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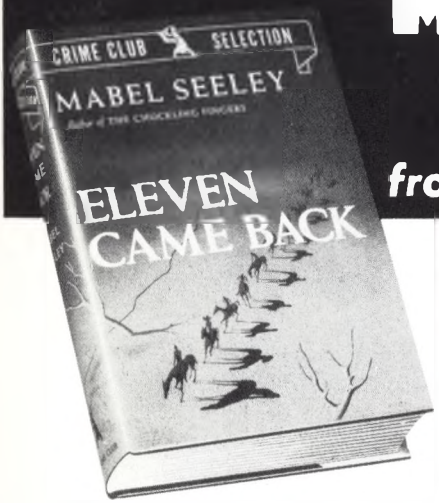

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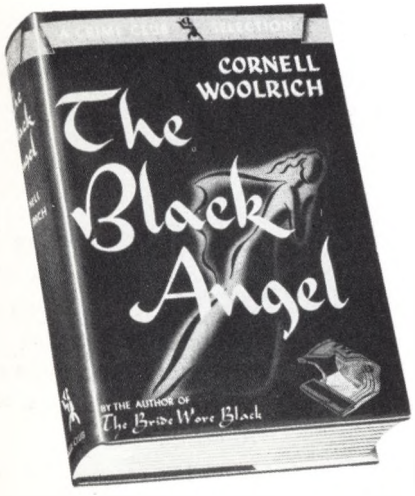

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THE CRIME CLUB

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PUBLISHER

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EDITOR

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Q5-42

A Mr. Fortune story never before published in the United States! Hop to it, fans!

Who are the "Big Four" of English detective characters in the field of the short story? From the standpoints of prestige and accomplishment, there can be no quarrel in nominating Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Thorndyke, Father Brown, and Reggie Fortune. Now it's a curious and interesting fact, not generally realized, that of this "Big Four" Reggie Fortune appears in the greatest number of short-story exploits. Here's the box-score to date:

Reggie Fortune: 85
Sherlock Holmes: 57 (including the recently discovered new story)
Father Brown: 50
Dr. Thorndyke: 40

THE THISTLE DOWN

by H. C. BAILEY

"THIS IS Max Tollis speaking," said the telephone angrily, "Sir Max Tollis."

"I am sorry," the parlourmaid answered, "Mr. Fortune has a consultation."

"Put me through to him," the telephone commanded. "It's a matter of life and death."

Mr. Fortune was building a theatre of his own design for the small girl whom he liked best. He set up the proscenium arch before he listened to this appeal. Then he asked, "Whose life? Whose death?" For Sir Max Tollis, though known to and knowing everybody, was immensely uninteresting to him.

"Bob Dale has been shot," Tollis responded with vehemence. "My secretary, Fortune, a dear boy. God knows how it happened. I can't believe it was suicide. I have the police here, but they're all at sea. I'd give my soul to get the truth clear. Would you come down, like a good fellow? If there's a man alive can work the thing out, it's you, Fortune. Bob never killed himself."

"When the police want me, they'll tell me so," said Reggie.

"Damn the police! I'm thinking of the boy's good name. I was fond of him."

"Where is he?" Reggie asked.

"What? He was found here, my little place, Frith House, just beyond King's Walton. It's only fifteen miles."

"In an hour," said Reggie, and rang off.

He took much less, for, curdling the blood of his chauffeur, he drove himself through London. When he

swung round the last curves of the drive which led to the white concrete lump of Frith House a man came out of the door and stopped to wait for him and met him with a puzzled smile.

"Good morning, Mr. Fortune."

"Well, well!" Reggie sighed satisfaction. "So you're in charge. Splendid."

"The same to you, sir," Inspector Underwood answered. "I know you're quick, but this beats all. I've only just 'phoned to ask the Yard for you."

"I am wonderful. Yes. But not now. Tollis asked first. Sayin' the police were all at sea."

"They haven't had much time to make land. Tollis is taking it very hard. I don't blame him."

Tollis came bustling from the house, a large, imposing, florid person. "Fortune, I'm deeply grateful to you." He shook hands impressively. "You know Inspector Underwood? Perhaps you will explain to him —"

"I have. Yes. Anything been moved?"

