as if they constituted a barrier between himself and sanity. "Was it called Grey Peacocks then?"

"No. That were called Playle's Farm, after the man 'oo farmed the land. But I remember years before that there was an old man pointed out the carving of the birds on the gatepost and he told me that one time the whole house was called Grey Peacocks. Then it were pulled down. That's what made me laugh outright when you and the lady came asking for it. You both wanted that and that was pulled down, see?"

"Very funny," agreed Campion acidly. "Perhaps you would like to laugh all the way home?"

To do Mr. Richart justice he did not care. With five shillings of a foreigner's money in his pocket a walk of four miles or so was a pleasure. Campion left him swinging down the chase as happy as only a man with a sense of humour can be.

Campion in his fast car came up with the girl at the point where the road forked in the outskirts of the wood. The car was parked on the grass verge and the girl was sitting at the wheel apparently reading a book. Campion told himself that he was in credulous mood and that there was nothing at all extraor-

dinary about the sight of a beautiful young woman, clearly in tears, reading a novel at the wheel of a car which contained the best part of her worldly goods, including bedding. He drew up, waiting for the storm.

It did not come. Instead he received a blow so unfair that it took all the wind out of his sails and left him gasping. She looked over at him, blinked away the worst of the rainstorm, and sniffed pathetically.

"Oh, don't tease me any more," she said. "I'm so tired and there's such a lot to do before they come. Where is the wretched place, for the love of Mike?"

Campion told his story, or part of it, with convincing exasperation.

"Our mutual friend, Mr. Richart — that's the man with a laugh — seems to be the only soul on earth who has even heard of it," he finished plaintively, "and he says that the house was pulled down some twenty-five years ago by some Americans who bought it as a ruin."

"Oh, well, he's wrong about that, anyway," said the girl casually, using her driving licence to mark the place in the book she had been reading. "I do know that. I was there ten days ago."

"What?"

She smiled at him. "That's what makes the whole thing so infuriating," she said confidingly. "Mother and I came down to see the house on Friday night. It was a dark journey, of course, but we saw all over it, and then he brought us back again."

"Who did?"

"Mr. Grey. He brought us down from London. He owns the house."

"Are you talking about Grey Peacocks?" Campion heard his own voice weakening.

"Well, naturally." The girl clearly found him singularly unintelligent. "That's the annoying thing. I've got the address, and I've even been to the place before, and yet I can't find it. Roads do look different at night, I know, and we came in a big closed car of Grey's, but still I was so certain I could manage that I told mother I'd get the place ready on my own. I've got the servants coming down by train tomorrow. I expect there's a lot of work to be done because it must be in spotless order by the time mother brings the others next week."

"What others?" demanded Campion, giving up finesse.

"The Americans we've taken it for, of course," said the girl. "You don't think we could pay all that for a holiday house for ourselves, do you?"

The ground beneath Campion's feet reeled, shivered, and afterwards became rather horribly firm. He climbed out of the car and went towards her.

"I say," he said, "I don't want to be depressing, but I do hope you haven't parted with any cash yet?"

Her dark eyes, which were round and candid and disconcertingly young, met his own, a slightly startled expression in their depths.

"We paid Mr. Grey a deposit," she said. "Half the amount. Six weeks at seventeen guineas a week. Look here, I hope there's nothing wrong, because it's their money, you see. The Americans', I mean. Mother and I are frightfully hard up. We could never afford ——" She broke off, laughing. "This is absurd," she said. "You frightened me for a moment. Who are you, anyway? Go away if you can't be helpful. It's ridiculous, though, because — well — it's a famous house, isn't it? That's why we didn't have references and nor did the agent. Look, it's all in here, address and everything. I've been trying to work out the route, but it doesn't give it."

She handed him the book she had been reading and it fell open where she had marked it. Campion took the volume with interest. It was an oldish publication, printed about 1870, and was entitled, with engaging naïveté, "Resting-places in the Garden of England." The make-up was simple. Each chapter, of which there were several dozen, dealt with a different country house, giving its features of interest, something of its history, and a pen-and-ink drawing of some part of its structure. Grey Peacocks, Little Chittering, near Horsham, Sussex, had a long chapter to itself.

Campion stood looking at a somewhat over-careful sketch of the panelled entrance-hall for some time.

"You say you went here last Friday night, Miss — ah ——?"

"Murphy," supplied the girl cheerfully. "Ann Murphy. Yes, I did. Mother and I both went. Not last Friday, the Friday before. As soon as the agent showed us this book we both knew it would be just exactly what these Americans would love, and so we phoned up the Cosmopolitan, where Mr. Grey was staying, and he asked us to go along to see him. We had a chat with him and then he took us down to see the house and very kindly lent us the book. It's a lovely place. You see that little hound-gate at the foot of the stairs? Well, it's still there. And that door leads into the sweetest drawing-room." She paused and sighed. "It's ideal," she said. "Of course it is. And yet I'm rather sorry we took it."

"Are you? Why?" Campion's interest was almost over-anxious.

The girl shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, it's nothing. It's very silly of me to think of it at all. But mother

heard from an old school friend this morning saying that she'd like to let her place. It's a pity in a way, because it's really quite as antique, and it would be cheaper, which would have suited us, because mother and I are doing the whole thing for a fixed sum, you see. Mother knew the American man years ago, and now he's a widower left with two grown-up sons who've come over for the shooting. Naturally she wants to impress them all and make them comfortable. I mean we don't want to look like a couple of unbusiness-like fools, do we? I really don't know why I'm telling you all this, but it is rather unnerving, isn't it, losing the house like this?"

Campion took another look at the sketch at the beginning of the chapter on Grey Peacocks before he returned the book to the girl, and there was a grim expression in his pale eyes.

"Tell me, did you pay this deposit to Mr. Grey direct?" he inquired.

"Yes, yes, we did," she said. "He was going abroad, you see, and he pointed out that it would save everybody trouble if we did the little transaction, as he called it, there and then and let him see to the agent afterwards. He didn't bother about our references and we didn't ask for any from him because we could see the house. Hang it all, we were in it. So mother gave him a cheque and he gave us a receipt on his notepaper stamped with the Grey Peacocks address. It seemed all right."

Campion, who had become very thoughtful during the last ten minutes or so, held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Miss Murphy," he said abruptly. "The very best of luck in your search. Look here, just if by chance you can't find the place, the thing to do is to go back to the agent, you know. He'll always be able to find Mr. Grey for you."

She shook his hand and looked, he thought, a trifle injured by his ungallant desertion, which was certainly sudden. However, mentally consigning her to the care of three stalwart Americans, he did not even look back, but climbed into the car and drove away without so much as a glance or a farewell wave.

Second Cousin Monmouth greeted him without enthusiasm. He had discarded his scarf and was sitting up in his room in the cold, a small tray of drinks on his dressing-table.

"How much longer have we got to stay in this infernal hole, Campion?" he demanded before the other man was safely in the room. "I shall catch my death, you know. I can feel that. I've told mother we should never have come."

"I shouldn't worry," said Campion briefly. "You're leaving now."

"Really?" The little man bounced off his chair and picked up his scarf. "Home, I suppose?"

"No. You're going to London. By the way, I hope you've got that money still or you'll stay away from home rather longer than ever before."

Second Cousin Monmouth stopped in his tracks like a shot bear.

"Eh?" he said cautiously. "What money?"

"Six weeks at seventeen guineas a week, Mr. Grey."

There was a long and embarrassing pause.

"Well?" said Cousin Monmouth at last with an almost creditable attempt at bluster. "Well, my boy, what do you know about that little peccadillo, eh?"

Campion's smile was not condoning.

"I know you let Aunt Charlotte's house, Waverley, to a poor wretched mother and daughter, falsely representing to them that it was an ancient structure called Grey Peacocks. You drove them out to Kent, and in the dark they thought they were coming to Sussex."

"Not at all." The little fat man shook his head. "Get the story right if you must be so blessed clever," he said. "Stick to the facts. There was no false representation about it. Waverley *is* Grey Peacocks. I've known that for years. Some Americans bought it in 1914. They took it down brick by brick and beam by beam and packed it in numbered cases with the idea of putting it up again on the other side. There's nothing new in that. They're always doing it. However, in this case the War came and prevented transport, and after the War the original owner had died and his executors sold the thing cheap to a builder who put it up where it stands today. He thought Grey Peacocks was a silly name for a house and called it Waverley. I knew the place had been moved at some time, and the other day I was browsing among some old books in a friend's library and I recognised a sketch of our front hall in an article on the house."

"So you pinched the book and launched out on to this jolly little swindle the moment Aunt was out of the house for a bit," put in Campion. "You stayed at the Cosmopolitan, saw the agent, hired a car and worked the whole thing while you were supposed to be staying with your sister, I take it?"

Second Cousin Monmouth rose to his feet.

"I may have borrowed the book," he said with dignity. "I admit that. But I resent the term 'swindle.' I tell you, Campion, I resent that bitterly."

"Resent away," said his nephew cheerfully. "Get your coat on and find your cheque-book. We're going to the agent's."

"To the agent's?" The old man was scandalised. "Whatever for? That's the last place I should have thought of going."

"We must pay the deposit back." Campion spoke earnestly. "Don't be a fool. It's that or jug or worse when Aunt Charlotte finds out."

Cousin Monmouth spun round, his small eyes popping.

"Good lord, has mother seen those people?" The little man hunched his shoulders and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. "There'll be trouble when she does. I hadn't thought of that," he said briefly and sat down on the edge of the table.

Campion was not the type to lecture anybody, much less a man nearly old enough to be his father, but he felt it behove him to say a few words on the unseemliness of robbing the widow and the orphan. Second Cousin Monmouth heard him out in owlish silence, and when it was over he rose to his feet.

"All right," he said earnestly. "All right. I'll pay up. I shouldn't have done it. I see that now. I've seen the light, my boy. The picture you've drawn of those two poor little women has made me regret my own hastiness. I've felt a fool all day sitting about with my face covered up, afraid lest one of them should come in. A fool and a knave, Campion, that's what I've been. It was a rotten trick. I am bitterly ashamed of myself. I ought not to have behaved like such an outsider."

He paused in his flow of self-reproach, and Campion, who was entirely unprepared for the performance, eased his own collar uncomfortably.

Second Cousin Monmouth remained in contrite silence all through the drive to London until they actually neared the city. Then he shook his head.

"Every great criminal makes a fatal slip, Campion," he said solemnly. "Do you know what has been weighing on my conscience all this time? It's a very serious and upsetting thought. If I hadn't been such a fool as to forget I'd left that stamped notepaper in mother's bureau, damn me, I'd have got clean away with it."

"Q"

In our July 1943 issue we brought you the first detective story written by James Yaffe, then only fifteen years old. Here is Master Yaffe's second effort — another adventure of Paul Dawn and his Department of Impossible Crimes.

Master Yaffe, now sixteen, can always be relied on to do and say the unusual thing. For example, in his letter attached to the manuscript of the second story, the boy-author makes this astonishing statement: "Incidentally, I assure you that the method which is used to commit the impossible crime in 'Mr. Kiroshibu's Ashes' is perfectly valid; I tried it myself."

Further comment by your Editor will be found at the end of the story. Now, play fair — read the story first!

MR. KIROSHIBU'S ASHES

by JAMES YAFFE

HE SAT DOWN in the dining car of the Florida Special. The small, well-poised Japanese gentleman who sat opposite looked up at him through horn-rimmed glasses and smiled brightly. Paul Dawn returned the smile and submerged himself in the menu. The Japanese gentleman became involved with an artichoke.

Paul made a mental notation about asparagus soup, but he was unable to keep his mind on the food. His eyes stole over the top of the menu; he found himself staring hard at the Japanese gentleman, a well-groomed individual, dressed with an impeccable taste that was almost annoying. He ate his artichoke with a delicacy and refinement that would have put Miss Post to shame. Very unimaginative type, was Paul's verdict. No sense of humor. Highly meticulous.

These meticulous people always miss so many of the good things of life, Paul thought The "good things" of Paul Dawn's life numbered three: crossword puzzles, an imagination that could whisk him away to other parts whenever things became tiresome, and the D.I.C. — Department of Impossible Crimes — the New York Homicide Squad's most obscure office, of which Paul was Grand High Potentate.

There was one thing about the Japanese gentleman which stirred his interest. On the table before him, the Japanese gentleman had placed

an urn. It was a black, copper urn, faintly resembling a flower pot, and sealed tightly on top. Entwined around it was a greenish decoration — some sort of dragon, Paul supposed. Very curious. Paul was bothered by that odd, black urn. What did it contain? Why had the Japanese gentleman brought it to the dinner table?

And as Paul Dawn stared at the Japanese gentelman's urn, he realized suddenly that the Japanese gentleman was staring at him. He looked up into the Oriental's warm smile.

"Excuse it, please," the Japanese gentleman murmured.

Paul's eyes flew back to his menu.

But the Japanese gentleman continued to smile. He wanted to strike up a conversation. Paul had the kind of frank and open face that people struck up conversations with. All his life utter strangers had buttonholed him in railway stations, hotel lobbies, and elevators, and poured out their troubles to his unwilling ears.

"Notice you have been admiring my urn," said the Japanese gentleman. "So glad to see you appreciate work of art."

Paul winced. His whole vacation was going to be spoiled. He envisioned discussing Art with the Japanese gentleman all the way to Miami Beach. "It's rather unusual," Paul said, scowling.

The Japanese gentleman smiled. "It serves unusual purpose. If you please, I am Dr. Howard Kiroshibu. Kiroshibu Brothers, Oriental Pottery. Perhaps you are acquainted with the firm."

Paul shook his head, hoping the conversation would end there. It didn't.

"You are Paul Dawn, noted criminal investigator," Howard Kiroshibu said. "Easy to recognize you from photographs in newspapers."

Paul nodded and tried to look flattered.

"Your work most familiar to myself and late brother, Henry. Science of deductive reasoning not unknown among members of Japanese race."

Paul said that he was very glad to hear of Dr. Kiroshibu's interest, and his eyes strayed once again to the odd, black urn which stood on the table, silent and disturbing.

Howard Kiroshibu smiled and nodded and then an amused twinkle gleamed in his eye. "Perhaps, Mr. Dawn, as man who spends much time in solution of enigmas, you would entertain humble problem of my own."

Paul mumbled something about being on a vacation.

"Am so sorry," said Dr. Kiroshibu looking at the floor sadly. "Would have been most honored to obtain advice of great expert. Difficulty

concerns black urn of which you remarked just now."

Paul looked up. So the polished Dr. Kiroshibu was worried about the urn! Paul's curiosity was growing in leaps.

"What's your problem?"

Kiroshibu smiled. "So happy to note your interest. I fear, Mr. Dawn, that at some time during long trip which stands before us, this urn will be stolen."

"Why?"

"Because of great value of contents."

"What's in the urn?" asked Paul, trying to look as if he didn't care.

"It is story of many complexities," Kiroshibu purred. "I will condense it for your convenience. One week past, my brother and partner, Henry Kiroshibu, most unhappily joined his illustrious ancestors."

"Died?"

"As you say. In disposing of property and worldly possessions, Henry presented to me his share of our business and many financial interests — under one condition. Condition, Mr. Dawn, of most uncommon nature."

Paul lit a cigarette and blew out a smoke ring of satisfactory dimensions. "What condition, Dr. Kiroshibu?"

"My brother requested that his body be burned — cremated — and that I should transport his ashes to Miami Beach, Florida, a spot of which he was most fond, and distribute them across the waters."

"So you're traveling to Miami Beach to toss your brother's ashes into the Atlantic."

"Precisely."

"And that black urn —"

"Contains my brother's ashes."

Paul Dawn watched another smoke ring curl into oblivion.

He had never before sat down at the same dinner table with a man's ashes. It was a new experience, and he wanted to savor it. Paul shut his eyes and thought how close he was to eating soup with a corpse. But, of course, ashes were different. Not the same thing as a corpse at all. You could hardly pick up an ash from the pile and say, "This used to be Kiroshibu's right eye," or "This was part of his stomach." Messy little things, ashes.

Paul looked up with a start, conscious of Kiroshibu's silky purr. "Would you care to look at them?"

"Look at what?"

"My brother's ashes."

Paul Dawn shrugged his shoulders. "Why not?"

His mild, unruffled smile grew as Howard Kiroshibu unfastened the cover of the black urn which contained his brother.

Henry Kiroshibu was of a non-

descript, grayish color, and he only filled about half the urn.

Howard Kiroshibu fastened on the cover and continued to smile, quietly and triumphantly.

For lack of anything else to say, Paul said, "How much do they weigh?" and regretted this cold-blooded remark immediately. He had forgotten for a moment that the mound of ashes in that urn represented the remains of the imperturbable Dr. Kiroshibu's beloved brother.

But the Japanese gentleman was undisturbed. "Ashes very light, urn very heavy. Hold in hand, please."

Paul took the urn, and nearly dropped it. Its weight was very deceptive. It looked as if it hardly weighed five pounds but it must have weighed over twenty.

"One thing I can't understand," said Paul. "A man's ashes are — well, they're extremely — specialized. I mean, there's very little demand for human ashes on the market. In other words, as a commodity, economically speaking, your brother's ashes are worthless. Why, then, do you believe that a thief is going to go to any trouble to steal what might be considered as a — er — drug on the market!"

Dr. Kiroshibu nodded. "I perceive the logic of your reasoning, Mr. Dawn. However, you have neglected one important consideration. It is, perhaps, not the ashes which the thief wants to obtain — but the urn."

Paul was puzzled. "You told me before that somebody was going to steal the urn because of its valuable contents."

"And that is exactly what I meant. They will steal the *urn*, because of the *ashes*. I will explain. There are throughout the country numerous collectors of Oriental pottery of unusual significance. Until recently, black urn which I hold in my hand had no significance whatsoever — therefore, no value to these collectors. Urn, however, has gained value within last few days. *It has been used to carry my brother's ashes to Miami Beach.* You can imagine, perhaps, the feeling of pride and triumph that would fill the heart of any collector of pottery who might obtain for his collection the very urn which was used to carry the ashes of the world's greatest pottery dealer. And if those ashes were still intact inside the urn, the prize would have unlimited value!"

Paul Dawn had heard a lot of crazy stories in his days with the D.I.C., and his imagination was tough enough to take most of them without a dent. However, human ashes as a motive for grand larceny were something new in his life. He

was incredulous. "Do you really believe that somebody might want your brother's ashes as a collector's item?"

Kiroshibu nodded. "Reducing situation to its elementals, that is correct."

Paul sighed. "And what do you want me to do?"

Kiroshibu leaned forward eagerly. "Take ashes. Bring them to your drawing-room. Hide them. Protect them. Keep them from harm. And return them to me in safe condition when we arrive at Miami Beach. For this, I give my assurances, you will receive generous remuneration."

Paul Dawn was tempted. The case was curious enough, and his duties looked easy. But it was not an impossible crime. At present, it was not any crime at all. And Paul had always specialized in impossible crimes. In New York he refused to handle any problem, unless it presented not only difficulties, but impossibilities.

"Sorry," said Paul. "I can't take the case."

The Japanese gentleman looked extremely forlorn. "That is your final answer?"

"I'm afraid so."

Kiroshibu rose from the table and walked down the aisle. Paul looked after him with a puzzled expression, as Howard Kiroshibu disappeared through the door that led to the next car.

That was the last time Paul Dawn saw the Japanese gentleman alive.

A six-letter word meaning "South African water buffalo" would have done very nicely at eleven-thirty that night. Paul Dawn and his new pajamas were sitting in Lower Eight unable to get to sleep. Paul was scratching his chin and the pajamas were scratching Paul. A crossword puzzle magazine was spread out before him; the great detective looked very undetective-like as he swam about in the sea of words that represented Puzzle 14. Puzzles 1 through 13 had been polished off during the past hour and a half.

A slight rapping noise snapped off his train of thought. Somebody was tapping on the head of his bed.

"Go away," said Paul.

It was the porter. "Mr. Dawn, is you awake?"

"No, I'm talking in my sleep. Go away."

A large, chocolate-brown hand slithered through the folds of the curtain that covered his berth, groped around in the darkness. Paul watched it, fascinated, until it collided with his shoulder.

"There you is! Mr. Dawn, wake up, will you, suh? There's been a accident!"

Paul sat up in bed. "Train wreck?"

"Nossuh. Diffunt kind of a accident. The conductuh said what you was on the train and that Ah should find you right away."

Paul was annoyed. He didn't like to be interrupted in the middle of a crossword puzzle.

"Well, if he wants me, he'll have to take me in my pajamas."

"Yassuh."

"*Blue* pajamas!" Paul managed somehow to extricate himself from his bed. He unbuttoned the curtain that covered the berth, while his dangling toes searched the floor for his slippers. He realized suddenly that he was shivering; it was a cold night, and the train was moving, and he would much rather have been in bed. But Paul followed the porter meekly down the dark aisle, between rows of curtained boxes that contained people, into the next car.

The conductor was a tired man of middle age, with spectacles perched crookedly on the end of his nose. They found him looking worried in front of the closed door of a drawing-room. Next to the conductor stood a large, fat Chinese gentleman, dressed in a purple bathrobe. The conductor introduced himself simply as "Simms," and the Chinese as "Mr. Oscar Kung."

"It's a relief to see you, Mr. Dawn," said Simms, wetting his lips. "Being as you're an officer of the law, and all that."

"An officer on vacation," Paul reminded him. "What seems to be the trouble?"

Simms turned to the fat Chinese gentleman. "You better tell him, Mr. Kung."

"Most honored." Oscar Kung spoke in a rich, booming baritone, and his chins wiggled as he talked. "I am occupant of drawing-room located next to this one. Five minutes ago I was awakened from sound sleep by noise of revolver. The sound came most assuredly from this drawing-room. I rose from bed and knocked upon door of this drawing-room. No reply. I knocked several times. No reply. I attempted to push door open, but found it locked securely from within. I summoned the conductor."

"And I called you," Simms went on. "Something's happened in that drawing room, Mr. Dawn. Somebody fired a gun, and now there's no answer from inside — and the drawing-room is locked. We're going to break open the door, and I want a detective around when we go in."

Paul said, "Who occupies this drawing room?"

"Jap fellow. Dr. Kiro-something-or-other."

"Kiroshibu." So the small Japanese gentleman was inside the locked drawing-room — with his brother's

ashes. Kiroshibu had been afraid that something would happen. Something had.

The combined weight of Simms, the porter, Paul Dawn, and the massive Mr. Kung was too much for the door. The lock gave and the door burst open.

Kiroshibu's drawing room was just like any other in the train. It contained an upper and lower berth, a small couch, and a wash basin. In general, the room was in perfect order. The upper berth was closed up and locked.

The eyes of the four men fastened on the lower berth. The curtains were pulled apart; the bed was in wild disorder; blankets fell across it and dangled to the floor; the pillows were bunched up at the end; the bed was full of bumps and creases, evidence of what must have a been furious scuffle.

And on top of the bed was Howard Kiroshibu. Even from the doorway, they could see the ugly hole in his forehead, and the blood that had bubbled from it and seeped across his face. He was lying there, stretched out in a comfortable position, his arms spread out at his sides, dressed in a flowing white kimono. The corpse was the only peaceful note in that bed. His mouth was still creased in a cynical, half-amused smile.

"I wouldn't move him or touch him," said Paul Dawn. "Porter, search the train for a doctor and bring him here right away."

The porter scurried out.

"What do you make of it, Mr. Dawn?" said the worried Simms.

"There's no gun near the body. It must be murder."

The conductor was perplexed. "But it *can't* be murder. The door was locked from the inside. So if it's murder, where'd the murderer go?"

"Pardon," Oscar Kung put in. "Since murderer could not have left scene of crime due to locked door, he must therefore be here still. Suggest we search drawing-room."

"No place to search," said Simms. "There are no connecting rooms, no closets, and, dammit, I'm pretty sure there are no secret passageways!"

Mr. Kung, poker-faced, nodded. "You are wise. However, suggest we search under bed and couch, and inside upper berth."

"The upper berth!" Simms exclaimed. "Nobody could hide in the upper berth when it's closed up. They'd suffocate."

"Perhaps they have already," said Paul Dawn. "Let's look."

They looked under the bed, and they looked in the upper berth, and they looked under the couch. No sign of a murderer. They tapped the walls for secret openings, and they

tried the window. The walls were solid, and the window was tight and minus bullet-holes.

Conductor Simms was stunned. "Kiroshibu was shot to death from inside this room. But there's no sign of a gun, and the door was locked from inside, and there are no other entrances, and the room is absolutely and completely empty. Where'd the murderer go? Did he disappear in a puff of smoke?"

"It would appear that he did," said Oscar Kung, suddenly, "for here are his ashes on the floor."

Paul knelt. On the floor, in the center of the room, was the black urn which had contained Henry Kiroshibu's ashes. Those ashes were now spilled all over the floor. Paul scraped them carefully into the urn.

"Looks like the murderer didn't have time to take these."

They left the room, slamming the door shut behind them.

Dr. Erwin Wilkins was traveling to Miami Beach with his wife, and he protested vigorously at being dragged out of a warm bed to look at a cold stiff. But he made the examination, unearthing no startling information. Deceased expired about 11:15. Deceased met death instantly. Bullet entered deceased's head at a spot approximately above the temple —

"I'll tell you one thing," said Dr. Wilkins, when the examination was over and the body carted off. "That man didn't die on his bed. He was killed in the center of the room. He fell to the floor. The murderer dragged the body over to the lower berth and arranged him in that position. You can see the blood tracks all over the room. Good day, gentlemen. Happy hunting."

Paul Dawn was left alone with the conductor.

"Now, I wonder," said Simms, scratching his head, "why the murderer would want to do a thing like that. Carting bodies all over the room. There's no sense to it."

"Maybe," said Paul Dawn, "he put the body on the bed in order to leave space in the center of the room."

"Space for what?"

"Space in which to disappear. You know, those things can't be accomplished in any old place, especially if there's a body cluttering up the floor. Disappearing's not much different from taking off in an airplane. You need space."

Simms scratched his head again. "Sounds logical."

Paul looked serious. "Have you wired the authorities in the next town to be ready for an investigation?"

"Yes, sir. But we don't stop for

quite a while. I figured you'd handle this case yourself, Mr. Dawn."

It was now an impossible crime — in Paul Dawn's department. He answered: "All right, I will."

"Do you want to question suspects, Mr. Dawn? It would be kind of inconvenient to wake up all the passengers on the train, but if it's necessary . . ."

"I'll start with you, Simms," said Paul. "Tell me about Kiroshibu. Who he was, what he was like, things like that."

"I don't know anything about him, Mr. Dawn. He only spoke to me twice. Once, when he gave me his ticket, and a second time, when he asked me about the urn."

Paul's eyes lighted up. "What did he want to know about the urn?"

"He asked me what responsibility the railroad company would take for packages that were left in the baggage car. I told him we only took big stuff, like trunks or crates or animals. He said thank you, and that's all."

Paul was thinking out loud. "First he tried to get rid of it on the railroad company and then he tried to palm it off on me. . . . How did Kiroshibu strike you, Simms?"

Simms thought for a moment. "Quiet gentleman. Kept to himself, if you know what I mean. But — sneaky."

Paul eased himself onto the couch. "Don't like Japs, do you, Simms? Why?"

"My son is in the Solomons, Mr. Dawn."

Oscar Kung was connected with the Chinese consul's office in New York. He was going to Miami Beach on business with his wife and his son, Oscar, Junior. The fat Chinese introduced Paul Dawn to Mrs. Kung, a quiet, middle-aged woman with the same humorous smile as her husband, and to Oscar Kung, Junior, a tiny toothpick of a boy, the exact opposite of his father in every respect. The son sat respectfully on the edge of the couch while the parents answered Paul's questions.

"I repeat, Mr. Dawn," Oscar Kung said, "at time of crime, I was snoring most loudly in lower berth. Honorable son, stationed in upper berth, will verify truth of that statement."

"You were louder than a riveting machine, Pop," said Oscar, Junior, in accents that smacked more of Broadway than Canton.

"Honorable son states it picturesquely. When revolver shot was fired, I awoke, scrambled into overlarge carpet slippers, and ventured out into night. Result of my investigations are apparent to you."

"You heard no sound coming from Kiroshibu's room while you were

waiting at the door?"

"None whatever. Hearing, however, of this old person is most imperfect."

"And you, Mrs. Kung? Were you asleep all night?"

Paul saw Mrs. Kung glance uncertainly at her husband. Oscar Kung nodded almost imperceptibly. The woman said, "I heard nothing all night."

"You sleep soundly?"

"Yes."

Paul Dawn turned back to Mr. Kung. "What did you think of Dr. Kiroshibu?"

Before Kung could answer, Oscar, Junior, piped up. "I didn't like the guy's looks."

Kung turned to his son. "In idiom of American slang, must request that you shut the trap." He turned to Paul. "Young man is most impulsive, Mr. Dawn, but his impression not far from my own. Dr. Kiroshibu's appearance was unappealing."

Paul leaned forward. "Did he say anything or do anything that might have annoyed you, Mr. Kung?"

Kung smiled sagely. "Old idea of enmity between the races doubtless takes refuge in your head, Mr. Dawn. The Chinese Mr. Kung and the Japanese Dr. Kiroshibu. You wish to know if I eliminated the good doctor simply because he was a Japanese. Murder on principle, one might say. No, Mr. Dawn, you are quite incorrect. At one time, I was most hot-blooded young man. But I have grown old, and blood has cooled."

Paul Dawn flushed slightly. The cherubic Chinese gentleman was smarter than he thought. Bad policy to underestimate such an adversary. "I meant more than natural enmity, Mr. Kung. Had you ever met Dr. Kiroshibu before?"

"Happily, no."

"Or you, Mrs. Kung?"

"He was not known to me."

"Had you ever *heard* of Dr. Kiroshibu, Mr. Kung?"

Kung said, "Oh, yes. Firm of Kiroshibu Brothers, Oriental Pottery, not unknown to Chinese Embassy — or, for that matter, American F.B.I."

Paul frowned. "What was wrong with Kiroshibu Brothers?"

"Nothing 'wrong,' Mr. Dawn. Only suspicious. Kiroshibu Brothers was suspected of many things since beginning of war. Dope smuggling, sabotage, espionage, even — murder. Most interesting firm."

"Most," said Paul. "One of the partners died recently, didn't he?"

"You have seen Henry Kiroshibu's ashes. It must be so."

"Anything suspicious about his death?"

"Death resulted from pneumonia,

I believe."

"Mr. Kung, have you got any ideas about this murder? How do you think it was done, and who do you think did it?"

"The Gods." It was Mrs. Oscar Kung who answered.

"My wife has no qualms about appearing a superstitious old fogey before the eyes of younger generation," said Oscar Kung. "But I, too, share her opinion. Howard Kiroshibu met a deserved end for life of crime and violence. He was killed by the Gods."

Paul made a sceptical face. "If the Gods killed him, Mr. Kung, why didn't they do it in the usual way? With lightning?"

"It is question we will never be able to answer."

Paul Dawn closed the door of Oscar Kung's drawing-room, but it sprang open immediately, and Oscar Kung, Junior, stood in the doorway. He followed Paul out into the aisle.

"I just wanted to tell you that I got a theory of my own."

Paul looked down at him curiously. "Do you think Kiroshibu was killed by the Gods?"

"Heck, no! He was killed by somebody in that room."

"Who?"

Oscar, Junior, moved closer and spoke in a mysterious whisper. "His brother."

"His brother!"

"Right. This Kiroshibu character murdered his brother, so his brother's spirit, which was still hanging around inside the ashes, took revenge and killed Kiroshibu. Simple, huh?"

"Ecstatically so. And how did the ashes dispose of the weapon?"

"I'm still working on that."

The porter of the Florida Special was a frightened young man whose name was not George.

"Sam," said Paul Dawn, "what do you know about this?"

Sam didn't know nothing and he was anxious to prove it. He carried Dr. Kiroshibu's bags and that was all. He hadn't seen the Jap fellow the rest of the evening. And he didn't have no opinion about the murder. He was just a poor, struggling porter working his way through correspondence school, and he didn't want to have no truck with no murderer, nossuh.

Paul Dawn was troubled. A locked door, a missing gun, an upset urn of ashes, a murderer who laid out his body neatly on a bed, and then disappeared. There was no sense in it anywhere. Kiroshibu was murdered, and yet he couldn't have been murdered.

Paul returned to the drawing-room where the murder had taken

place. The urn was still standing on the floor, half-filled with ashes. He picked it up thoughtfully. It was very light.

Paul sunk his chin into his hand, and stared at the urn like a crystal-gazer at his globe. Something was stirring around inside his head. The urn which had been heavy was light. *The urn was much lighter!* He saw it all now! Paul slammed the urn down on the floor, nearly spilling the ashes.

Several startled passengers witnessed the undignified sight of a rather wild-eyed young man rushing through the aisles of the Florida Special at one o'clock in the morning, yelling for the conductor. He found Mr. Simms curled up in a couch in the smoking car.

"Simms," he cried, "I give it up!"

Simms mumbled something sleepily.

"I said, I give it up!"

"Give what up?"

"The murder. The Impossible Crime in the Drawing-Room. I'm quitting. I'm giving it up."

"You mean you're dropping the case?"

"Positively psychic!"

Paul left Simms scratching his head. He stumbled back to his berth, filled in the six-letter word meaning "South African water buffalo," and within two minutes was snoring as loudly as the large Chinese gentleman, Mr. Kung.

Miami Beach was hot and happy and filled with men in khaki. Paul Dawn had been there ten days, and the only thing he had to show for it was a sunburn. The whole matter of Howard Kiroshibu and his brother's ashes was forgotten.

Paul was sitting in a bar next to his hotel when he heard a familiar voice behind him.

"Mr. Dawn. So happy to meet you once again."

Paul Dawn whirled around and found himself looking at the massive shape and smiling chins of Oscar Kung.

"Oscar Kung! This is a pleasure. Sit down. Have a Scotch and soda."

Oscar Kung painfully hauled his huge body into a small, barroom chair. "Beg pardon, but native American drink of Scotch and soda has drastic effect upon internal organs. Will take small Tom Collins, if convenient."

The bartender went for their drinks, and the two men regarded each other.

Paul said, "You've grown no stouter, Mr. Kung."

The Chinese gentleman bowed. "And you no wiser, Mr. Dawn, from what I read of progress of Kiroshibu case."

"Running around in circles, aren't they?" said Paul. "Still can't figure out how the murder was committed. Well, I'm glad I retired from that case early."

"Rural police officers more eager than able, I think," said Kung. "One thing, however, continues to puzzle me. Man of your probing nature, Mr. Dawn, is never satisfied with job half-done or problem half-solved. Am unfamiliar with reasons which prompted your withdrawal from Kiroshibu case, but am perfectly certain you would never have done so if you had not been aware of the solution."

Paul Dawn gazed into the old man's eyes, and saw the mischievous twinkle they contained. The Chinese gentleman had guessed his secret.

"All right, Kung, I'll confess. The case is solved. I know who the murderer is, and I know how it was done. And would you believe it, I don't intend to say a word to the police!"

Paul Dawn set about to answer the questions in Oscar Kung's eyes.

"I was first put on the right track when I picked up the black urn which contained the ashes. The murder was over and the urn was lying on the floor of the drawing-room. I picked it up, and it was *light!* That was very curious considering that Dr. Kiroshibu had shown me that same urn at dinner that evening, *and the urn had been extremely heavy!*

"The urn had contained ashes when I picked it up at dinner; it contained those same ashes when I picked it up after the murder. There was only one possible answer. The urn had contained *something besides ashes* at dinner. And whatever that something was, the urn did not contain it after the murder. *Something had been removed from the urn.* It seemed reasonable to suppose that the mysterious object had been removed by the murderer. The motive for the murder was robbery. Not of the ashes, as Dr. Kiroshibu had told me, but of something that was hidden underneath the ashes.

"What was that something? Why did Dr. Kiroshibu think it would be stolen? Why was it hidden in such an unusual place? I'm still not sure of the answer to that — but it doesn't really make any difference."

Mr. Oscar Kung nodded his head ponderously. "You are most ingenious, Mr. Dawn. The objects that were hidden beneath the ashes in Dr. Kiroshibu's urn were small metal parcels of dope. Dr. Kiroshibu was an agent of the Japanese government, commissioned to distribute deadly drugs among the soldiers stationed at Miami Beach. Operating for the United States government, I took steps to prevent that dope from

reaching Miami Beach. I was successful."

"Well, well," said Paul Dawn. "I told Kiroshibu those ashes were a drug on the market. How right I was. May I congratulate you, Mr. Kung. And may I congratulate your son, Oscar Kung, Junior. That boy is a very clever young murderer."

Oscar Kung sighed. "It is that which I regret most of all. The necessity of forcing honorable son to commit a crime. However, the cause was good, and young Oscar seems singularly unimpressed by whole affair. He actually states that it was 'fun.' Our bloodthirsty younger generation."

"What a kid!" said Paul Dawn.

"But you will tell me, Mr. Dawn, by what methods you determined the solution to the crime?"

"The whole murder was performed by an optical illusion," said Paul. "The crime was impossible. Anyway, it looked impossible. I could only see one way that it could have been carried out. The door was locked from the inside, so the murderer couldn't have left the room. Therefore, as you pointed out yourself at the time, *the murderer must have been inside that room when we broke in.*

"But where was he? There were no secret passageways. He wasn't behind the door. He wasn't under the bed or couch. He wasn't in the upper berth. It looked like the murderer had disappeared into thin air, because we searched everywhere.

"But there was one place we didn't search. *There was one spot in the room that we never even touched.* The bed! The body of Dr. Kiroshibu was lying on the bed, and so we didn't go near it. But the bed was really the most obvious hiding place. It was in wild disorder, as if a fight had taken place on the bed. But why the disorder? Kiroshibu had been killed in the middle of the room. There was no reason why the bed should have been messed. Unless the murderer messed the bed purposely. And why should the murderer do that, Mr. Kung? The answer is that there is nothing so deceptive as a mussed-up bed. As a boy, I used to shove pillows inside my bed in a makeshift fashion in order to deceive my parents into thinking I was asleep. The trick always worked. Reason: the bumps and creases and folds in a bed make it a perfect optical illusion. The fact is, looking at a disordered bed from a few feet away, *it is impossible to tell whether there is somebody in it or not.*

"This is especially true if a dead body is lying on top of the bed, distracting the attention from the rest of the bed. It is especially true if the

secret occupant of the bed is a spindly young man of thirteen years who could, no doubt, compress himself into a very small space. I saw then what your amazing son had done. He entered the room, shot Dr. Kiroshibu with his father's revolver, removed the packets of dope from the urn, placed the body on top of the bed, *climbed inside the bed and underneath the body*, and, when the coast was clear after we left, slipped out of the room. It must have been touch and go, but the boy managed it — and, of course, he had been coached very carefully in advance by Oscar Kung, Senior."