"No, sir," said Underwood. "The body and the car are still as they were when the local police got here at ten o'clock.

"And nothing done!" Tollis cried. "Now, Fortune, will you come and examine the poor fellow?"

"One moment. Where was the dead man previous to bein' dead?"

"God knows," Tollis answered. "This is the position. My wife and I spend practically all our time here. But yesterday we were both at our flat in town for the Derwent wedding and the Charities Ball. After that was over we drove straight down here and arrived about four in the morning. Bob's car was in the garage then, the chauffeur says, but, of course, it didn't occur to him to look inside. When he opened the garage again after breakfast he saw Bob lying in the back of his car dead and cold. There was a wound in his head and a pistol on the car floor. We got the doctor and the police, and they said he'd been shot. That's all they could say!"

"Not bein' magicians," Reggie murmured. "Nor am I, Tollis. However. Anything known of the movements of the dead man yesterday?"

"I wish there was," said Tollis.

"And there is," said Underwood. "A footman here took a telephone message for him at three o'clock from a Mrs. Meryon — just to tell Mr. Dale 'Same place. Same time.' He did tell Mr. Dale and after that nobody saw Dale again. The servants didn't think anything of his being out to dinner — he often went off when Sir Max wasn't here."

"It's the first I've heard of this," Tollis exclaimed.

"You haven't been in much of a state to ask things, sir," said Underwood.

"I suppose I'm not." Tollis looked from one man to the other. "Mrs. Meryon — and Bob. I don't understand."

"Lady known to you?" Reggie asked.

"My wife calls. The Meryons are new-comers; they've taken a cottage for the summer. I believe Mrs. Meryon was on the stage, a striking figure of a woman. It's news to me Bob was on any terms with her."

"We'll work that out," said Underwood.

"Whatever you want to do, do it." Tollis was impatient. "But you'd better show Mr. Fortune everything here."

"I will," said Underwood, and Reggie took a case from his car and went with them to the garage, which was concealed from the house by a bank of rhododendrons.

Two cars stood in it, a resplendent limousine and a much-used ten which had shed some oil on the floor. Underwood opened the off-side back door of the smaller car.

Reggie saw a body slumped down in a heap as if he had slid from the back seat, the body of a young and dapper man. His face had been rather too pretty for manhood before the mouth sagged loose, before blood clotted across his cheek. The blood came down from a wound which darkened the fair wavy hair above his right ear.

"Photograph and finger-prints and all that?" Reggie asked, and Underwood nodded. "What did the doctor say?"

"Time of death uncertain, but not less than twelve hours ago. Cause of death, shot from a weapon held close to his ear, which might have been that pistol by his legs on the mat. And taking all things together, it was quite possibly suicide."

"Nonsense," Tollis exploded. "I'll never believe that. I knew Bob. He was the last man in the world to kill himself. He never had a grouse. He didn't know what worry was. He enjoyed every minute he lived."

"And then — this." Reggie waved a hand at the huddled body. "Well, well." He picked up the pistol. "Webley self-loading. About .455." He looked at the wound. "It could be."

"You say suicide, Fortune?" Tollis demanded. "Damn it, man, you haven't examined him yet. You can't jump at suicide, like the local doctor, because you find a pistol with him."

"I never jump," said Reggie.

"I don't believe Bob ever had a pistol — or knew one end from the

other," Tollis retorted. "He wasn't that kind of fellow."

"Don't look it. No. However." Reggie put the pistol in his pocket. "We will now have a nearer view. Give me a hand, Underwood." They lifted the stiff body from the car and Reggie knelt down and opened his case. . . . He pored over the wound and his round face was plaintive. "Well, well," he sighed and smiled awry. With a pair of tiny forceps he detached from the congealed blood something filmy, fluffy, and put it into a metal box.

"What the devil's that?" Tollis cried.

Reggie did not answer. He was extracting another feathery tuft and another. He picked yet more from the dead man's hair, but those he put in a second box.

Then he rose and displayed them to Tollis. "There you are."