Kung gazed at Paul Dawn admiringly. He laughed. "Mr. Dawn, you are most amazing yourself. But why have you not reported crime to police?"

Paul smiled. "I share your natural enmity for the Japanese, Mr. Kung."

Now that you have read — and we hope, enjoyed — the second case about Paul Dawn, solver of impossible crimes, your Editor asks the following unorthodox question:

What is the flaw in Mr. Yaffe's story? Did you spot it? Or did you fail to see the forest for the trees? For the solution to this mystery-within-a-mystery, *please turn to page 75.*

MacKinlay Kantor, author of the epic LONG REMEMBER *and the unforgettable* THE VOICE OF BUGLE ANN, *tells us the poignant story of young Benny Hackett who after serving nearly ten years for one murder was determined to commit another . . .*

THE WATCHMAN

by MacKINLAY KANTOR

UNDER his left arm, in a little holster, he carried the file. It was not an ordinary file. During his last day in the prison shop, Benny Hackett had managed to secure that file without detection. Working with painstaking energy, scraping the sharp triangular sliver for hours against wet concrete, Benny had converted the file into a razor-thing of devilish sheerness.

Crouching in the black gondola, drenched by the rain which had blown over him for hours, he smiled calmly: the set and unpleasant smile of a man who has planned to do something, and knows that the moment of fulfillment is not far away.

It was well past three o'clock; the freight train ought to be pulling into Newtown at any moment.

This would be the second murder committed by Benny Hackett. The first was a very sad affair: he had been a boy of eighteen, and even after nine years he could not tell just how the thing happened. It was a mistake, heartbreaking and horrible, but Judge Cope had piled misery on misery. He could have given Benny a year's imprisonment and then suspended sentence. But instead he gave him ten years' imprisonment, and did not suspend sentence at all.

For nine years, Benny Hackett had not read a letter from his family or friends. The letters which they sent he returned unopened. They stopped sending letters.

But Benny did not forget Newtown or the life from which Franklin Cope had sent him away. Mentally, night after night, he went over the avenues and paths of that village. He counted the inhabitants; he measured the very gardens, flower by flower and inch by inch. And forever, rising from the welter of people whom Benny once loved, loomed the tall figure and stony face of the old judge.

The judge had only two ambi-

tions: to rid the world of criminals — like Benny, for example — and to persuade the selectmen to put up a marker within the corporate limits of Newtown at the spot where various ancestors of Judge Cope had risen to smite the British. In neither of these ambitions was he likely to be successful.

And, thought Benny Hackett, he must not go beyond the brow of the hill. He must stop at the home of Judge Franklin Cope, and do what he planned to do, and then he must go away. Because not far past the brow of that hill was another house. A man and a woman lived there, and they were Benny's parents. Benny must not go too close to them; if he did, he might falter in his plan.

Soundless lightning shot across the sky. It showed Benny the long parade of cars rocking ahead of him. And more than that — the black outline of Lavey's Hill. Just beyond the river bridge, he swung to the ground.

He felt his way over the fence and dropped down amid the bushes of Judge Cope's lawn. Again that pastel shimmer illuminated the sky, and he could see that the window of the judge's bedroom was open. He knew that it was Judge Cope's bedroom. You cannot live in a place like Newtown until you are eighteen and not know just where your neighbors sleep.

Benny sped across the lawn. All this had been practiced for centuries. He knew just how the windowsill would feel under his hands; he had known, all those years, with what silence he could draw his body over the ledge. The laggard curtains touched his face but made no sound.

He was in the room . . . and the judge was sleeping, a few feet away. He could hear the regular breathing, the sigh of a resting organism.

His ears would tell him where lay the head of this sleeper. There had been only one flaw in this plan: the possibility that the judge might, during the intervening years, have moved himself to another room. But Benny's first moment in the room told him that there could be no mistake. His hand brushed a swaying web of elastic which hung from something on a chair . . . suspenders . . . man's clothing. Judge Cope still slept in that bed.

Benny Hackett was beside the bed. His hand grasped the file. Heavy breathing beneath him — his arm would come up, like this, and then go down — go down and —

The lightning flicked a flood of lavender across the world. Involuntarily, as Benny lifted his arm for the blow, his eyes sought the open window. Just beyond the low fringe

of bushes a man was coming toward the house. He was a big man, bareheaded, and he was running purposefully as if he knew what stood beside the judge's bed. And he carried a gun in his hands.

Benny Hackett sucked in his breath. If he waited a second more, his escape would be barred. He didn't have a gun. There wasn't a chance for him to shoot his way out of there.

In one silent plunge he went through the window. He vaulted the side fence and dove headlong into the black tangle of Wickton's grove. He tore the thickets like a tiger. He threw the sharpened file far away from him; now there was no evidence of murderous intent. Barbed, dead branches raked at his clothes and sliced across his hands and face.

. . .

The world went out from under him. Even as he sprawled forward down the sickening incline, the awful realization possessed Benny Hackett's brain: he had not ever planned a getaway like this. He had forgotten the old quarry beside the river road. He tried to cry out, but existence vanished with a single blinding flash.

Someone was washing his face.

Benny opened his eyes. It was dawn, a clear dawn in which the wet woods tingled, alive and green . . . "Mr. Dorn." His lips shaped the name of the man — an old neighbor.

"Sure. Sure . . . Benny. I recognized you, right off, as soon as I wiped your face; I thought you was dead. What happened?"

"Fell — fell —" whispered Benny. "Fell off the old quarry, I guess. I — I was —"

Dorn nodded. "Coming home, wasn't you? We heard you was about to — get out. Here, Benny. Let's see if you can walk."

With Mr. Dorn's arm around him, Benny shuffled toward the neighbor's car. He ached; his body was a mass of bruises, but he could walk. It seemed, though, as if he couldn't think. He looked down at his half-clenched hand . . . oh God, he thought, I didn't kill him. Thank God, I didn't —

The car bumped slowly up the hill road. It turned sharply to the right, at the highway above the hill.

Benny didn't dare look to the left. "Wrong way," he muttered. "Here. My folks live —"

Mr. Dorn shook his head. "No, Benny. Your folks moved, two years ago. They — well, they live up in Judge Cope's old house. They bought it. The judge died three years ago —"

And then, in dizzy mist that swam

around him, Benny couldn't understand anything. Even when they stopped in front of the house where his father lived, and Mr. Dorn was helping him from the car and trying to point out something to him.

"Right there," he was saying. "See? Right beside the fence. Up on that granite block, in the bushes. With a gun in his hand. That's the statue of the Minute Man, that the old judge always wanted to put up. He left the money for it, in his will."

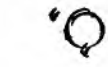
The Flaw in "Mr. Kiroshibu's Ashes"

Oscar Kung, Junior, "entered the room, shot Dr. Kiroshibu with his father's revolver, removed the packets of dope from the urn, placed the body on top of the bed, climbed inside the bed and underneath the body, and when the coast was clear after [the investigators] left, slipped out of the room."

But why did young Oscar *climb inside the bed and underneath the body* at all? Having killed the Japanese and taken the packets of dope, why didn't young Oscar do the very natural thing of *leaving the room at once?* Why climb into the bed and then *wait* for his father to "discover" the crime and summon investigators to the scene? Why this colossal risk, when young Oscar could have slipped out immediately, returned to his father's room — and *then* Mr. Kung, Senior, with perfect safety to his son, could have raised the hue and cry?

In their joint efforts, Mr. Kung, Senior and Mr. Kung, Junior (and, yes, Master James Yaffe!) have strayed from the narrow path of credibility — *simply to provide Paul Dawn with another "impossible" crime!*

A fundamental flaw which, now that it has been pointed out, your Editor is certain Master Yaffe will never repeat . . . But the truth is, we like our boy-author all the more for his youthful and excusable fallibility. It proves how natural, how human, a writer he is. It augurs exceedingly well for his detective-story future.



One of the great difficulties in tracking down old detective short stories is illustrated perfectly in this tale of Inspector Joly. "The Silver Pencil" is to be found in a book called DIANE AND HER FRIENDS. *Who would dream of opening the covers of a book with that title in search of a "forgotten" or "unknown" detective story? And yet the book contains no less than six of Inspector Joly's cases.*

The unassuming and philosophical Inspector Joly had retired to his Monrepos — to the rest and quiet of his suburban retreat. But peace, even for an old sleuth-hound, is not always wonderful. Inspector Joly was restless. So, when Madame de Wimpffen came to him with the strange story of a thief who had broken in not to take but to leave *something . . .*

It is a great pleasure to bring you this suave and mellow detective story, vintage 1914, told with a charm that is hard to find in these days of lean and jolting prose.

THE SILVER PENCIL

by ARTHUR SHERBURNE HARDY

INSPECTOR JOLY had always maintained that conclusions were more important than stability. Not to change one's opinion under the pressure of evidence was the proof of mediocrity. Yet, after voluntarily retiring from active service and acquiring that suburban retreat which had so long been a dream, not for worlds would he have admitted to Madame Joly that any disappointment lurked in the dream's realization.

Monrepos certainly was not responsible for the disappointment. The reality coincided in all respects with the dream. In one, as in the other, on opening the gate between the high inclosing walls, one saw a straight walk, freshly graveled and bordered with box, on one side of which was the fountain with the goldfish, and on the other the arbour where he was now sitting; and at the end of the walk that house, a little naked as yet, being fresh from the hands of the architect, to which he had looked forward as a very heaven of rest.

Surveying this heaven, M. Joly said to himself: "It appears one is happy only in remembering or in anticipating. That being the case, since I have nothing more to anticipate, I am like the moon, one side of which is in perpetual darkness — and the other," he added, with a sigh, "shines only by reflected light."

Sitting opposite him, the curé of Saint-Médard, who had come to spend the day and found Monrepos to his liking, was almost asleep. No master of ceremonies would have presented these two to each other

with the idea that either could afford the other a moment of pleasure. It amazed M. Joly that so superior a woman as Madame Joly should have such a confessor. It also amused him — for what could a woman like Madame Joly possibly have to confess?

"Monsieur le curé," he said, abruptly, "after Paradise, what?"

"After Paradise," stammered the curé, rousing himself, "there is nothing. Paradise is the sum of all things the realization of every dream."

"In that case," replied M. Joly. "I advise you on going there to hold a few dreams in reserve, lest even Paradise prove wearisome."

The curé relapsed into silence. To disturb his state of mental repose was for M. Joly an irresistible delight. He also dearly loved the curé's arguments, drawn from sources which reminded him how old was human thought. But the curé's eyes were closing again. M. Joly observed him a moment meditatively, then walked down the gravel path toward the gate.

Just within, among the vines on the wall, hung a bell. In the earlier days of his retirement, its call from the outer world had awakened in his breast emotions of curiosity and hope. But he had long since realized that the stream of life does not tarry to converse with what it has cast up on its banks. Observing this bell, hampered by encroaching vines and yellow with rust, M. Joly was muttering to himself, "A symbol of oblivion and decay!" when suddenly, as if in indignant denial, it began to ring violently.

"Come, now," he said ironically, "what joke are you up to?"

For answer the bell rang again, this time with a tone of imperious impatience. At this second summons he opened the gate, to find himself looking into a pair of blue eyes.

Instantly he dived down into the depths of memory and brought up two pictures: one of a woman crumbling bread to the fishes over the railing of the garden of the Hôtel d'Italie et d'Angleterre in Freyr, the other of this same woman ordering his breakfast on the terrace of Madame de Caraman's villa in Bourg-la-Reine.

"Madame de Wimpffen!" he exclaimed.

A smile of pleasure came into the blue eyes.

"I am so glad to find you, Monsieur Joly. May I come in? You have not forgotten me in all these years?"

His thought was that no one could possibly forget her, but in his momentary embarrassment he said: —

"That is not to my credit, I have such a good memory."

She answered him with her bright,

understanding smile as she stepped within the gate.

"Where may I speak with you? — here, on this seat by the wall? Shall we sit down here? Will you please tell the coachman to wait?" And when he had delivered the message and closed the gate, "Sit down, please, Monsieur Joly," — making room for him; — "something has occurred which made me wish to consult you. You see, I, too, deserve no credit, having also a good memory."

He took the proffered seat, a little awkwardly, crossing his hands as usual over his waistcoat, experiencing at the same time that feeling of mingled admiration and intimacy which this woman had inspired once before.

"You remember the mysterious disappearance of my Cousin Célimène's necklace," began Diane, digging the tip of her parasol into the gravel. "Well, yesterday, on my return from Bourg-la-Reine, where my husband and I were making my cousin a visit, I found a little mystery of my own."

She paused a moment, and M. Joly leaned back against the wall to gain a fuller command of her face.

"Our apartment is on Boulevard Haussmann, number 190. During our absence someone has been searching it — I say searching," she repeated with emphasis, "because nothing was taken. On the contrary, something was left. Examine this, please. I found it among my lingerie, in my chiffonier."

He took the small silver pencil which she held out to him, and, turning it slowly over in his hand, read the words "L. Pichon, Inspecteur," engraved on the side. "What carelessness!" he thought. But he said nothing.

"Perhaps you will say," she went on, "that it does not follow because Monsieur Pichon's pencil is found in the drawer of my chiffonier that Monsieur Pichon himself left it there. But I have made inquiries. First, of the concierge, who says two men, workmen, came with a permit duly authorized by the police to inspect the electric installation in our rooms. But the electric company deny that any such inspection has been ordered. What I wish to know," she said, lifting her eyes to his, "is, what Monsieur Pichon was doing in my apartment. Naturally I thought to write my husband, who remained for a few days at Bourg-la-Reine. Then I said to myself: 'No, he will be furious — he will return at once, and his vacation will be spoiled. I will first consult that Monsieur Joly who found my Cousin Célimène's diamonds.' But it seems" — her eyes were still studying his face — "that you are no longer at the prefecture."

"That makes no difference," he said, with superb disregard for the Paradise of Monrepos.

"At first I was indignant. Then I reflected. When the police search, it is because some one is suspected. Who? Of what? I am consulting you professionally, Monsieur Joly."

He waited for her to go on.

"There is Valérie, my maid, who has been with me since I left the convent —"

"Madame," interrupted M. Joly protestingly, "I am not one of those persons who believe that to extinguish the lights is to make one's neighbour a thief. And in the case of a mystery, which so resembles darkness, I refuse to entertain suspicions whose only foundation is our own mystification. Let us begin by ascertaining what my friend Pichon has got into his head."

"Oh, you know Monsieur Pichon?"

"Intimately."

"And you will see him?"

He rose. "At once."

"How good you are!" she cried impetuously; "will you accept a seat in my carriage, Monsieur Joly?"

"I am afraid," he said, smiling, "madame drives too rapidly for an old tortoise who between here and the Boulevard du Palais must have time to reflect."

One foot on the step of the carriage, she turned: "You approve of my not writing my husband?"

"Absolutely."

"Wait" — as he closed the door — "my card."

"You forget the good memory. Boulevard Haussmann, 190."

She laughed, and he signed to the coachman.

He watched the carriage till it disappeared beyond the turn in the road, then stood gazing thoughtfully up the gravel path of Monrepos. The curé was still sleeping in the arbour. The bees were droning above the parterres. The goldfish, motionless, lay in the shadow of the stone coping.

"Come now, friend Pichon," he said, closing the gate of Paradise behind him, "let us see about this pencil."

An hour later he descended from the omnibus on Boulevard du Palais. It was raining and he had no umbrella. Buttoning up his coat and lowering his head, he made a dash for the archway of the prefecture. Although the clock in the bureau of the prefect struck only three times, the lamp on the prefect's desk was burning, the sudden summer storm having enveloped the city in mid-afternoon darkness. Except for the circle of light under the green shade the room was in shadow. In this shadow, midway between the desk and the door, stood Pichon, lately

promoted to the grade of inspector in place of Joly, resigned.

Pichon was often taciturn because he had so much to say. That his silence on this occasion was due to other causes was clear from his abject appearance. Under the gaze of the prefect his figure seemed to grow smaller and to retreat still further into the shadow.

"So, no progress."

The prefect's voice was cold, and Pichon remained silent. It was true, he had made no progress. The prefect went to the window. Through the veils of the falling rain lights were beginning to appear in the neighbouring buildings.

"What a pity Monsieur Joly took it into his head to retire. You used to work together so admirably."

Pichon winced. Watching the prefect's form dimly outlined against the window, he had the sensation of being slowly effaced, of no longer counting for anything.

"How often it happens that a good soldier makes a poor general."

Unable to dispute the truth of this aphorism, Pichon contented himself with shifting his weight uneasily from one foot to the other. At that moment the prefect, drumming absent-mindedly on the windowpane, in the flash of lightning which illumined the room for an instant saw a man, struggling with the storm, crossing Boulevard du Palais.

"The devil!" he exclaimed; "and to think there are people who refuse to credit miracles!"

Pichon, mystified, pricked up his ears. Any miracle which would put an end to his misery was welcome.

"Speaking of Monsieur Joly, be so good as to say I wish to speak to him."

Pichon's mystification changed to astonishment. One would think M. Joly was in the next room! He stared at the prefect in a sort of stupor.

"I will look for him, Monsieur le Préfet," he stammered, collecting himself.

"That is unnecessary. You will find him on the stairway or in the anteroom."

As he went softly out the door Pichon was aware that his chief was smiling, and the sense of effacement deepened. In the corridor at the head of the stairs, to his amazement he saw M. Joly, and from force of habit touched his hat.

"Monsieur le Préfet has sent for you," he said.

"Well, you see I am coming," replied M. Joly.

While standing before the prefect's desk, his hat in his hand, as he had so often stood before, M. Joly had the time to speculate a little. He reasoned that if he was sent for it was because he was wanted, and that

if he was wanted it was because some one had failed — which accounted for the dejected countenance of Pichon. Well acquainted with the little mannerisms of his former chief, he waited patiently. Watching the quill pen traveling to and fro in the circle of light under the green shade, he said to himself, "At the end of the fifth line he will stop." But at the end of the fifth line the pen began a new journey. "Ah!" thought M. Joly, "it is something serious."

At last the pen paused and M. Levigne looked up.

"It is you, Monsieur Joly? So the prodigal returns."

M. Joly was silent.

"It was not by chance, I suppose, that of all the doorways in Paris you should choose that of the prefecture to escape the rain."

"Monsieur le Préfet, if I sought shelter within the walls of the prefecture it was not because I expected to find there a fatted calf."

M. Levigne moved the lamp to the edge of the table and leaned back in his chair.

"What a lucky dog you are, Monsieur Joly! Here am I beset with perplexities, while you can pass your days in repose without a care. You call it Monrepos, do you not? An excellent name."

"He will continue in this manner two minutes yet," thought M. Joly, "then he will come to the point."