"What is the stuff?" Tollis asked angrily.

"You don't know it? Fruit of carlina vulgaris. The common thistle."

"Thistle down!" Tollis muttered.

"As you say."

"Are you sure?"

Reggie laughed. "Oh yes, yes," as Underwood gave him a questioning stare.

"Thistle down on him," Tollis cried, "in the wound! Why, then, he couldn't have been shot here in the garage!"

"But where thistle down was blowin' about. Yes. That is the natural inference. That bein' thus, go along with Underwood and see if any of your servants can tell him the places Dale frequented when he went off in your absence. And I'll take another look at the wound."

After they had gone, his attention was transferred from the wound to the pistol. Years old, he decided, seen a lot of service, fired recently, one cartridge gone from the magazine. He pocketed the pistol again and proceeded to search the car. "Case of cartridge not here," he murmured with a crooked smile, but he went on hands and knees to pore over the mats again. He found tufts of thistle down upon the mat at the back, flattened out by the pressure of a foot which had left spots of damp dust. Beside them was a smeared blood-stain.

Having taken Dale's keys, he locked the car doors, then wandered about the garage, peering into every corner. "No cartridge case," he purred, and went back to the house. A butler of irritated visage answered the bell. "Inspector Underwood engaged with Sir Max?" Reggie enquired. "All right, I'll carry on." He crossed the hall and shut himself into the telephone box. . . .

When he came out the butler,

hovering by another door, turned with a start. "In there, are they?" Reggie smiled.

"If you please, sir," the butler ushered him into a room half-study more than half-lounge.

Tollis and Underwood sat there with a woman standing before them.

"Just telephoned 'em to take the body away," said Reggie. "Well?"

"This is Miss Benn," said Underwood, "Lady Tollis's maid. She tells me she's seen Dale's car on Longley common more than once and him round about there with Mrs. Meryon."

"Oh." Reggie surveyed the woman. "As if they were — friends?"

She pursed her prim lips. "They looked like it."

"Thank you. That's all." He dismissed her. "You didn't know that, Tollis?"

"She'd never told me."

"Nor your wife?"

Tollis flushed. "Of course not. She's a decent woman. My wife loathes scandal."

"I hope Lady Tollis hasn't been too much distressed by Dale's death."

"Naturally she's upset. She was fond of the boy. We both were. This story of Mrs. Meryon is staggering. I should never have thought Dale would care for a woman of her type, and a married woman too."

"You believe the story?"

"I believe what Benn said, absolutely. She's no scandalmonger."

"I had to drag it out of her," said Underwood, "and it fits with the 'phone message from Mrs. Meryon telling Dale to come to the same place, same time."

"That is so," Reggie agreed. "Yes. By the way, did you find a cartridge case?"

"No, sir." Underwood's sagacious eyes watched him steadily like a dog's. "I couldn't see one in the car or in the garage."

"What's that?" Tollis broke in. "Dale was shot, wasn't he?"

"Oh yes. Yes. But the pistol found with him would eject a cartridge when fired. It was fired. And the cartridge isn't there."

"Why, then," Tollis cried — "then Dale didn't commit suicide."

"That is the obvious inference," Reggie murmured.

"That's what you meant when you showed me the thistle down in the wound. He was killed somewhere else and brought back with the pistol to get the murder taken for suicide. You're marvellous, Fortune."

"Not me. No. Only see what there is. And believe evidence. We haven't finished. Murderer not yet found. Nor the place of murder. Where do thistles grow round here, Tollis?"

Tollis looked at a loss. "Nowhere near that I know of. Beyond my

grounds there's woodland. Frith Wood. My God, the common, though — Longley Common, a cursed lot of thistles there!"

"Well, well. Longley Common. Where Dale has been seen with Mrs. Meryon. Who wanted him same place yesterday. Place where thistles grow. Where there might be a cartridge case of a Webley .455. I wonder. Get your wife's maid, Tollis. Want her to show us where she saw Dale and Mrs. Meryon companying together."

"Very well." Tollis rose. "What a ghastly business!"

"Not nice, no. The sooner it's over the sooner to sleep. We'll see Mrs. Meryon on return. Have your chaps fetch her here, Underwood."

Reggie's car, with the maid beside the chauffeur, conveyed them some two miles of a winding green tunnel of a road through beechwood before it came out on a common which spread, dim in haze beneath a sultry sky, wide spaces of coarse grass studded with thistles.

"You'd better stop now," said the maid as they passed a rough track through the grass. "It's along there I've seen Mr. Dale."

Reggie jumped out of the car and contemplated the track and the common. "Lots of thistles," he murmured plaintively.

"The devil of a lot," said Tollis. "Do you mean Mr. Dale was here by the road, Benn?"

"Oh no, sir," she answered. "He took his car along the track up to those clumps of trees. But I thought this gentleman's was too big."

"Shall we walk then, Fortune?" Tollis asked.

"Yes," Reggie sighed. "Do the painful right. Go ahead," and Tollis went up the track with the maid.

"There has been a car along here," said Underwood to Reggie's ear. "Worn Dunlop tyres. And so are Dale's."

"As you say," Reggie answered. But he was not looking at the tyre marks; he surveyed the thistles on either side, the misty expanse of the common, and turned with a dreamy smile to Underwood. "My dear chap!" he murmured.

Underwood stared about him. But Reggie's pensive attention had concentrated on picking a way along the sandy ruts. The long grass about them was wet from the haze.

The maid stopped, pointing at a tongue of open ground dividing two copses of birch and crab-apple. "That's where Mr. Dale put his car," she said, "And Mrs. Meryon and him among the trees."

"Thanks very much." Reggie came up to her. "Stand fast. Now we'll see what we can see, Underwood."

On the dank way from the track to the copses the tussocks of grass were disturbed and some thistles had been broken down. "Thistles enough about," said Tollis.

"Oh yes. Yes. Plenty and fruity." Reggie stopped to collect some tufts of down.

"My God, she's right!" Tollis cried. "There has been a car here; come and look at this."

"What?" Reggie was putting the thistle down in a box with affectionate care and Underwood watching him. He stooped to pluck some grass. "Go to it, Underwood."

Underwood strode on to Tollis and was shown the traces of a car starting and turning by the trees. "Yes, there's been a car here several times," he pronounced, "and once quite lately. A small car and tyres like Mr. Dale's."

Reggie strolled up to inspect and agree. "That is so. Place where the car was. Place where thistle down is. If you find the cartridge case also, you might prove where the murder was."

"The cartridge?" Tollis repeated. "Oh, yes, of course; that would clinch things absolutely." He looked about him. "But it's almost like hunting for a needle in a haystack."

"You think so? Should be near where his car last rested, what?"

"There is that," Tollis said slowly. "My God, you are keen, Fortune!"

Underwood went delicately over the crushed grass and Reggie joined the search. It was not long before Underwood plucked his arm and showed him a gleam of brass in the dank tufts. Reggie picked it up with forceps and held it to the light. "Yes, I think so," he murmured — "from a self-loader .455. Easy to prove it came from the pistol." He put the cartridge away and over his round face came a small benign smile. "Now we'll go talk to Mrs. Meryon." . . .

When they reached Tollis's house again a detective met them and told Underwood that the sergeant had Mrs. Meryon there and Mr. Meryon with her. He pointed to the study.

"You'd better come too, Tollis," said Reggie.

"If you say so — it's a foul business," Tollis answered. "Anything you want."

They went into the study, and Meryon, a swarthy, lean man, started up and limped towards them demanding which of them was Inspector Underwood and why his wife was brought to that house.

Underwood told him to sit down. "I am investigating a case of murder, the murder of Mr. Dale, the secretary of Sir Max Tollis here."

"You're Tollis, are you?" Meryon scowled at Reggie.

"Not me, no. My name's For-

tune." Reggie contemplated the woman, while Meryon transferred his scowl to Tollis. She had not moved; she sat erect, lithe and tense, the rich, dark colours of her face set in a stern calm.

"How do you do, Sir Max?" She spoke with contempt, and Tollis bowed.