"But what astonishes me is that a man who possesses such advantages should be wandering about the streets of Paris like a dog without a home."

"It is not necessary to remind Monsieur le Préfet that a dog is the most faithful of animals."

The prefect lifted the green shade from the lamp, which now cast its light full on their faces. "Good!" said M. Joly to himself, "we shall now know something."

"Monsieur Joly, there is a wine-shop on the corner of Rue de la Colombe which has a room where one may converse quietly with a friend. I recommend you to go there and to take with you Pichon — who is in need of advice."

M. Joly did not move.

"Well," said the prefect.

"Monsieur le Préfet, there is a condition."

"Ah, there is a condition?"

"That I have *carte blanche*."

"Come, come," replied M. Levigne, pushing toward him on the table the sheet on which he had been writing, "that goes without saying."

M. Joly folded the precious paper tranquilly, deposited it carefully in the pocket of his waistcoat, then, seeing the prefect's pen beginning its travels again, stole noiselessly from the room.

Tormented with anxiety, Pichon was pacing the corridor.

"It is such a pleasure to see you again, old friend!" cried M. Joly, linking his arm in his. "How goes it? You are well? Really, to see you is like a draught of old wine. What do you say, shall we have a little chat together as formerly in the café on Rue de la Colombe? We see each other so rarely."

"Then you do not remain with us?" said Pichon, as they went down the stairs.

"I, remain? What an idea! To risk my skin a hundred times a year for nine hundred francs! You are joking, Pichon."

"That is true," admitted Pichon, his anxiety somewhat appeased. "Nine hundred francs is very little."

"It is worse than nothing. If you are not paid at all, you receive a gold medal for a fine action. But if this action is paid for, you are not even noticed. It is impossible to be a hero when one is a mercenary."

"I had not thought of that," said Pichon; "but not every man's wife," he added mournfully, "is so fortunate as to receive a legacy like Madame Joly."

"That is what the prefect said to me. 'Monsieur Joly,' he said, 'you are a lucky dog.'"

As they crossed the open space before Notre Dame, Pichon's anxiety returned.

"I do not deny," continued M. Joly, "that sometimes, when I remember — we have had some interesting quarter-hours together, eh, Pichon? Tell me" — entering the Café de l'Espérance and pushing open the door to the room in the rear — "tell me, is there anything interesting going on at this moment?"

"There is always something interesting going on," Pichon replied moodily. "Not ten minutes ago the prefect said to me it was a pity you had resigned."

"Really," exclaimed M. Joly, leading the way to a quiet corner, "he said that? You amaze me."

Pichon sank into a chair. "But since these things interest you no longer —" he said, plunging his hands into the deep pockets of his loose trousers.

"Messieurs?" inquired the waiter.

"Ah, Joseph, it is you? A *sirop de groseille*, if you please. And you, Pichon, a *fine champagne*, as formerly?"

Pichon nodded.

"What you say is quite true," resumed M. Joly when they were alone again; "these things interest me no longer. Do you remember that little girl they called Dorante whom we found at the Restaurant des Tournelles in that affair of the Bank of France? She has become my own

flesh and blood. I am teaching her the history of France. In the month of May we go into the woods for primroses. A small hand slips into yours and you break with the habits of a lifetime. No, my friend," — shaking his head, — "it is finished."

Moving his glass uneasily to and fro over the table, Pichon observed him doubtfully. Distrust of himself, the longing to profit by the experience of a superior intelligence, and a sudden resurgence of loyalty were working in his brain. Against this tide he struggled for a moment, then set his glass down sharply.

"Comrade," he said abruptly, "I am in a fix."

"You need money, Pichon?" asked M. Joly sympathetically.

Pichon dismissed the suggestion with a wave of his hand.

"A document has disappeared from the Ministry of War" — he paused in order that this fact might have time to sink into the mind of his listener — "an important document which has to do with the mobilization of the army. This document was deposited in the safe in a room occupied by Colonel de Wimpffen, a safe of which he only" — another pause — "and General Texier, of the staff, possessed the combination. On the morning of August 13, Colonel de Wimpffen and his wife go to Bourg-la-Reine to pass a few days with a cousin. On the 14th, General Texier takes it into his head to consult this document. He opens the safe. The document in question has taken wing. He sends for the prefect. The prefect sends for me — and where we began, there we are now."

He stopped, took a turn up and down the room, shrugged his shoulders, and dropped into his chair.

"But you have a theory," said M. Joly; "develop your theory, Pichon."

"There is but one theory," replied Pichon testily. "Two men possess the key to a combination. One is above suspicion. There remains the other."

"What a devil of a logician you are, Pichon! You subtract one from two and one remains."

Pichon shook his head. "Logic is a fine thing, Monsieur Joly, but sentiment is still finer. This de Wimpffen is a friend of General Texier, who knows him from childhood. He served with him in Africa. He is the soul of honour! We have heard such arguments before." And Pichon shrugged his shoulders again disdainfully.

"In the operation of subtracting one from two," observed M. Joly thoughtfully, "there is always the question which of the two is the remainder."

"Oh, of that there is no doubt. Think of it! A general of the staff!"

"In that case, since this remainder

is the soul of honour — one consults a man of honour."

"*Parbleu!* They have sent for him. He arrives to-morrow."

M. Joly's hands clasped over his waistcoat. "And you, Pichon, what have *you* done?"

Pichon took another turn in the room, then planted himself squarely before his companion.

"To consult an innocent man is to learn nothing. A guilty man denies. Why, then, consult him at all?"

M. Joly nodded approvingly. "I understand. So you put this soul of honour under your microscope. Tell us what you have discovered, Pichon."

"Nothing. His correspondence? — he has none. His friends? — irreproachable. His desk, his apartment? — not a straw."

"And then?" pursued M. Joly encouragingly.

Pichon hesitated.

"I will tell you," he replied, the desire to prove his adroitness overcoming his caution: "when a man is not suspected, he becomes careless. This man is *not* careless. But when a man knows that he is suspected, he becomes troubled — that is, he makes mistakes. I learned that Madame de Wimpffen was to return to Paris alone, and I had an idea." M. Joly's hands tightened. "I said: 'I will leave my tracks in the den of the fox — I will make them so plain that even a woman can see them — and this woman, alarmed, perplexed, will hasten to show them to her husband — and this husband, seeing that the hounds are on the trail, will betray himself.'"

"Really, Pichon, I had no idea you were capable of such cleverness."

Pichon's face wore a smile of self-satisfaction. "To-morrow," he said significantly — "to-morrow we shall see something."

"Has it occurred to you," said M. Joly, after a pause, "that a man, distrustful of his memory — figures are so elusive — should make a note of a combination? — a note which falls into the hands of another?"

"Why?" retorted Pichon obstinately; "to what end? Two men do not forget, or, if that be so, which is improbable, in an emergency a safe can always be broken open."

"Forgive me, another question: no one occupied this room with Monsieur de Wimpffen?"

"Yes, a clerk, one Bulow — an old man whose nose is in his papers from morning till night. He lives on Rue Monge, No. 176. Be easy, I forget nothing. He is under surveillance."

Studying the bottom of his now empty glass, M. Joly appeared lost in thought.

"Pichon," he said, at length, "if you should carry off from the Galerie d'Apollon in the Louvre the crown

of Napoleon, what would you do with it?"

"*Dame!* one is not so naïve as to offer the crown of Napoleon for sale. I would demand a ransom."

"But if you preferred the document on the mobilization of the army to the crown of Napoleon?"

Pichon reflected. "I would make a copy, and I would return the original before its loss was discovered."

"Doubtless that has already occurred to you."

"Certainly, certainly," said Pichon, in an offhand manner.

M. Joly took out his watch.

"Heavens!" he cried, "five o'clock — I must be off." And, rapping on the table, he called for the score.

"You approve of what I have done?"

"How can you ask such a question?" said M. Joly playfully. "Have times changed so that nowadays one asks for approval before one has succeeded?"

"Even afterward one is not sure of it," grumbled Pichon. And, the score being settled, they passed out into the street.

"To whom is this affair known?" asked M. Joly as they neared the corner.

"Except to those I have mentioned, to no one — General Texier, the prefect, myself, and you."

"And Monsieur Bulow."

"Not at all. When Colonel de Wimpffen went to Bourg-la-Reine he said to him: 'I am going into the country — I give you a holiday. On my return I will send for you.' Consequently he knows nothing."

An omnibus drawn by three white horses was approaching.

"Pichon," said M. Joly, "you almost make me regret that there are such things as legacies — what you tell me is so interesting. I am dying to hear what Madame de Wimpffen will do when she finds —" His words were lost in the rumble of the wheels.

Pichon, on tiptoe, shouted in his ear, "If you will come to-morrow, at this hour —"

"That was what I was about to propose to you. Good-night, Pichon. Good luck to you."

"After all," thought Pichon, gazing after the retreating omnibus, "he did not tell me why he came to the prefecture."

Retracing his steps, he went over in his mind the conversation in the Café de l'Espérance. M. Joly was certainly right. One's first endeavour would be to replace the paper before its absence was discovered. But Colonel de Wimpffen was still at Bourg-la-Reine and had intended to remain there. Clearly he had had no opportunity, nor was he in any haste, to put back the stolen document. This

thought troubled Pichon, for it threatened his theory. What if the document was already back in its place! He rejected this idea as preposterous. A general of the staff! The alternative was inconceivable. Yet this idea, having once found a lodgment in his brain, returned with a disquieting persistence.

Meanwhile, M. Joly, descending from the omnibus at Place de la Concorde, was following Boulevard Saint-Germain to the Ministry of War. He passed in unnoticed, but at the head of the stairs an usher asked what he wanted.

"The room of Colonel de Wimpffen."

"Colonel de Wimpffen is in the country."

"I did not ask for Colonel de Wimpffen. I asked for his room," replied M. Joly blandly.

"Since Colonel de Wimpffen is not in town, naturally his room is closed."

"Very well, then, I will see General Texier."

The usher eyed him superciliously.

"Your card, if you please. It is the order."

"My card? I have none. Say to him that I come from the prefecture."

"It makes no difference where you come from," said the usher, losing patience; "to see General Texier a card is necessary."

"I have something better," smiled M. Joly, "but since a card is necessary I will make one."

He tore a leaf from his notebook, wrote his name in pencil, and while waiting in the corridor remarked to himself, "It seems that in the Ministry of War it is easier to penetrate a safe than to penetrate to a general."

When, fifteen minutes later, he emerged from General Texier's office, he was accompanied by a secretary.

"You will take your instructions," said the latter, calling the usher and indicating M. Joly, "from this gentleman. Monsieur, here are the keys."

"The room of Colonel de Wimpffen, if you please," repeated M. Joly politely, slipping the bunch of keys into his pocket.

Reaching at last the door, he took out his watch. "At what hour does the Ministry close?" he asked.

"At six o'clock, monsieur."

"It is now twenty minutes of six. For carrying out your orders so faithfully I present you with these twenty minutes." Saying which he unlocked the door and went in.

He first relocked the door and removed the key; then he looked about him. Midway along the side wall stood a mahogany desk, behind which hung portières. Behind these portières he expected to find a door, but on drawing them aside he per-

ceived an arch, within whose recess appeared the partition wall. Evidently, he thought, this room once formed part of a larger one which in the interests of economy has been divided. Opposite the desk was a door on either side of which were shelves filled with books and pasteboard pockets. Pushing a chair in front of this door, he sat down and took out the bunch of keys. After one or two trials this door opened, disclosing a safe let into the wall. Without hesitation he took hold of the dial, turned it successively to the right and left, till the massive front door swung on its hinges. Between the pigeonholes another smaller door confronted him. Selecting once more a key, he surmounted this last barrier, and, thrusting in his hand, pulled out a heavy blue envelope sealed with three seals bearing the words "Ministère de la Guerre." On the face of the envelope was the word "Mobilization."

At this instant a quick step resounded in the corridor. Replacing the envelope, he closed the safe and stood up, listening. Some one was about to enter. He had barely reached the portières when the door was opened, shut, and locked again. Motionless, holding his breath, he waited. A few steps — then silence. He parted the curtains gently — and saw the back of Pichon!

Seated in the chair before the safe, Pichon was repeating one by one the maneuvers of his predecessor. Finally he, too, thrust his hand into the inner vault and pulled out the blue envelope.

"Thunder of heaven!" he exclaimed, "I have made the wrong subtraction."

After astonishment came reflection. Firmly wedded to his theory, he found himself forced to suspect one so high in the hierarchy that his spirit of subordination revolted. To impart this suspicion to any one seemed to him impossible. Yet in his own mind it took the form of a conviction. Closing the safe mechanically, he left the room.

Shortly after six o'clock M. Joly had finished his investigation. The hall was filled with employees hurrying homeward. The expression on his face indicated that some problem more difficult than Pichon's subtraction was troubling him. "But why," he muttered, "if he is deaf —" Mingling with the throng, he descended the stairs slowly. At the entrance he accosted the porter.

"Monsieur," he asked, "this Bulow, the deaf clerk of Monsieur de Wimpffen —"

"Bulow?" replied the porter; "he is no more deaf than I am."

"But why, then, since he is not deaf —"

The porter thought he had to do with a crazy man.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" he retorted angrily, "go about your business. If you want a deaf man you will find a number of them in the Asylum on Rue Saint-Jacques — we do not keep them in the Ministry."

"Thank you," said M. Joly; "I have been misinformed."

At the corner of the street he found a commissionaire, and, tearing a second leaf from his note-book, sent the following message to Monrepos: —

"I am detained in Paris for the night. Say to Dorante that she may read on as far as the battle at Vouille, where Clovis defeated the Visigoths under Alaric II."

Then, hailing a cab, he gave the direction, "Rue Monge."

"What number?" asked the driver.

"Any number which pleases you," replied M. Joly.

As he anticipated, the cab drew up at No. 1. He paid the fare and continued on foot. Just before reaching No. 176 he saw on the opposite side of the street a café. The sky had cleared and the tables on the sidewalk were already crowded. At one of these tables a man was seated before a tall glass of black coffee. Seeing M. Joly approaching, this man rose with a gesture of surprise.

"Do not disturb yourself, Meneval," said M. Joly, taking the vacant chair at the same table. "We are in the same business."

"You are one of us again, Monsieur Joly?" asked Meneval respectfully.

"You used to take orders from me without asking questions, Meneval. Are you alone?"

"Yes, I am alone."

"Well, go and tell Pichon I wish to speak with him; and in order that your conscience may not suffer, I permit you to read this."

M. Joly took from his pocket the paper given him by the prefect.

"It is not necessary," replied Meneval, recognizing the prefect's signature. "I am going."

"But first tell me," said M. Joly, deliberately tearing the paper into small pieces, "what manner of man this Bulow is."

Meneval described him. "There is a light in his window now, the third above the thread-shop."

"Good. Tell Pichon to bring with him what is necessary. You have your pistol? Slip it into my pocket, Meneval. You will take a cab." Saying which M. Joly ordered another *sirop* and the *Figaro*.

The light was still burning in the third-story window when Pichon arrived with two agents. His face still wore the expression of surprise and anxiety with which he had re-

ceived the message delivered by Meneval.

"Sit down, Pichon," said M. Joly in his quietest manner. "Tell me, did you notice anything in particular this afternoon when you opened the safe at the Ministry?"

Pichon's small eyes opened to their widest capacity.

"You know, then, —"

"What I know is not the question. In fact, as yet I know nothing. So you did not notice anything?"

Pichon shook his head blankly.

"Nevertheless," said M. Joly, "it is worth thinking of. If agreeable to you we will consult Monsieur Bulow. Will you accompany me?"

Pichon followed him across the street into the doorway of No. 176 without a word.

"Pichon," said M. Joly at the foot of the stairs, "you remember that you said to me, 'I am in a fix.' It is therefore at your request that I interfere in your affairs. But if you wish — will you go first?"

"After you, master," said Pichon.

At the door on the third landing M. Joly knocked gently. A moment of silence intervened, then a voice said: "Come in."

M. Joly took off his hat.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Monsieur Bulow?" he asked.

"That is my name. What do you want of me?"

"I?" replied M. Joly — "I want nothing. I come on behalf of my friend here, Monsieur Pichon. It is he who wishes to consult you on a matter of importance."

Pichon glanced at his friend appealingly.

"Be seated, gentlemen," said M. Bulow.

"You are very good to receive a stranger so affably," replied M. Joly. "The truth is my position is a delicate one. Monsieur Pichon is afflicted with an insatiable curiosity. He wishes to know why a man who is not deaf provides himself with one of those instruments called audiphones — or, if he be deaf, why he leaves it at the Ministry instead of carrying it on his person. Keep your seat, Monsieur Bulow," continued M. Joly, taking the pistol from his pocket and laying it on his knee. "I understand your feelings — do not move, please. I admit the question is an impertinent one. I admit even that I have no authority to ask impertinent questions of any one. For that reason, as you perceive, —" His hand closed over the handle on his knee.

Suddenly regaining his composure, the man burst into a boisterous laugh of affected gayety.

"What joke is this you are perpetrating?" he exclaimed.

"Monsieur Bulow," said M. Joly, "it is plain that you are saying to

yourself that the blue envelope, with its seals affixed, is reposing safely in the vault at the Ministry. But there are cases in which a copy is of more value than the original — quick! Pichon!"

Of all this conversation Pichon understood nothing. But if his brain moved sluggishly his hands deserved no such reproach. He had seen the crisis approaching and was ready, ending the brief struggle by transferring the handcuffs in his pocket to the wrists of his assailant.

M. Joly went to the window and made a sign. The two agents appeared, breathless.

"One of you call a cab," said M. Joly, "and you, Pichon, go down with Meneval and Monsieur Bulow."

When, at the end of a few minutes, Pichon returned, he found M. Joly also ready to leave. "This fellow," he was saying, "is a simpleton. Here is the stamp whose impression you doubtless observed on the three wax seals, and here under this portfolio is the copy. I give them to you, Pichon."

"But I understand nothing," cried Pichon.

"Pichon," said M. Joly, "I once read in a book — one of those books in which we are held up to ridicule — of a man with an ear so acute that he could hear the tumblers of a lock fall into their places. I did not believe it. I do not believe it yet. Nevertheless, given a lock of a certain age and an audiphone — do you know what an audiphone is, Pichon? You will find one under the loose papers of the third drawer in Monsieur Bulow's desk at the Ministry — given these things, and it is possible."

"I am disgraced," cried Pichon.

"You disgraced, my friend! Why do you say so?"

"I have left that damned pencil in the lingerie of Madame de Wimpffen."

"Oh, as to that," replied M. Joly, "be tranquil. Here is your pencil, Pichon."

On reaching Monrepos late that evening M. Joly said to his wife: —

"Marie, I have to make a confession. Passing this afternoon before the prefecture, I was like a boy at the door of the pastry-cook, and I went in."

"I know it," she said.

"You know it!" exclaimed M. Joly in astonishment.

"Do you think I have observed nothing all these weeks?" said Madame Joly, smiling.

M. Joly made no reply. After all, Paradise also had its attractions.

A professional nurse desperately in need of money . . . a dying patient . . . a fortune in the safe. The simple ingredients of — murder.

This grim psychological study, written by the well-known newspaper woman, biographer, poetess, and novelist, has never before been published anywhere.

Let the last two paragraphs of this story sink in. They are, to paraphrase a famous quotation, the stuff as shivers are made on and our little life is rounded with the creeps.

MORTMAIN

by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

"I'LL BE BACK on Thursday, Miss Hendricks, and I'll drop in here in the afternoon. It's only three days, and I don't anticipate any change. You know what to do. If anything happens, you can call Dr. Roberts; he knows all about the case. I wouldn't go away, with Marsden like this, but — well, it's my only daughter, you know, and she'll never be married again — at least, I hope not! — and she'd be heartbroken if her old dad weren't there to give her away."

Dr. Staples turned to his patient.

"Good-bye, old man; I'm leaving you in Miss Hendricks' charge till Thursday. You won't be sorry to have three days free of me, eh?"

Dr. Staples put on his gloves and picked up his hat from the table by the bed. The sick man nodded feebly, essaying a slight courteous smile. The nurse nodded too, her eyes downcast. She was afraid to look at the doctor — afraid to let him see the incredulous joy in her face.

"So long, then." He was gone, shutting the door quietly after him.

What unbelievable luck! Cora Hendricks felt herself trembling with excitement. How she had schemed and planned — and it had never occurred to her that anything would keep Staples from his daily visits to his patient. Now she had three whole days and nights.

Today. It was only three o'clock. She could do it today. His four o'clock medicine. By five she would be finished here; by six she could be on a train. By Thursday she could be where Staples would never find her. No — that was foolish. She mustn't disappear. She would phone Dr. Roberts, and he would come. Perhaps he would summon Staples back, perhaps he would take

the whole responsibility. Either way, it would make no difference to her. Afterwards, she could go, and then — then her new life would begin.

She sat silently by Marsden's bed, on the other side of the table, and let her eyes, that she had not dared to let the doctor see, rove around the big room. Back of the framed photograph of Marsden's dead wife was a sliding panel that hid a safe. She knew the combination; Marsden had given it to her when he wanted her to bring him the insurance papers for the doctor to look at. Marsden knew he was going to die soon.

At night, when he was asleep, she had opened the safe again. It was full of money. She had not counted it all, but without the bonds — they would be dangerous — there was nearly ten thousand dollars in currency. Her hands shook at the memory.

She could have taken it then, and gone away, but three things had restrained her. First, there was a lingering scruple of professional ethics, at deserting a patient in the middle of the night. Then, he might waken suddenly and understand, and she knew that in a drawer of the bedside table was a loaded revolver. He was probably too weak to use it, but once in a while he gathered sudden accesses of strength. And finally, it would be quite obvious where and how the money had gone. Marsden would tell the doctor in the morning, and they would have hold of her in short order.

But she must get it. She must. There were urgent reasons. There was her own realization that time was slipping past her, that professional calls were growing fewer, that there was nothing saved. And there was Terry.

Terry had been her patient once, long ago, before she knew anything about him. He was just a rich man taken ill in a hotel. That was when she was young and full of ideals and rigorous virtues. Probably, if she had never met Terry, the money would have lain in that safe forever for all of her. But after they had fallen in love she had found out — gradually. Terry was a professional bank-robber: that was the bald truth of it. He was also handsome, cultured, fascinating, and she was mad about him. Slowly his influence conquered all the ideals and most of the virtues. If she had been scrupulous and honest since, it was from expediency, not from principle. And then Terry had been caught. But he had not been armed — Terry was too wise ever to carry a gun — and he had received a light sentence — ten years. He was a model prisoner; with good behavior, his term would be over now in three more

months. They were going to be married when he got out. He must never run such risks again; she must have money for him — plenty of money. They must be able to go away somewhere, change his name, live new lives. It was with Terry, in whispers across a high-ridged table in the visitors' room, that she had planned this thing.

Marsden would never need that money. There wasn't anyone for him to leave it to: his wife was dead, he was childless and without brothers or sisters. He had told her himself that his will left everything to various charities. Everything about him was eccentric. Living alone in an apartment, eating in restaurants, hiring no servant — that was eccentric too, not miserly. He paid Cora Hendricks well, and he paid the woman well who came in once a week to clean. It was eccentric to refuse to go to a hospital when his illness became acute; Staples was an old friend and humored him. It was eccentric to keep his valuables in a safe built into the wall instead of in a safe-deposit box in a bank. It was surely eccentric to keep a loaded revolver in a table-drawer when he was too weak to lift it and had no occasion to use it anyway.

At first she had suspected he was contemplating suicide as a quick way out of incurable disease, but he had disabused her mind of that.

"I like to feel that I am still in touch with the active world I shall not rejoin," he had said a little shamefacedly, in his precise voice. "When I was well I spent all my summers in Maine, in the town where I was born. Up there in Squanscutt I'm somebody important; here in New York I'm just a fairly prosperous man with nothing to do.

"Do you know, Miss Hendricks —" his voice slumped to a conspiratorial whisper like a small boy's — "when I'm at home, in the summer, I'm a deputy sheriff! I have all the accoutrements — I keep it here by me, to look at and remember, because I shall never wear the things again. In fact, I never did need them, but there was always a chance of — oh, let's say adventure — a rum-runner, perhaps, before repeal, or an escaping bandit. Nothing exciting every happened to me in my life," he added wistfully. "This junk here represents my dream that something might have happened."

He opened the drawer confidentially — it was one of his good days — and let her look at everything. There was the badge, with "Deputy" on it in blue enamel; the revolver in its holster; the pair of handcuffs; even, crushed and folded, the hat, looking more like a western bad man's than

a Maine deputy sheriff's. Cora, with a transient twinge of pity, realized that in Squanscutt they must laugh at him and indulge him and love him — probably he had been the town's benefactor in more ways than one. He was no millionaire, but the bonds must run to a hundred thousand in value, and he had a good-sized checking account in two banks. The cash in the safe was all that mattered to her — just spending money to him, but imperative, vital, to Cora Hendricks.

She could reach across him right now, open the drawer — it had no lock — and shoot him as he lay there with his eyes closed and his breath coming in irregular gasps. She would do nothing so ridiculous, of course. Marsden was going to die naturally — perhaps from the excitement of seeing his old friend and physician leave him for three days. That was what she would suggest to Dr. Roberts when she called him.

She had the stuff ready: Terry had told her where and how to get it. It could be poured into the four o'clock medicine, and he would never know the difference. Neither would anyone else — who would order an autopsy on a man who had been dying for weeks? In ten minutes now he would be dead.

Then she went over the plan mentally, while she sat watching the sick man's troubled breathing. First she must wash out the glass thoroughly. Next she must dispose of the little vial which had been constantly in her apron pocket for a week while she awaited her chance. She could take it away with her, and throw it somewhere when she was on the train. She would get the money out, close the safe again — it was unlikely that anyone, even Staples, knew just how much currency Marsden had there, or if he had any at all. Fingerprints wouldn't matter — Staples had seen her open the safe at Marsden's order.

Ten thousand dollars made a big bundle. But there was room in her suitcase. When Roberts was through with her she would pack and return to her rented room. She would give her name in at the registry at once. She might even go out on another case if one presented itself. Nothing suspicious; no running away. When Marsden was buried, when Terry was about to be released, she would go to the place where they had agreed to meet, and take the money with her.

Would the clock ever move to four? She felt her nerves fraying with impatience to have it over with. She got up softly and walked to the window. It was open a little. Cora gazed meditatively at the building opposite. No one could possibly in-

terfere. Even if some fool stood there with a spy-glass, what would he see? A uniformed nurse giving her patient his medicine. She smiled, and returned to the chair on the left side of the bed.

Four o'clock. She stood up briskly. Marsden opened his eyes and turned his head inquiringly to her.

"Your medicine," she said soothingly. She caught her breath; she must not betray her agitation.

"Which one?" he asked feebly. He lost track of time easily.

"The digitalis mixture."

"Oh, yes."

He watched her while she poured a little water in the glass and then with the dropper measured the eight drops into it. The medicines were not on the bedside table — that was sacred to his personal belongings, his glasses and a book or two, and the touching little bunch of flowers the cleaning woman had brought him that very morning.

She turned away from him to stir the mixture. In that instant the little vial came from her pocket and was emptied into the glass and returned to its hiding-place. The liquid was colorless and odorless.

She marveled at her steadiness as she brought the glass to him, propped him on his high pillow so that he could drink. He took the glass in his veined hand and laid it beside him on the table.

"Sit down, Miss Hendricks," he said gently.

Cora dropped into the chair by the bed. Could he possibly have seen that her legs were trembling?

Marsden half-smiled, and stared at the half-full glass. In the same mild tone he spoke again.

"Will it hurt?"

For a second she could not answer: the shock drove the blood from her heart. Then she summoned her voice.

"Why, Mr. Marsden, you've had it three times a day, right along. You know it doesn't hurt."

His mind must be beginning to wander; he couldn't last much longer in any event. Perhaps if she had let him alone he would have died without her help. But she couldn't take that chance; he might outlast the time when Terry was due to meet her, or die when Staples was there.

"I don't mean the digitalis," said Marsden evenly. "I mean the other stuff you put into it. From the bottle in your pocket."

She stared at him, speechless, paralyzed.

"It's for the money in the safe, isn't it? I've been watching ever since you saw it. I could have given it all to you, and saved you from having to do this. But you see, I'm tired of all this nonsense. Staples

wouldn't finish me off, I know that. But you will. Thank you, my dear. I'm glad I had enough in the safe to tempt you."

She sat stunned, unable to look at him.

"Only, it doesn't seem fair to other people, later on. Money doesn't last forever, you know, and you might be tempted again to —"

He summoned all his strength for the last effort. His movements were quick and sure. He even managed to get the glass on the table again before he fell back on the pillow.

On Thursday afternoon, Dr. Staples, smiling as he remembered his daughter's radiant face, rang the bell softly so as not to disturb Marsden. He waited. He rang again. Then, with a frown, he searched his pockets for the extra key which his friend had given him in the early days before a nurse had been needed. He frowned again, indignantly. He had never employed Miss Hendricks before — his regular nurse was ill — but the registry had recommended her highly. Surely she had not deserted a patient in the condition Marsden had reached.

At the door he stood stock-still, feeling his face grow white.

The room was full of flies. Marsden lay obliquely across the bed; brown patches had formed on his stringy neck, his mouth and eyes were open. On the bedside table, beside some wilted flowers, was a glass, with a little liquid still in the bottom. Dead flies lay in it and around it. The table-drawer was open.

On the other side of the bed, slumped by an overturned chair, crouched Miss Hendricks. Her hair was disheveled, her uniform torn. There was dried blood on her right arm, and a long green bruise over a puffy swelling.

Dr. Staples walked quickly to the bed, pulled back the tumbled covers.

Miss Hendricks opened blank eyes. The doctor's flesh crawled, as she began to giggle.

Her right wrist was handcuffed to the left wrist of the corpse.

In our November 1943 issue we introduced you to "Dr. Sam: Johnson, Detector" — one of the most unusual discoveries made by your Editor in a whole year's indefatigable research. Here is a second memoir of Dr. Johnson, recorded (supposedly) by that most famous of all real-life Watsons, James "Bozzy" Boswell.

"Prince Charlie's Ruby" is founded on a true incident in Dr. Johnson's life. He really did visit Flora Macdonald; he really slept in Prince Charlie's bed; he really saw most of the priceless relics described in this story.

Again Miss de la Torre projects the spirit and flavor of the 18th Century with remarkable authenticity. The result is another distinguished short story — another "first" for EQMM.

DR. SAM: JOHNSON AND PRINCE CHARLIE'S RUBY

(as related by James Boswell, September, 1773)

by LILLIAN DE LA TORRE

"PRAY, Mr. Boswell," said Flora Macdonald, "what did you do for the Bonnie Prince in the '45?"

"In the '45, ma'am," I replied, "I was a fine boy of five; I wore a white cockade and prayed for Prince Charlie."

"Well done, Bozzy!" exclaimed Dr. Sam: Johnson approvingly.

"But," continued I, "one of my uncles, General Cochran, gave me a shilling on condition that I should pray for King George; which I accordingly did."

"Now I perceive," cried my Tory companion, "that Whigs of all ages are made the same way!"

The company enjoyed a hearty laugh at my expense, for all those present were of the *old interest*, and rejoiced to find the learned Dr. Sam: Johnson kindly affectioned toward the lost Stuart cause; while I looked airy, and whistled a bar or two of "Charlie Is My Darling."

We had but just arrived at Kingsburgh in the Isle of Skye, and now we sat in our host's comfortable parlour by a good fire, comforting ourselves with punch and conversation before taking our rest. In the elbow-chair by the chimney-piece sat our host, Allen Macdonald of Kingsburgh, quite the figure of a gallant Highlander. He wore a brown short coat of a kind of duffle, a tartan vest with gold buttons and gold buttonholes, a bluish filibeg, and tartan hose. He had jet-black hair tied behind and with screwed ring-

lets on each side, and was a large stately man, with a steady sensible countenance. By his side in a straight chair sat his sister Margaret, a stout-built clever-looking woman with merry dark eyes.

On the opposite side of the fireplace, at Dr. Johnson's right hand, the cynosure of all eyes, sat the wife of our host, the celebrated Flora Macdonald. She was a little woman, of a mild and genteel appearance, mighty soft and well-bred; elegantly attired in tabby silk, with a gold locket on a chain about her neck.

To see Dr. Sam: Johnson salute Miss Flora Macdonald with a flourish of his glass was a wonderful romantick scene to me. The great lexicographer regarded the Jacobite heroine with reverence, and bent to her level from his ponderous height with a deference touching to see.

The apartment in which we sat might have been in St. James's, rather than in this remote corner of the Hebrides. Two pretty French figurines adorned the delicate scroll-work of the mantel. The room was softened by hangings of damask, and elegantly lighted by wax candles in sconces. Dr. Johnson could not forbear to comment.

"Why, sir, we are not such savages here," said Flora Macdonald with a smile. "I had the damask from Paris; and we never lack for wax candles, for my father-in-law was factor to Sir Alexander Macdonald, and made all the candles for the big house, and we have the use of the forms to this day."

I looked at the well-formed tapers. Two of them burned in sconces beside a bracket whereon stood a busto in plaster, representing a young man of singular beauty. Something about it was strangely familiar to me. I covertly studied the oval face, the beautifully cut mouth not quite smiling, the broad lofty sweep of the brows, the keen expression and proud lift of the well-shaped head. A sly word from my observing friend brought me out of my reverie.

"For a dog of a Whig, Mr. Boswell," observed he, "you seem strangely lost in admiration of His Majesty King Charles III."

With a start I realized why the plaster busto was so familiar to me. Such effigies of the beloved Prince were widely dispersed in Scotland; and indeed they were openly displayed for sale in London, in Red Lion Square, as long ago as my first visit thither.

"You are a Jacobite indeed," I retorted upon my *quizzing* friend, "to recognize your king when you have never seen him."

"Why, Bozzy," retorted Dr. Johnson, "'twas no feat of divination, but the mere use of my eyes.

They are not what they were, 'tis true; but he who will look may see."

He raised the candle before the image, and I saw an inscription on the plaster, traced in faded paint. With difficulty I read it off:

THEN ALL CLASP HANDS ABOUT THE RING,
BRING FORTH THE PIPES, LET ALL MEN SING:
LONG LIFE UNTO OUR PRINCE AND KING!
THUS SHALL WE MAKE THE WELKIN RING
WHEN THE KING SHALL COME INTO HIS OWN.

"'Tis an old song of the '45," said Margaret Macdonald, "of my father's own making. I remember, he taught it to me before the battle of Culloden. In later years he limned it above the plaster busto, as you may see, and always kept it bright; but we have not renewed it since he died. 'Tis but doggerel, but he set great store by it."

Dr. Johnson was studying the plaster busto, peering at it with an inscrutable countenance.

"'Tis a noble countenance," he remarked, "and indeed 'tis a commonplace, that the face of any man is nobler in plaster than in the vicissitudes of flesh."

"Not so," exclaimed Flora Macdonald warmly, with indignation thrilling in her musical voice, "the face of Prince Charles as I saw it last, worn and bronzed and suffused with tears, was nobler and more beautiful than any plaster busto."

To this there was no answer, and Dr. Johnson swiftly turned the conversation to deal with less immediately interesting matters connected with the sculptor's art.

"'Tis observable, ma'am," he remarked, "that in the numerous equestrian memorials that adorn our metropolises, the horse is commonly the finer animal. This is because, depicting the same creature over and over, each time with a new rider, the artist perfects and refines his concept of equine nobility."

"You say true," exclaimed Flora Macdonald, whose Edinburgh education and refined travels had equipped her to pass upon the truth of my ingenious friend's observation.

"The like is observable," continued he, pointing to the side of the plaster head, "of ears. Observe the uncommon delicacy and perfection of this ear. This is not Charlie's ear, ma'am; this is *the Platonic ideal of ear.*"

"Nay, Dr. Johnson," replied our hostess, smiling, "there you are out again. This is the bonnie laddie's very ear, for I have observed it myself. Indeed the whole busto is very like. Dr. King relates, that when the

Prince was in London in 1750, his serving-man recognized him from just such a head."

"In London in 1750!" I exclaimed incredulously.

Flora Macdonald laughed.

"The Prince," she said, "comes and goes at will. He is totally without fear. He was at the Hanoverian's coronation in '61; and they tell me he was at Inverness not five years past."

"Do you say so!" exclaimed Dr. Johnson. "Now that we have met Miss Flora Macdonald" — he bowed with his rare old-fashioned courtesy — "nothing remained to hope for unless we could meet the Prince himself face to face; you encourage me to believe that even this is not impossible in the Western Islands."

Kingsburgh shook his head.

"Nay, Dr. Johnson," he said, "you must 'e'en satisfy yourself with gazing on the busto; for we learn that upon his father's death the original is wedded at last, to a beautiful miss of twenty, and a princess to boot, and now he renews his youth as Benedick the married man. Depend upon it, His Majesty the King will come no more to Skye."

"Then, sir," said Dr. Johnson, "we must make do with what we have. I have kissed the hand of the celebrated Flora Macdonald; and now, as the hour grows late and the *poonch*-bowl empty, let me prefer a last request."

"Anything," smiled the lady graciously.

"That I may rest tonight in the very bed that sheltered the Prince so many years ago."

"You ask much," said Kingsburgh doubtfully.

"But not," said Flora quickly, "more than we will grant. Come with me, gentlemen."

We followed her up the stairs. At the head she unlocked a door with a key, and we stood in Prince Charlie's room. By the light of the lifted candle we saw that it was a spacious chamber, well dusted and in order. On each side of the fireplace stood a sturdy bedstead, decked orderly with coverlets and hung with tartan curtains. On the hearth a fire was laid; Flora Macdonald lighted it with a spill.

"Ma'am," said Dr. Johnson earnestly, "it seems that the room has been readied for us."

"Not for you, Dr. Johnson," she replied; "for the King. My father-in-law kept it ever aired and redded against the day when Prince Charlie should return to Kingsburgh. The old man died last year; it was his dying wish that we should keep it so."

"So all is unchanged," mused Dr. Johnson, "since the unfortunate fugitive slept here."

"'Tis the same bed," said Flora, pointing to that on the right of the fireplace. "The hangings are the same, and the coverings. Here is what is left of the linen."