"I have to ask you some questions, Mrs. Meryon," Underwood went on. "When did you last meet Mr. Dale?"

"Some days ago. I don't remember which day."

"Was that on Longley Common?"

"Possibly. I walk there sometimes."

"And he used to drive out there to meet you?"

"What do you mean?" Meryon roared.

"I have to put these things to Mrs. Meryon, sir," Underwood told him. "Were you aware of her meetings with Mr. Dale?"

"Yes. I knew all about them. We were both sorry for him."

"Why?" Reggie murmured.

"He was a nice boy in a rotten job."

"Dale never told you that," Tollis cried.

"Didn't he?" Mrs. Meryon raised her black eyebrows.

"What was rotten about his job?" Reggie asked.

"Sir Max can tell you. I never knew just what Mr. Dale meant."

Tollis laughed. "That's the story! It won't do, ma'am. Dale was with me for years before you came here."

"Yes, he told me that too. I don't know when he began to be afraid of you."

"Not very clever," Tollis sneered. "It's no use pretending Dale wasn't happy with me. The whole place knows he was. But I had better leave the lady to you, Inspector." He rose.

"If you please," said Underwood. "Now, Mrs. Meryon, how often did you go alone to meet Dale on the common?"

"I never went to meet him. He sometimes met me."

"But not with your husband there?"

"That's a scandalous question." Meryon started up. "I'll report you for it."

"Been in the Army, Meryon?" Reggie asked.

"What? I'm not a regular. I was through the last war."

"I thought so. Ever carry a pistol?"

"Why?" Meryon scowled.

"We want to know."

"Was Dale shot?"

"We're askin' the questions."

"I had one on service, of course."

"What sort?"

"Webley automatic. Lots of fellows had 'em."

"I know. Have you kept yours?"

"Good Lord, no."

"When did you get rid of it?"

"Years ago."

"Well, well." Reggie turned to Underwood. "Don't forget the message."

"I hadn't." Underwood was aggrieved. "I was coming to that before."

"My dear chap! Sorry. My error." Reggie looked at his watch. "Too bad." He pushed back his chair and wandered away to the window.

"Now, Mrs. Meryon," Underwood said again, "why did you telephone Dale yesterday to —?"

"I didn't," she interrupted.

"A 'phone message from you to Dale was taken by the footman here after lunch yesterday saying to meet you 'same place, same time.' "

"It wasn't from me," she said quietly.

"We shall be able to trace the call, Mrs. Meryon."

"Why haven't you?" she asked.

Reggie strolled across the room and went out.

"Having received that message," Underwood continued, "Dale left this house, and I have evidence he proceeded to Longley Common, where he had been in the habit of meeting you, and he was shot there. Do —"

"Trace the call," said Mrs. Meryon. "I went up to town yesterday morning with Douglas. We did a matinée and —"

The door was opened and a booming voice called: "Sir Max Tollis! This way, sir, if you please."

Tollis bustled out. The door was shut behind him. He found himself confronting a solid man with two others at his elbows and Reggie in the background.

"I am Superintendent Bell," the central man announced. "Sir Max Tollis, I have to send you to the police-station, where you will be detained. You may be charged with a grave crime. I warn you that anything you say will be taken down and may be used in evidence."

"What charge?" Tollis gasped.

"The crime I am dealing with is the murder of Robert Dale."

"Fortune!" Tollis cried. "You know I sent for you."

"Oh yes," Reggie murmured, "to prove Dale didn't kill himself. I have. You told me you'd give your soul to get the truth clear. I've got it, Tollis."

Tollis lurched forward, babbling incoherent panic. "Take him away," said Bell.

Reggie went back to the study.

"Sorry you've been troubled," he apologised to the Meryons, who were looking dazed. "Couldn't do without your side of it. As you see."

"I don't," Mrs. Meryon answered sharply.

"My dear lady! You said Dale hated his job and was afraid of Tollis."

"So he was, but he never told me why. He only moaned."

"Look at it the other way round. Tollis was afraid he would tell you why. That's what you gave us. Motive for murder. Motive for putting it on you and Meryon. You've been very inconvenient for Tollis. Thanks very much."