By the light of the candle she carried she showed us an old press in the corner. In a deep drawer, among various strangely-assorted oddments, lay yellowing a sheet of fine linen.

"Pray, ma'am," enquired Dr. Johnson, "did Kingsburgh afford the royal fugitive but one sheet?"

"Not so," replied Flora with a smile, "there was a pair, which we at Kingsburgh have treasured among our dearest possessions. The one which is gone served Lady Kingsburgh for a winding sheet; and this shall do the same for me."

Dr. Johnson peered shortsightedly into the press. It contained a variety of relics, which Flora Macdonald turned over with a faraway smile.

"Here is old Kingsburgh's punch-bowl," she said, "it suffered an accident on that very night." It had indeed; it was broke clean in half.

"Here is his shoe," said she. "It was worn clear through; old Kingsburgh gave him a new pair."

"Where is the other?" I enquired.

"When the old man died we cut it into strips and gave them away."

"What is this?" I asked, indicating a roll of pale blue silk.

"'Tis the Prince's candle," replied our hostess. "Here is his candle-snuffer; and this is his tinder-box."

"Where," enquired Dr. Johnson, drolling, "is the Prince's warming-pan?"

"Here," replied our hostess seriously. Sure enough, it hung bright and gleaming by the fire.

"So, Bozzy," observed Dr. Johnson, smothering a yawn, "tonight we lie royally indeed. I will sleep in the Prince's bed, I will be warmed by the Prince's warming-pan, and I will snuff the candle with the Prince's candle-snuffer."

Flora Macdonald shovelled coals into the polished warming-pan and set it in the Prince's bed between the homespun sheets.

"Good night," said our gracious hostess, "may you sleep soundly, and dream, if you will, of Bonnie Prince Charlie."

We lay in good comfort in the Prince's chamber, but for all that I slept but ill. The wind was in the chimney, and I lay long musing on the melancholy fate of the gallant Stuart prince. At last I slept, but fitfully, and in the phantasmagoria of sleep I dreamt that Prince Charlie returned to Skye. Over the moan of the wind I seemed to hear the subdued murmur of welcoming voices, and footsteps in the long hall. Fitfully through my dream I saw the proud white face of the plaster busto.

We lay late, for no one called us.

"Sir," said Dr. Johnson, "the happiest moments of a man's life are those he spends lying in bed in the morning."

The sun streamed through the leaded panes.

"'Tis when lying in bed in the morning," said Dr. Johnson, stretching his massive frame, "that a man enjoys the blessings of consciousness, without suffering its inconveniences."

He grunted prodigiously, settled on his head the kerchief that served him in lieu of a night-cap, and with a great creaking of the bed-cords turned over for another bout with Morpheus.

'Twas late when we descended, and found our host and hostess gone, no one could say whither, and the buxom sister left to do the honours, which she did with an abstracted air. We enjoyed an excellent breakfast: as good chocolate as ever I tasted, tea, bread and butter, marmalade and jelly. There was no loaf-bread, but very good *scones*, or cakes of flour baked with butter. Miss Macdonald busied herself pouring out tea for my *teaophile* friend.

We were waited upon by a young girl bare-headed but very decently dressed. She kept directing at Miss Macdonald looks full of trouble and appeal, and finally, fetching the barley-bannocks, she burst forth in an odd sort of Gaelic and English:

"'Tis the Burlow Beanie, ma'am, and not my fault at all, he's pried loose the chimney bricks and turned out the lint we laid up in the old man's time, and now here's one of your Dutch tiles you set such store by gone out of the sitting-room fireplace, and the plaster head is off the bracket and stolen quite away, for I can't find it anywhere."

Miss Macdonald dropped the sugar-tongs and stooped to retrieve them, but I was before her.

"You are an ignorant girl," she said severely, "be quiet and fetch some fresh tea."

"We'll all be in our graves," wailed the girl, "for there's a new grave dug by the byre where the old man had the kale-yard . . . Yes, ma'am, fresh tea." The girl retreated before Miss Macdonald's stern visage, only to return in new distress:

"The Burlow Beanie has stole the cheese!"

"That," said Miss Macdonald to us, "sounds more like the Burlow Beanie."

"What is the Burlow Beanie?" I enquired.

"A foul fiend," replied Miss Macdonald, laughing, "which lives under the bed and requires to be placated with victuals; which failing, he takes to stealing and smashing."

"An institution of great utility,"

commented Dr. Johnson gravely.

"Thus it comes about," replied Miss Macdonald, "that in Scotland no housemaid ever breaks a dish or steals an end of cheese; 'tis all done by the Burlow Beanie."

After breakfast I retreated to our chamber to write up those notes which I am accustomed to keep on the proceedings and discourse of my illustrious friend. No better entertainment offering itself, in the absence of our host and hostess, Dr. Johnson joined me there at the conclusion of the mid-day meal and devoted himself to correspondence.

We supped late with Miss Macdonald, whose discourse proving a little wearisome, we mounted betimes to bed. We were courteously lighted thither by the lady herself, who with deputed zeal must needs inspect the appointments of the chamber.

"Alas, Dr. Johnson," she cried suddenly, turning from his bed in dismay, "you can never lie here tonight!"

"Why not," ma'am?" demanded the philosopher, peering between the curtains.

" 'Pon my soul, sir," exclaimed I, glancing over his shoulder, "You should have spoke better of the Burlow Beanie!"

The bed was sodden with water. Miss Macdonald stared distractedly into the top of the tester.

"A leak — " she cried, "come, Dr. Johnson, you shall lie in comfort just down the passage."

She marshalled us to the back of the house and installed us in a room which stood providentially ready, two good beds fresh cloathed and a fire laid; and there she left us.

"Hah!" snorted Dr. Johnson, "A leak! The Burlow Beanie! This is mere malice and petty persecution. Someone on this island makes sport of our discomfort."

"'Tis clear," I returned, "that Miss Macdonald believes in her Burlow Beanie. I met her in the lower passage after dinner, and trust me, she was carrying the lubber fiend the best part of the joint."

"So do not I," retorted Dr. Johnson, "and I'll lie in the Prince's chamber tonight though I lie with the Burlow Beanie. I'll e'en beg the loan of the edge of your bed, Bozzy, and we'll see what the lubber fiend is after."

Returning stealthily to the Prince's chamber, we lay in tolerable comfort for perhaps an hour, concealed by the tartan curtains close-drawn. Then suddenly there was a light step in the passage, the door opened, and in stepped our gentle little hostess with a candle in her hand. She was followed by her husband and a tall stranger, a slim strong-

built man in middle life. Kingsburgh carried a crow, which with no word spoken he applied to the bricks of the chimney-piece.

"Now fie upon my curiosity," muttered Dr. Johnson in my ear, "I had expected the serving-maid." He swept aside the tartan curtain and rose to his feet.

Kingsburgh dropped the crow with a clatter; Flora Macdonald drew in her breath with a little cry. Only the stranger was unmoved. He regarded my friend with a level gaze; I saw his eyeballs gleam in the light of the candle he held beside his head.

"Pray," he said with composure, "make Dr. Johnson known to Mr. Douglas."

I was piqued at the inversion of courtesy by which Kingsburgh *presented* my venerable friend to Mr. John Douglas. However, Dr. Johnson scanned the stranger's face keenly for a moment, by candle light, and then inclined from the waist with his rare stately courtesy.

"If Charles Stuart," he said respectfully, "wishes to be known as John Douglas, 'tis not for me to dispute the appellation. I am your humble servant, Mr. Douglas."

I looked again at the oval face, the eyebrows raised now and the mouth just on the point of smiling. It was a face that had been used hard; the eyes were tired, and the oval was fuller than it had been. But the broad brow, the finely modelled nose, even the keen proud look, were still there.

He was dressed as of old, in Highland costume. He wore kilt and short hose of the red-and-black Stuart tartan. His well-shaped knees were bare; I noted how the full filibeg set off the good shape of his muscular legs. For the rest, he had a black waistcoat and a short cloth green coat with gold cord. On his feet he wore Highland brogues.

He carried himself with composed stateliness. I bowed low as I was presented to him in my turn, meditating on the vicissitudes of fortune that bade Charles Stuart return to the country of his fathers secretly and by night, hiding his presence even from those who in happier times would have been his subjects.

The King was smiling openly now.

"You see I was right," remarked Charles Stuart, "removing the busto from the bracket could not remove it from the memory of Dr. Johnson."

"Yet you were likewise wrong, sir," cried Flora Macdonald, "for you see you stand in no danger from Dr. Johnson, Sassenach though he may be. You might freely have appeared before him in your own person."

"As I do now," said Charles. "The better, for we have need of your counsel, Dr. Johnson."

"I am wholly at your service," replied my monarchical friend. "What is your difficulty?"

"It is thus, my friend," replied the royal Stuart, "concealed somewhere in this house is a ruby worth £50,000."

"If indeed it be in this house," said Kingsburgh gloomily.

"It is here," replied Charles with confidence. "I trusted it to your father's keeping. I will stake my life that he kept it well. But where?"

"We have had up the fireplace tiles," said Kingsburgh, "we have turned out every chest and press that was here in my father's day, we have dug where the old kale-yard used to be, all to no purpose. Only this room remains to be searched; and I crave your indulgence, sir," he turned to Dr. Johnson, "for the crude means by which we sought to have you out of the way."

"Sir," said Dr. Johnson," 'tis folly to put your trust in spades and crowbars. Your father meant that the ruby should never be found by men with mattocks. No, sir; man is the master, not by reason of crows and shovels, but by virtue of the vision in his head."

"Then pray, Dr. Johnson," said the King half humourously, "search in your head and find me my ruby."

"Sir," replied Dr. Johnson seriously, "I will do so. Pray let us conduct this search by the sitting-room fire, with a bowl of *poonch* for the facilitation of the operation."

Accordingly we removed thither. Dr. Johnson brought the candle. Flora Macdonald lit the fire; Miss Macdonald came with the keys and brewed an excellent punch, which Charles Stuart commended heartily; and we sat as snug around the fire at midnight as though we were all old cronies together, and Bonnie Prince Charlie had never lost his kingdom and a ruby worth £50,000.

"But come," said Dr. Johnson when the glass had gone round, "I am not to search in *my* head, for I am a stranger to Kingsburgh; if the ruby is to be found, it must be found in *your* heads. Pray, let me hear the story of the lost gem."

"You must know," replied Charles, "it was one of a pair, the gift of the French King to my granddam Mary Stuart. One of these she gave away; the other descended to my father, and he left it to my brother Henry, the Cardinal. 'Twas the first one which after many years was brought to me at Holyrood and given into my hands for the good cause. I kept it by me for the day of need; 'twas on my person at Culloden."

"This gem was unset?" enquired Dr. Johnson.

"It was set in a ring," replied Charles Stuart.

"After Culloden the Prince fled into the Western Islands," said Flora Macdonald, "and the chiefs of the Isles protected him."

"I remember the day he came to Kingsburgh," said Margaret Macdonald "though I was then no more than seven. Sir Alexander Macdonald was away at Fort Augustus; and when the military came on Skye, Lady Margaret sent for my father in haste, and he left the forms standing and the wax cooling in the vat and went away to her at Monkstadt. The next day he came back at dusk with a muckle, ill-shaken-up wife in an Irish camlet cape with a hood."

"Me," said Charles, and laughed to the echo. "What a gawk of a female I made. Old Kingsburgh lost all patience with me. They call you a Pretender, says he as I fell over my skirts, all I can say is that you are the worst at your trade I ever saw."

"My father was a staunch man," said Margaret softly. "When the Prince had got clean away, we begged him to save himself. 'I'll bide,' says he. 'I'm an old man, and may as well hang as die in my bed; and besides, who will light the great house if I take to the heather?'; and he stayed by the forms till they came from Fort Augustus and took him away."

"I wish," said Allen Macdonald, "that my father could have lived to see this day."

"So do I too," said Charles Stuart, "he was kind and staunch."

"And," added Kingsburgh, "he could have laid your ruby in your hand without ado."

"Have no concern," said I, "Dr. Johnson will lay the ruby in your hand before the night is through."

"I must find it first," said my venerable friend, "Pray, sir, let us hear more of how the gem came to Kingsburgh."

"It came through my agency," said Flora Macdonald. "I will tell you the story. 'Twas in June of '46 that word came to me at my brother's on South Uist, that he for whom we all prayed was hiding in the mountains, and desired my aid to pass over into Skye. We met at Milton by night, and a plan was concerted between us."

"I remember that night," said the royal Stuart, "we met in the byre at Milton. 'Twas black dark; but I remember a soft hand, and a low voice, and a steadfast courage."

"Lady Clanranald got us a boat; but before we could go off," said Flora Macdonald, "the militia had taken me up and brought me on suspicion before the commanding officer."

"Alack," I exclaimed, "how was this remedied?"

"The officer," replied Flora, "was my mother's second husband, and

well-affected in secret. He gave me a pass —" she went to the writing-desk — "to carry us all safe into Skye."

She handed my companion a yellowing slip of paper. It was superscribed: "To Mistress Macdonald in the Island of Skye." Dr. Johnson read out the crabbed lines:

"I have sent your daughter from this country lest she should be frightened with the troops lying here. She has got one Betty Burke, an Irish girl, who, as she tells me, is a good spinster. If her spinning pleases you, you may keep her till she spins all your lint; or if you have any wool to spin, you may employ her. I have sent Neil Mackechan along with your daughter and Betty Burke to take care of them."

"A good spinster!" cried Charles, "O Lud, if I had stayed on Skye till I had spun all the lady's lint, I'd be there yet!"

"Prince Charlie," said Flora Macdonald, "in those days and after, was the handsomest man I have ever seen." The King smiled and pledged her in dumb show.

"But alack, sir," went on Flora, and laughed aloud, "in female gear, you were the awkwardest, most impudent jade imaginable, and had us all in terrour that you would unfrock yourself before you had made good your escape."

"I submit, sir," said Charles Stuart argumentatively, turning to my venerable friend, "I appeal to your candour, whether any man alive is to be expected to walk from Monkstadt to Kingsburgh, ay and embark in boats and ford burns, clad in a quilted petticoat and an Irish cape with a hood, and still keep his maidenly modesty? 'Tis not in nature, and that's flat."

"Well, sir," continued Flora Macdonald, "modest or no, we took wherry and rowed for Skye, on a night wild with storm. We were all in fear for our lives, all save the Prince; and he sat high in the stern and sang ballads till the day broke."

"I sang," said Charles meditatively, replenishing his cup, "I sang 'Gilderoy'." He sang softly to himself, in a true clear voice:

"Gilderoy was a bonny boy
Had roses tull his shoon . . ."

"'Twas the worse when day broke," continued Flora, "for the militia spied us from Waternish, and fired on us; and only that the oars were locked in the guard-house, the adventure had ended there."

"I wished that it had," said Charles, "when we landed at Kilbride, and I had to spend the day lurking among the rocks. All the gnats on the Hebrides devoted the day to me."

"I hastened to Lady Macdonald

at Monkstadt," said Flora, "where I found a great company assembled, among them several officers of the militia. I was happy to see old Kingsburgh. My first thought was to ask after Allen, for I could not hear of him since Culloden. Allen's father made me glad with the news that he was safe, and absconding in the heather."

"Ay," said Kingsburgh, "lurking in the heather and thinking of you — and you dining with royalty!"

"Lady Macdonald feared to receive the fugitive," continued Flora Macdonald, "and my father-in-law volunteered to shelter him at Kingsburgh."

"I fared sumptuously in this house," said Charles Stuart. "There was linen on the table. Lady Kingsburgh sat at my right hand, and Flora Macdonald on my left. I dined well on collops, eggs, butter, and cheese."

"And beer," added Flora. "I remember your toast: 'The health and prosperity of my landlord and landlady, and better times to us all.' "

"'Tis still a good toast," observed the royal guest. "Pray, Miss Macdonald, let us have more of your excellent punch."

He raised the replenished glass:

"To the health and prosperity of my landlord and landlady, and better times to us all."

Kingsburgh bowed his acknowledgements. Flora continued with a smile:

"Then our guest produced his pipe, an old thing as black as ink and worn to the very stump, sulphurous as the Pit — and you may be sure the ladies withdrew on the instant."

"'Twas a well-seasoned and deliciously fragrant *dudeen*," said Charles Stuart firmly, "and well it served me in my days of absconding. With it, and old Kingsburgh's famous punch, I comforted myself in talk with my host till nigh on to three. It was then I took the ruby from my bosom and begged him to hide it for me till happier times. He promised; and thus do I know beyond any cavil that the gem is here."

"And this transaction passed here, in this room?" enquired Dr. Johnson.

"Here, in this room," replied Charles.

"There's no hope in that," said Kingsburgh, "for we have turned out the presses and sounded the walls and pried at the fire-place tiles. We must seek further."

"Pray continue your story," said Dr. Johnson thoughtfully.

"I slept that night between sheets," said Charles Stuart, "and never awoke till past noon. Then in came my tirewomen, and inducted me again into the garments of Betty Burke."

"How we laughed, to be sure," said Flora. "The Prince affected to have the *vapours*. I assure you, 'twas more like epilepsy."

"So," said Charles, "by your fair hands I was garbed and shorn."

"Shorn?" I enquired.

Flora Macdonald opened the locket at her bosom.

"There was a great whispering in Gaelic," said Charles with a smile, "and when I enquired what was to do, I learned that Lady Kingsburgh was urging Flora to beg a lock from my devoted head. On the instant I laid it in the lady's lap, and she made a Sampson of me."

I looked at the fine curl of light hair with its overtones of red.

"I have worn it in my bosom ever since." The blue eyes and the brown met in a moment of silence. Then Charles drew from his *sporan* a little jewelled snuff-box, turned it thoughtfully in his hand a moment, and then delicately took snuff.

"Kingsburgh fitted me out," he went on, "with new shoes and a stout plaid — "

"My father treasured the old shoes," said Kingsburgh, "you may see one still in the Prince's chamber."

"And where are the clothes of Betty Burke?"

"My father burned them that day," said Margaret Macdonald.

"The rest is soon told," said the King. "Raasay met me with a boat at Portree, and there I took leave of Flora Macdonald. She gave me a snuff-box for a keepsake — "

"You have it in your hand," said Flora softly.

"I carry it always," said Charles. "We took leave without words, and the boat was launched."

"I watched it out of sight," said Flora Macdonald."

"In the end I got clear away," concluded Charles, "and boarded a French vessel at Lochnanuagh, and so ended the adventure."

"And you, ma'am?" enquired Dr. Johnson.

"They carried me off to London," said the lady with a smile, "and lodged me in the Tower with the Lions; but after a bit they let me out, and I became a lion in my own right for a while, in the drawing-rooms of St. James's; till at last they tired of me, and so I came away back to the Hebrides and married Allen Macdonald."

"And lived happily ever after," said the tall Highlander with a tender smile."

"So have not I," said Charles bitterly, "exile and treachery have been my portion since I left Scotland. But now I look for a better day, when my son will be King of England."

"A son," cried Flora Macdonald joyfully, "you have an heir!"

"A fine boy," returned Charles proudly. "The child was born in Italy, but he will be brought up in Scotland. I have committed him secretly to the care of Clanranald. I myself go always in fear of assassination; it shall be otherwise with my child. Let his existence be a secret among us."

"It shall be so," said Dr. Johnson solemnly.

"It is for this," said Charles Stuart, "that I must have the ruby. My brother the Cardinal is a wealthy man; he has taken a fancy to reunite the pair. He will give me its value, which shall serve to educate my son. Well, Dr. Johnson — "

My learned friend was staring into the flame of the candle with an abstracted air, rolling his ponderous frame from side to side. With a start he returned his attention to the royal personage who addressed him.

"You have looked in our heads, sir," said Charles Stuart, "can you look in your own and find my ruby?"

"Sir," replied Dr. Johnson, "to bring our cerebral search to a happy conclusion, I ask only another bowl of *poonch* and a song."

"Sure this is a merry oracle," cried Charles in approval.

Margaret Macdonald brewed the punch, and the royal guest gave us "Gilderoy" with much applause. Still my friend sat with fixed gaze, and Charles Stuart launched into the minor strain of "Lochaber No More."

Midway in the song the candle began to flare and sputter. Flora Macdonald reached for the candlestick, but Dr. Johnson stayed her hand. In another moment there was a light click as something fell from old Kingsburgh's candle into the silver candlestick.

"Man is the master," cried Dr. Johnson triumphantly, "by reason of the vision in his head."

He handed the candlestick to Charles Stuart. In its base, covered with congealing candle-wax, lay a heavy ring set with a huge stone.

"Sir," said Dr. Johnson, "by looking into old Kingsburgh's head, I have found Mary Stuart's ruby as I promised."

"I am your debtor," cried Charles. "By what happy conjecture did you produce it so patly, like a stage play or a conjuring trick?"

"Sir," replied Dr. Johnson, "this house when I entered it was permeated with your presence. Old Kingsburgh and his family had preserved as sacred relics the bed in which you slept, the sheets that wrapped you, and the ragged shoes you wore. Flora Macdonald wore in her bosom a lock of your hair. But there was one treasure different from these, and therefore mysterious to

me — a candle in the room where you had slept. Why was it an object of special concern? Not because you had used it — it was a new candle, never lit. Not because it had been yours — you could not be thought to have burdened yourself with a wax taper in your dangerous journeys through the Highlands. The King's candle already had my curious attention before you entered this house, before you laid your problem before me."

"When we repaired hither, I brought it with me to burn in the King's presence. By its light I listened to the story of the old days in an indescribable state of apprehension. My climax threatened to become an anti-climax; the old man had set the gem further down in the candle than I had looked for. But at last I saw its shape appearing; and as the wax was consumed it fell and so was revealed."

"Pray, Dr. Johnson," I enquired, "how came you to light upon the candle, and not rather upon old Kingsburgh's ditty painted upon the wall? I made sure it was his message to us, and if we could but read it aright we should find the ruby by his direction."

"So did I too," confessed Kingsburgh, "for it repeats the word 'ring' as if by design. I came nigh to wrecking the wall where the word is painted, but 'tis solid, and has never been breached in my memory."

"You might have saved your pains," said Dr. Johnson. "Old Kingsburgh's verses were writ *before Culloden;* how then could they be a guide to the transaction of the ruby, which took place *after Culloden?* But the old man was pouring candles *after* the Prince's visit. No, sir; I have looked in old Kingsburgh's head as he poured the candles for the great house, and set aside for the King a candle worth £50,000."

"Sir," said Kingsburgh, "we are all in your debt."

The dainty mistress of Kingsburgh flung her arms about my astonished friend, and saluted him with a fervent kiss; while Charles Stuart gratefully pressed his hand.

"Bozzy, Bozzy," cried he, "this will be something to tell at the Mitre, that I have kissed the lips of Flora Macdonald and pressed the hand of his Majesty King Charles III!"

"Not so," replied Charles with his affable smile, "for the sake of my son, this episode must remain a part of secret history."

And as such I have respected it; until now the deaths of all the principals, including, alas, that of the last male scion of the House of Stuart, at Ormaclade in the fourth year of his age, sets me free to narrate this romantick episode of our Tour to the Hebrides.

One of your Editor's fondest reading memories dates back more than twenty years — to the early 1920s when Thubway Tham cavorted through the pages of "Detective Story Magazine." How many of you remember Thubway Tham, the lisping little pickpocket who plied his clever fingers in New York City's subway during rush hours — and his arch-enemy, Detective Craddock, who had sworn so many times to "get" Tham and send him up the river?

Overcome one day with nostalgic longing, your Editor wrote to Johnston McCulley and asked him to bring Thubway Tham up to date. The delightful result is "Thubway Tham, Thvilian" — written especially for this magazine. Tham is now middle-aged, but like all good American citizens he has closest to his heart the interests of his Uncle Sam (I almost wrote Uncle Tham!).

You'll be on Thubway Tham's side, rather than on the side of the law, when you read how the little pickpocket did his bit in our all-out war effort.

THUBWAY THAM, THVILIAN

by JOHNSTON McCULLEY

LEAVING the little restaurant where he usually ate breakfast, Thubway Tham wandered up the street and turned into Madison Square. It was a beautiful morning, and the big clock in the tower pointed to the hour of ten. Sparrows were fighting and chattering over scraps of food, and pigeons were strutting about. Soldiers in uniform were wandering around, some with girls at their sides. There was a sprinkling of sailors, too, and a few marines. From far up the Avenue came the strains of martial music as some parade got under way.

Thubway Tham found his favorite bench unoccupied, and sat upon it. He was thinking of the war. Many of his younger friends had enlisted or been drafted. Familiar faces were missing. Even certain of the gentry habitually under the eyes of the police had accepted honest toil in shipyards and factories turning out munitions and war supplies.

Tham was sad. A few days before he had tried to enlist and get into a uniform. But there were several things wrong with him physically, the army surgeons found. Tham had started the physical examination feeling rather fit, but by the time they got through with him he was wondering which hospital would be the best when he unexpectedly collapsed on the street.

He was contemplating now seeking work in some defense plant. But, frankly, that did not appeal to him. Tham was a creature of habit, and a part of that habit was to ignore manual labor. Moreover, work in a war

plant would keep him away from his beloved subway.

As he mused, another man stopped at the end of the bench until Tham became aware of his presence and glanced up. Detective Craddock, his friend-enemy, the officer who often had sworn to catch Tham "with the goods" some day and "send him up the river for a long stretch," was standing beside the bench.

"Tho I thee your ugly fathe again!" Tham grumbled.

"Tham, old boy, it should be a radiant face today," Detective Craddock told him.

"How come?"

"Tham, you now see before you a man who soon will be wearing the uniform of his country. Moreover, on my shoulders will be those gleaming little gadgets which will announce to the world that I am an officer in Uncle Sam's army."

"You intereth me thrangely," Tham confided. "Protheed with the detailth."

"I merely put in an application for a commission in the Army Intelligence Department, my boy."

"Intelligenth? That ith the lath plath they would put you, Craddock. I am told that the Army needth truck driverth. It altho needth men to handle freight, thupplieth for the boyth who are doin' the fightin'."

"I am to be a captain, Tham."

"There ith one conthulation," Tham told him. "You won't be around here to pethter me any more."

"But I may, Tham. I may be assigned to duty right here in New York, because I know the city so well. I know a lot of people, too, and some of their little habits," he added, with a significant glance at Tham.

"When do you take off your thivilian clotheth and get into the olife drab?" Tham asked.

"Just as soon as I pass my physical, Tham."

Thubway Tham chuckled. "You think you can path it?"

"Certainly. I'm sound in wind and limb."

"That," said Tham, "ith what you think. When the Army doctorth get through with you, you'll know you're a wreck. I thought I wath thound in wind and limb, too. But they found a thouthand thingth wrong with me. Uncle Tham ith mighty particular about hith boys in the Army. To get in, you've got to be good."

"You tried to get in?" Craddock asked, in amazement.

"I thertainly did. They threw me out on my earth. I have flat feet, my eyeth don't match, there ith a knot behind my left ear, and my

blood prethure ith terrible."

"Get into some line of defense work, Tham. Uncle Sam needs all his nephews now. We've got to defend the American way of life. If the enemy wins, Tham, they'll probably shut up the subways and make everybody walk. Then you'll be out of a job."

"Thir?" Tham expressed indignation.

"Don't give me any comedy, now. I'm still on the police force, Tham, and I have my eye on you. What do you expect to do in the way of activities during the day?"

"I wath jutht thinkin' of goin' up to Timeth Thquare," Tham said. "There ith a bond rally up there, with a band and everything."

"Everything, including a packed crowd where a pickpocket can work to his heart's delight," Craddock hinted.

"Now, Craddock, ith that nithe? You hurt me thorely, Craddock, when you talk like that. You thtrain our friendthip. You almoth make me feel that I thould turn my back after thith whenever I thee you comin'."

"Rave on, Tham!" Craddock said, pleasantly. "Don't forget what I said about a job in some war plant. All of us should do our part."

"You don't have to thell Uncle Tham to me," Tham replied. "I wath thold on him ath thoon ath I wath old enough to underthand thingth." Tham got up from the bench and stretched. "Maybe I'll be theein' you later, Craddock. If you do get into a uniform, the firth thing they'll do to you ith trim down that bay window around your belt line. And if you go to tellin' off thome buck thergeant, he'll pin back your earth. I hope to be there to thee it."

"Don't worry about me, Tham. I'll get along."

"Intelligenth department," Tham sniffed. "When it cometh to intelligenth, Craddock, you have about ath much ath an elephant hath whithkerth."

Tham grinned and turned away. He left the Square and got over to Broadway, and started up it toward Times Square. He could hear a band playing in the distance, and Tham liked bands, the brassier the better.

Broadway was thronged, and Tham elbowed and jostled his way through the crowds with a technic born from long experience. As he neared Times Square, the sidewalk crowds became even thicker. There was a bond rally in the Square. Combined with it was a drive for Red Cross funds. Certain celebrities were to be on the program, and a few thousand citizens were out to see a free show.

The band ceased playing as Tham approached, and somebody intro-

duced somebody else over the loud speaker. The crowd cheered, and Tham elbowed a path for himself to get as near as possible to the platform which had been erected. Some musical comedy star, he saw, was going to sing.

Tham found himself jammed behind a fat, florid-faced, overdressed man of perhaps forty-five, and a tall thin man with a pasty face who seemed a trifle nervous and furtive. They were talking in low tones, but Tham could hear what they were saying despite the musical comedy star's ringing high notes.

"Buy bonds and give to the Red Cross," the fat man was saying to his companion. "What a racket! It's a gyp!"

"I suppose they've got to pay for the war," the thin man replied.

"Let the government print bales of money to pay for it. Who'd know the difference? And this Red Cross thing — the government should pay for that. These suckers running to hand over their cash when somebody waves a flag! None of it for me, brother!"

"I'm so short right now I couldn't buy bonds if I wanted to," the thin man said. "Never had such a streak of bad luck."

"I'll see you through," the fat man said. "Your luck will change."

"Thanks! But can you spare it?"

The fat man laughed. "Can I spare it! Did I make a haul last night!"

"Good pickings?"

"A couple of hick officers from out West somewhere. I ran into 'em and they asked me questions about what to see in town. They were goggle-eyed from looking at the tall buildings — that kind."

"Didn't know they were any left," the thin man said.

"They're in the Army now, that's all. These hick lieutenants were on leave for a couple of days. Going to ship out, they told me. Having a last fling before going to die for dear old Uncle Sam — the saps! Nice little simpletons. A few adroit questions, brother, and I had the lay. Each of 'em had a roll on him. Money from home, and some of their salary left. Well, I figured that Uncle Sam feeds the Army boys, and he doesn't feed me, so I decided I needed the money worse than they did."

"And you got it?"

"Poker game. I teased 'em until they went with me to Eddie's place. How we trimmed those suckers! And they didn't even suspect anything was wrong. Said it was only bad luck. We gave 'em a tenner each and a drink and a couple of sandwiches."

"Heavy haul, huh?" Tham heard the thin man ask.

"I've got about six hundred in my

wallet that wasn't there before I met the hick lieutenants, and it all came from them. So I can slip you a hundred until times are better for you. And don't forget to pay it back when the good luck slopes your way."

During this conversation, Thubway Tham had felt rage welling up within him. But he choked it back quickly. It would avail little to denounce these men to the bystanders, and one of them might slap him down.

Stealing from Uncle Sam's officers through the medium of a crooked card game was about the lowest of the low, Tham decided. Suppose they *were* hicks from the sticks? Everybody couldn't be city wise. And they must be real men, or they wouldn't be in the Army with bars on their shoulders. Ready to ship across and fight, and maybe die, and these cheap crooks taking their money away from them like that!

As Tham watched, the fat man produced a wallet and opened it. As he fumbled for a bill of large denomination, Tham had a glimpse of the inside of the wallet. Plainly enough, the fat man had been telling the truth, and not merely boasting. Tham could see a fat sheaf of currency in the wallet, and the figures he saw in the corners of the bills made his eyes open wider.

At the moment, Thubway Tham was down to less than three dollars. The takings in the subway had been meagre lately. Tham was sorely in need of funds. He owed rent in the lodging house conducted by Mr. "Nosey" Moore, the retired burglar, and Mr. Moore's friendship did not extend to prolonged credit.

Thubway Tham kept on watching as the fat man handed a bill to the thin man. The fat man began talking again in the same unpatriotic vein, and closed the wallet and thrust it into his hip pocket. Thubway Tham's eyes glowed.

"And the poor thimp talkth of hickth," Tham muttered to himself. "He ith a thity hick for puttin' hith wallet in hith hip pocket. He detherveth to lothe it — and he thhall."

Thubway Tham knew it would not be difficult for him to get the wallet right then and there. But he was packed in a jam of human beings watching the free show, and a quick getaway would be impossible. If anything happened to go wrong, Tham would be caught in a trap. He would have no freedom of action.

But the fat man would not remain there all day, Tham judged, and when he finally did move on Tham would move also. He would trail this despoiler of Uncle Sam's fight-

ing men until he could get the wallet.

Somebody on the platform began an uninteresting speech.

"I've got enough of this," the fat man said to the thin man. "Let's get out of here."

Tham followed them as they made their way through the crowd. Other persons were leaving, too, and Tham's movements were unobserved. On the corner, the fat man and thin man parted.

"I've got to go downtown," the fat man said. "I'll use the subway — it's quicker than a taxi. This gas and rubber shortage — that's another gag. I'll see you tonight at Eddie's."

Tham almost grinned as he shuffled along the walk in the wake of the fat man. His prospective victim was going into the subway, which was Tham's happy hunting ground. Fate was kind to him today, Tham thought.

On the crowded platform, Tham got near his man as they waited for a downtown express. The train roared into the station, and Tham followed the fat man into a car which was jammed. Both hung from straps and swayed as the train dashed on.

Tham glanced quickly at those nearest him, to make sure that no police officer he knew was in his immediate vicinity. He looked toward the end of the car — and saw Detective Craddock watching him. Craddock grinned and shook his head.

Tham almost choked with rage. So Craddock had tailed him all the way from Madison Square, instead of going about his other business! Craddock had his eagle eye on Tham now, and the latter dared not make a move.

He glared at Craddock, and turned his head away. This was one time, he felt, when Craddock should not be there to interfere. Here was a scoundrel who deserved to lose his wallet and all it contained.

The express roared in and out of Pennsylvania Station and passed Fourteenth Street. Tham began wondering where the fat man was going, and whether he would have a chance at him. As the express neared Chambers Street, the fat man gave indications that he was about to leave the train. He began working his way back toward the door.

Shielded from Craddock's view by the persons jammed between them, and because he bent down a little, Tham kept close to the man ahead. Chambers Street was reached, and the fat man fought his way out. Tham waited until the moment when the door was about to be closed, and darted out. His prospec-

tive victim was hurrying away, intent on reaching the street.

Looking back, Tham almost choked with rage again. At the last moment, Craddock had got out of the car, and was following. Tham ignored him and hurried on after the fat man. He emerged into the street to find the other striding along the street toward City Hall.

Tham strode after him, and Craddock strode after Tham. Ahead, the fat man suddenly turned into the entrance of a building. As Tham passed the entrance, he glanced inside, and saw his quarry entering an elevator.

Opportunity had flown. But there might be another, Tham thought, if he could engineer things properly. The fat man wouldn't remain in the office building forever. He'd come out some time, and probably with the money still in his wallet.

So Tham slackened his pace and allowed Detective Craddock to catch up with him.

"Well, my goodneth!" Tham exclaimed. "Tho I thee you down in thith part of the thity, do I?"

"You certainly do, Tham. And may I ask what you are doing in this part of town?"

"You may athk, yeth."

"I'm asking."

"I had it in my mind," Tham said, "to go over and thee the Polithe Commithioner."

"Indeed?"

"Yeth. I wath goin' to thee if I couldn't get your job if Uncle Tham dethideth that the Army ith tho bad off it needth you. Who ith better qualified? I know the thity like a book. I know a lot of the boyth —"

"And you know how to do detective work, I presume?" Craddock said.

"What hath that got to do with it?" Tham asked. "Do you know how to do it? No. Yet you have been on the thity payroll for yearth."

"I've been watching you, Tham. I know when you're trailing a man. You lost out this time, didn't you? Your man got away. You'd better be a good little boy, now, and get back uptown. And you'd better be a good little boy after you get there, too."

"Craddock, you make me thick!" Tham exploded. "Alwayth thinkin' the wortht of everybody."

"Maybe I didn't see everything on that subway express, Tham. You may have made a touch in that crowded car. I'm going to frisk you."

Tham made a show of indignation. "All right! Go ahead!" he said. "Thearch me!"

"Back up against the building and hold up your arms," Craddock ordered.

Craddock went through him swiftly and in an expert manner.

"Two dollar bills and eighty cents in change," he said.

"After I pay a thubway fare uptown, I'll have only two dollarth and thix bitth," Tham informed him.

"Calm down, Tham."

"I'll see the Commithioner about thith!"

"Better not, Tham. The Commissioner isn't feeling kind these days. Too much on his mind."

"Are you goin' to pethter me all day?" Tham demanded.

"Go where you please, Tham. Maybe I'll tag along," Craddock said. "I may have only a few days more on the police force, and I'd like to nail you and toss you into the jug before I go into the Army. It'd be a fine farewell gesture, Tham."

Thubway Tham glared at him and whirled around to walk back toward the subway. Craddock laughed so Tham could hear, and followed deliberately.

The station platform was not crowded at that hour at Chambers Street. Tham got a good lead on Craddock and hurried down the steps, but he knew Craddock could pick him up as soon as he reached the platform. An uptown express was just leaving, so it would be some minutes before another arrived. Tham could not make a getaway before the hurrying Craddock overhauled him.

Tham glanced at the large magazine stand. A sleepy-looking elderly man was in charge, and at the moment he had no customers. Tham hurried up to him.

"Let me get behind the counter and hide," Tham said. "It ith a gag. I want to watch for a friend of mine and thurprith him. There ith two bitth in it for you."

The elderly man opened the door at the end of the stand.

"Let's see the two bits," he said.

Tham handed over the quarter and got down behind the counter. By leaving the little door open a crack, he could see the length of the platform and the bottom of the steps.

"Don't keep lookin' down at me," Tham told the magazine stand man. "Thomebody might think I'm here."

"It couldn't be the cops you're dodgin', could it?" the magazine man asked.

"Do I look like a cop-dodger?" Tham demanded, in an angry undertone. "I am playin' a joke on a friend. He ith about to make an important change in hith life, and I dethire to rib him about it."

"Oh! Goin' to get married, is he?" the magazine man asked. "The poor sap!"

Thubway Tham let him think so. "I want to watch and thee when he

cometh down the thtairth, and get on the thame train," he said.

Through the crack of the door, he saw Detective Craddock hurry down the stairs at that moment. Craddock's gaze swept over the platform and the few people waiting for trains, and chagrin showed in his face.

Tham almost chuckled. Somebody was buying magazines above him, but he knew he could not be seen. And then he heard Craddock's voice as he questioned the magazine man.

"You see a little runt around here?" Craddock demanded. "Brown suit and shoes, and he doesn't look very bright."

"I've seen a lot as don't look very bright," the magazine man replied.

"None of your sass! I'm an officer!"

Tham could imagine Craddock showing his badge as he said that, and he had a moment of fear. But the magazine man did not betray him.

"Didn't mean to be sassy," he told Craddock. "I see so many people in a day that I don't pay any attention to any of 'em unless they stop here to buy somethin'."

Tham heard Craddock's heels thumping as he walked away to make a search. He continued watching the bottom of the steps. He wanted to avoid Craddock, but most of all he wanted to see the fat man again.

He heard the magazine man's voice:

"That copper is standin' over by the end of the platform on the watch. That'll be four bits more, unless you want me to give him a hail."

Tham handed up his fifty-cent piece, and kept his eyes glued to the crack. People were coming down the stairs now, but the fat man was not among them. A downtown express roared in, and passengers got off. A local disgorged its human freight and rolled on.

More people came down the steps from the street. Among them was the fat man.

Tham watched as he walked to the edge of the platform in plain view and stood there waiting impatiently for the uptown express. He seemed nervous and angry. He had come from an interview which had not pleased him, Tham guessed. That made it all the better. When a man was angry or confused, and had his mind on some recent happening, he was an easier victim. He would not have his mind on his wallet or be inspecting those around him too closely.

"Where's that cop you talked about?" Tham whispered to the magazine man.

"Still standin' at the other end of the platform, watchin' the stairs."

Tham heard an express coming.

He saw his quarry glance down the track. Tham got ready to make a quick exit from the magazine stand.

The train roared in and stopped. Passengers got off and others struggled to get on. Tham waited until the last moment, then darted from the magazine stand and toward the door of the car he had seen the fat man enter. The doors slipped shut. The express roared on.

Tham had a feeling of exultation. He had dodged Craddock that time, he thought. He looked around to spot the fat man, and saw he had worked his way toward the end of the car. Thubway Tham edged toward him a foot at a time, slowly so as not to attract attention to himself.

He was more than halfway to his prospective victim when Fourteenth Street was reached. The fat man did not leave the train there. Nor did he leave it at Pennsylvania Station. He was going to Times Square, or beyond.

Tham edged still nearer as people moved along the aisle. Finally, he was at the fat man's back. Others pressed against them. That was as Thubway Tham wanted it. He saw the fat man eyeing a good-looking girl, and knew his mind was not on his wallet at that instant.

The train was coming into the Times Square station, and Tham flexed his fingers and prepared to do his work. He glanced around once, but found nobody giving him special attention. The train slackened speed and rolled on to the stop.

The fat man stepped forward. There was a quick surge of passengers toward the end door. On the platform outside, a crowd was struggling to board the train.

In that moment Thubway Tham's nimble fingers did their work. He got the wallet and slipped it into his right-hand coat pocket. He thrust and jammed with the others, got out on the platform and brushed past the fat man to hurry for the stairs.

"Tham! Just a moment!" he heard somebody shout.

He knew that voice. It was the voice of Detective Craddock. So the human bloodhound had got on that train after all!

Tham was too wise to turn his head and look back. He did not show he had heard. He quickened his stride, miserably aware that the wallet was damaging evidence if he was caught and searched.

His nimble fingers opened the wallet in his pocket and felt the billfold. Without removing the wallet from his pocket, he extracted the currency, folded it, and transferred it swiftly to a pocket of his vest. And all this time he was going up the steps and making for the street as swiftly as he could.

"Stop, Tham!" he heard a roar behind him.

Stopping was the last thing Thubway Tham intended doing at that juncture.

He reached the street level just as three men were starting down the steps. They collided. In the confusion resulting, Tham dropped the wallet and kicked it against the side of the building. Then he hurried on, toward the crowd at the bond rally.

He had a wad of currency in his vest pocket, and currency is difficult to identify unless it has been marked. But if Craddock overhauled and searched him now, he would wonder where Thubway Tham got his sudden wealth. Tham had had only two dollars and eighty cents on him when Craddock had searched him only a short time before.

"Tham —" Craddock was shouting again, and his shout sounded too near for comfort.

Tham went into the midst of the crowd listening to a popular stage comedian telling stories. He knew from long experience how to get through crowds quickly. And, with his bulk, Craddock could not do that.

A gleam came into Tham's eyes suddenly, for an idea had come to him. It was a splendid idea! He went on through the crowd, elbowing and jostling, getting glares from some and muttered imprecations from others.

He got around the corner of the platform which had been built for the bond rally, and saw the Red Cross booth. Tham hurried up to it. A pretty girl in a nurse's uniform smiled at him.

Tham took the wad of currency from his pocket and slapped it down on the counter.

"For the Red Croth," he told the smiling girl. "No name. It ith jutht — jutht anonymuth."

He went on through the crowd, knowing that Craddock was gaining now. At a certain spot Tham stopped and looked blankly at the stage, then laughed as the comedian ended a joke.

Craddock reached his side.

"Got you!" he said.

"My goodneth, Craddock! You here again?"

"Right here, lad! I made that express down at Chambers Street when I saw you run and get on at the last moment. I moved up a car at Fourteenth Street and another at Penn Station. And you heard me yell at you, and ducked."

"Why, Craddock, how you talk!"

"You haven't had time to get rid of your haul, if you made one. So you'll stand a frisk."

"It theemth to me that thith ith goin' too far," Tham complained.

"It ith not legal to thearth a man every hour."

"Get your hands up!" Craddock ordered. "And button your lip!"

He backed Tham up against the side of the Red Cross booth and went through him expertly. He found two dollar bills.

"You had two-eighty downtown," Craddock said.

"It cotht me a nickle to ride uptown on the thubway, didn't it?"

"Unless you used a slug," Craddock said. "How about the other seventy-five cents?"

"That? Oh, maybe I gave it to the Red Croth," Thubway Tham told him.

He glanced past Craddock, and gulped. That beautiful Red Cross nurse was approaching him, smiling.

"My dear sir, I saw you stop here, and I simply had to come and thank you," she told Tham. "You were so modest in your gift. We need every dollar we can raise —"

"Oh, that ith all right!" Tham said, gulping again when he saw the expression in Craddock's face.

"You said you wished your gift to be anonymous, and so it shall be. But let me thank you, just the same."

"Did this man give something to the Red Cross?" Craddock demanded, a trifle belligerently.

The nurse did not like Craddock's tone. "He did, if it is any of your business," she replied. "He set a fine example for — for other men who possibly haven't contributed."

"Yeah? How much did he give you?"

The nurse saw Tham's slight shake of his head.

"When an anonymous gift is made, the Red Cross doesn't reveal the donor or the amount," she told Craddock, caustically. "And please do not annoy me, or I'll call an officer!" She turned and hurried back to the booth.

Tham chuckled as his eyes twinkled at Craddock.

"Thee? You'll get yourthelf in trouble, Craddock. That girl will call an offither. Maybe you'd better give thomethin' to the Red Croth, to keep her from gettin' mad."

"You're not foolin' me any, Tham. If you made a haul and gave the cash to the Red Cross, that's that! But don't think you've fooled me."

Tham chuckled again and crossed the street. He still had two dollars in his pocket, and there were other leathers to be lifted. He had taken ill-gotten gains from the fat man and avenged two Army officers. The Red Cross girls were looking gleefully at a wad of currency which totalled almost five hundred dollars. And Craddock had been bested again.

It was a good day.

A few sips of rare Dashiell, vintage 1924: early Hammett in a playful and ironic mood. The story of a new racket and the nameless "beak" who quashed it . . .

THE JUDGE LAUGHED LAST

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

"THE TROUBLE with this country," Old Man Covey unexpectedly exploded, emphasizing his words with repeated beats of a gnarled forefinger on the newspaper he had been reading, "is that the courts have got a stranglehold on it! Law? There ain't no law! There's courts and there's judges, and this thing you call the law is a weapon they use to choke human enterprise — to discourage originality and progress!"

The portion of the morning paper upon which the old man's assault was concentrated, I saw with difficulty, held the report of a decision of the Supreme Court in connection with some labor difficulties in the West. Old Man Covey, I knew, couldn't be personally interested in either side of the dispute. He had as little to do with capital as with labor, which was very little. For eight years now — since the day when a street preacher had turned "Big-dog" Covey from the ways of crime, to become plain John Covey and, later, Old Man Covey — he had subsisted upon the benevolence of a son-in-law.

His interest in this case was, then, purely academic. But his attitude was undoubtedly tinged by his earlier experience with the criminal courts, which had been more than superficial, and I suspected that some especially bitter memory had engendered this outburst.

So I rolled another cigarette and led him gently along the road of argumentation — the most direct path, I had learned, to the interior of his contrary old mind.

"Being a beak," I said, using the vernacular term for judge in an attempt to do all I could to stir up the portions of his remembrance that had to do with his days of youth and lawlessness, "is a tough job. Laws are complicated and puzzling, and it isn't easy to straighten them out so that they fit particular cases. Most of the beaks do very well, I think."

"You think so, do you?" the old scroundrel snarled at me. "Well, let me tell you, sonny, you don't know a damned thing about it! I could tell you stories about beaks and their ways that would knock your eye out!"

I put all the skepticism I could summon into a smile, confident

now that I had him.

"You look at things from your own side," I replied, "and in those days you were on the wrong side. Now I don't say that judges don't make mistakes now and then. They do. They're only human. But I never heard of a case where you could say that a judge had positively twisted the law around to —"

That turned the trick. He cursed and snorted and glared at me, and I grinned my insincere doubts, and the story finally came out.

"Me and 'Flogger' Rork was on the road together some years ago, with a gun apiece and a couple big handkerchiefs to hide our mugs behind when we needed to. All-night grease-joints was our meat, and we done ourselves pretty well. We'd knock over a couple a night some nights. We'd drift into them separate at three or four in the morning, not letting on we knew each other, and stall over coffee and sinkers until we was alone with the guy behind the counter. Then we'd flash the rods on him, take what was in the damper, and slide on. No big hauls, you understand, but a steady, reliable income.

"We work that way for a few months, and then I get an idea for a new racket — and it's a darb! Flogger — he's an unimaginative sort of jobbie — can't see it at first. But I keep jawing at him until he gives in and agrees to take a whirl at it.

"You never seen Flogger Rork, did you? I thought not. Well, he's a good guy — what 'Limey' Pine used to call a 'bene cove' —but he ain't no flower to look at. I seen a cartoon of a burglar once in a newspaper during one of these crime waves, and that's the only time I ever seen a face like Flogger's. A good guy — but we had to be careful how we moved around, because bulls had a habit of picking us up just on account of his face. Me — nobody hadn't ever took me for a lamb, myself; though alongside of Flogger I look pretty sweet.

"These mugs of ours had been handicaps to us so far, but now under my new scheme we're going to cash in on them.

"We was in the Middle West at the time. We blow into the next burg on our list, look the main drag over, and go to work. Our guns are ditched down under a pile of rocks near the jungle.

"We make a drug-store. There's two nice little boys in it. I plant myself in front of one of them, with one hand in my coat pocket, and Flogger does the same with the other.

" 'Come through,' we tells 'em.

"Without a squawk, one of 'em pushes down the 'No Sale' key of the damper, scoops out every nickel

that's in it, and passes it over to Flogger.

" ' Lay down behind the counter and don't be too much in a hurry about getting up,' we tell them next.

"They do as they're told, and me and Flogger go on out and about our business.

"The next day we push over two more stores and move on to the next town. Every town we hit we give our new racket a couple of whirls, and it goes nice. Having an ace up our sleeves, we can take chances that otherwise would have been foolish — we can pull a couple or even three jobs a day without waiting for the rumpus from the first one to die down.

"Pickings were pretty them days!

"Then, one afternoon in a fresh burg, we push over a garage, a pawnshop and a shoe store, and we get picked up.

"The bulls that nabbed us was loaded for bear, but — outside of running until we saw it was no use — we went along with them as nice as you please. When they frisked us they found the money from that day's jobs, but that was all. The rest was cached where we knew it would be when we wanted it. And our guns was still under that pile of stones three States away. We didn't have no use for them any more.

"The guys we had stuck up that afternoon came in to look us over, and they all identified us right away. As one of 'em said there was no forgettin' our faces. But we sat tight and said nothing. We knew where we stood and we was satisfied.

"After a couple days they let us have a mouthpiece. We picked out a kid whose diploma hadn't been with him long enough to collect any dust yet, but he looked like he wouldn't throw us down; and he didn't have to know much law for us. Then we laid around and took jail life easy.

"A few days of that, and they yank us into court. We let things run along for a while without fightin' back, until the right time came. Then our kid mouthpiece gets up and springs our little joker on them.

"His clients, he says, meaning me and Flogger, are perfectly willing to plead guilty to begging. But there is nothing to hold them for robbery on. They were in need of funds, and they went into three business establishments and asked for money. They had no weapons. The evidence doesn't show that they made any threats. Whatever motives may have prompted the persons in the stores to hand over the contents of the various cash registers to oblige them — the kid says — has no bearing on the matter. The evidence is plain. His clients asked for money and it was

given to them. Begging, certainly — and so his clients are liable to sentences of 30 days or so in the county jail for vagrancy. But robbery — no!

"Well, son, it was a riot! I thought the beak was going to bust something. He's a big bloated hick with a red face and a pair of nose-pinchers. His face turns purple now, and the cheaters slide down his nose three times in five minutes. The district attorney does a proper war dance with the whoops and all. But we had 'em!"

The old man stopped with an air of finality. I waited a while, but he didn't resume the story, if there were, indeed, any more to it; so I prodded him.

"I don't see where that proves your contention," I said. "There's no using of the law as a weapon there."

"Wait, sonny, wait," he promised. "You'll see before I'm through . . . They put their witnesses back on the stand again, then. But there was nothing to it. None of 'em had seen any weapons, and none of 'em couldn't say we had threatened 'em. They said things about our looks, but it ain't a crime to be ugly.

"They shut up shop for the day, then, and chased me and Flogger back to the jail. And we went back as happy a pair as you ever seen. We had the world by the tail with a downhill pull, and we liked it. Thirty days, or even 60, in the county jail on a vag charge didn't mean nothing to us. We'd had that happen to us before, and got over it.

"We were happy — but that came from the ignorance of our trustin' natures. We thought maybe a court was a place where justice was done after all; where right was right; and where things went accordin' to the law. We'd been in trouble with the law before, plenty, but this was different — we had the law on our side this time; and we counted on it stickin' with us. But —

"Well, anyway, they take us back over to court after a few more days. And as soon as I get a slant at the beak and the district attorney I get a sort of chill up my back. They got mean lights in their eyes, like a coupla kids that had put tacks on a chair and was a-waiting for somebody to sit on them. Maybe, I think, they've rigged things up so's they can slip us two or three, or even six, months on vag charges. But I didn't suspect half of it!

"Say, you've heard this chatter about how slow the courts are, haven't you? Well, let me tell you, nothing in the world ever moved any faster than that court that morning. Before we had got fixed in our chairs, almost, things was humming.

"Our kid mouthpiece is bouncing up and down continuous, trying to get a word in. But not a chance! Every time he opens his mouth the beak cracks down on him and shuts him up; even threatening to throw him out and fine him in the bargain if he don't keep quiet.

"The man we'd gone up against in the garage was the proprietor, but the ones in the hock shop and the shoe store were just hirelings. So they leave the garage man out of the game. But they put the other two in the dock, charged with grand larceny, have 'em plead guilty, sentence 'em to five years apiece, and suspend the sentences before you could shift a chew from one cheek to the other.

'If,' the beak says in answer to our mouthpiece's squawk, 'your clients simply asked for the money and these men gave it to them, then these two men are guilty of theft, since the money belonged to their employers. There is nothing for the court to do, therefore but to find them guilty of grand larceny and sentence them to five years each in the state prison. But the evidence tends to show that these men were actuated simply by an overwhelming desire to help two of their fellow men; that they were induced to steal the money simply by an ungovernable impulse to charity. And the court, therefore, feels that it is justified in exercising its legal privilege of leniency, and suspending their sentences.'

"Me and Flogger don't understand what's being done to us right away, but our mouthpiece does, and as soon as I get a look at him I know it's pretty bad. He's sort of gasping.

"The rest of the dirty work takes longer, but there's no stopping it. This old buzzard of a judge has our charges changed to 'receiving stolen property' — a felony in that state; we are convicted on two counts, and he slips us ten years in the big house on each, the hitches to run end to end.

"And does that old buzzard feel that the court should exercise its legal privilege of leniency and suspend our sentences? Fat chance! Me and Flogger goes over!"

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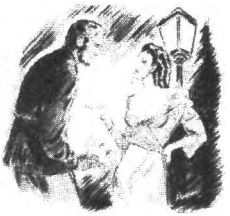

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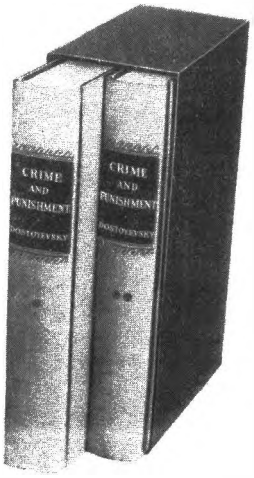

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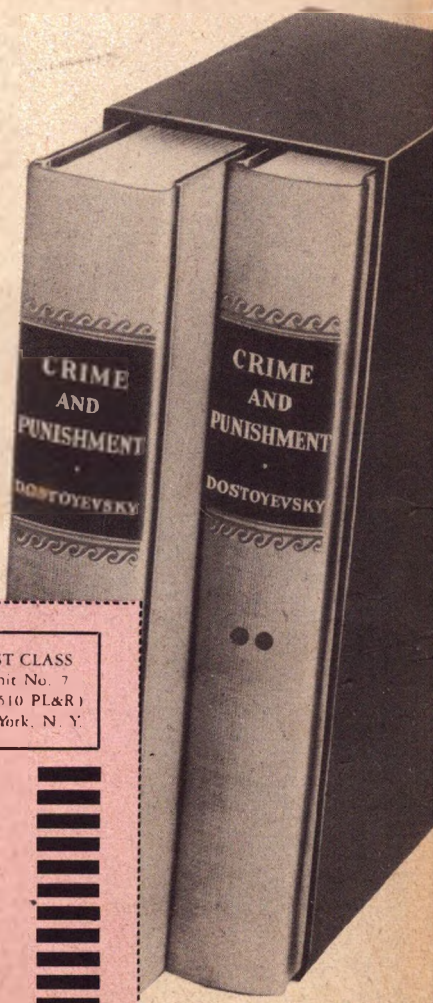

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