Mrs. Meryon spoke loud enough for Reggie to hear what she said to her husband as she went out. "The man's as bland as a cat." But he was gratified. He liked cats.

Bell stood aside to let her pass and then came in. "Well, young fellow" — he clapped Underwood on the shoulder — "you've done a good job of work this time. Tollis is an old fox. That thistle down was the smartest touch I remember. And yet it's going to hang him."

"The thistle down?" Underwood looked stupefaction.

"Oh yes," Reggie assured him, "you spotted the flaw. Thistle down in the wound, thistle down in hair and car, proof Dale was not shot in the garage, but out in the open. Only the thistle down was damp. Which gave the game away. That thistle down never took the air. It never blew on to Dale. It was put. Cunning fellow, Tollis. Falls down on detail. Well, he had his engagements in town yesterday for an alibi. He knew the Meryons were not at home. So he sent a 'phone message in her name telling Dale to meet her on Longley Common and went there and collected thistle down. When Dale went to the garage and started his engine Tollis shot him, using the sort of pistol Meryon had in the war. Then planted the thistle down on the body and collected the cartridge case from the floor and went to town. Bold bad fellow. Called me in this morning to prove how fond he was of Dale and make sure the death wouldn't pass as suicide, but murder by Meryon out of jealousy. Produced the maid's evidence of meetings with Mrs. Meryon and so got us to the thistles on the common. Which were still damp as when he picked the down yesterday. Havin' led us to the place Mrs. Meryon and Dale met, he left us to find the cartridge there. You noticed how well he managed that, said it was huntin' for a needle in a haystack. Devilish clever, as he said of me, confound his impudence. But he was weak on detail again. Smear of car oil round the cartridge rim. No oil on the common. But oil on the garage floor. Which is where it fell when ejected. I told Tollis if we found the cartridge we might prove where the murder was. He missed the point."

"I didn't get the hang of the thistle down, sir," said the honest Underwood. "I just thought there was something queer about it."

"My dear chap! You did," Reggie chuckled. "Your work."

"I suppose it makes a case." Underwood looked at Bell.

"There's more than that thistle down, my lad," Bell answered. "Mr. Fortune 'phoned me about it being wet and asked me to have a look at the clothes Tollis wore yesterday. When we tried his flat, we found a lounge suit packed up to send to the cleaners. In the turn-up of the trousers some damp grass seed, in one of the jacket pockets bits of thistle down, and on the cuff of a sleeve a blood-stain. That's the case. And it'll hang Max Tollis."

"Yes, I think so," Reggie murmured.

"It's strong enough," Underwood frowned. "But why? I mean to say, what's the motive?"

"My dear Underwood! You heard Mrs. Meryon. Fear. Fear she had hold of Dale, he'd tell her why his job was nasty, why he was afraid of Tollis. Tollis had to wipe him out and the Meryons with him."

"But Tollis is a public man and all that," Underwood objected. "I don't see how his secretary could have anything on him to risk murder for."

"Ah! Wait till we've gone through Tollis's papers, my boy," Bell answered.

"My guess is blackmail," said Reggie dreamily. "The higher rate, big-game blackmail. Always thought Tollis knew too much."

Remember Nick Noble, the wine-soaked sleuth of "Screwball Division"? Here he is again, still swatting that imaginary fly on his sunset nose.

Detective stories come and detective stories go, but the ones we honor most and remember longest are those in the grand tradition — the eagerly devoured "simon-pures" that always play the game and follow the rules. Mr. Boucher's story is pure detection of the modern school — strong in plot, even stronger in counterplot, eminently "fair," and made of the stuff of this morning's news.

"QL 696 .C9" (provocative title!) has never before been published anywhere.

QL 696 .C9

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

THE LIBRARIAN'S body had been removed from the swivel chair, but Detective Lieutenant Donald MacDonald stood beside the desk. This was only his second murder case, and he was not yet hardened enough to use the seat freshly vacated by a corpse. He stood and faced the four individuals, one of whom was a murderer.

"Our routine has been completed," he said, "and I've taken a statement from each of you. But before I hand in my report, I want to go over those statements in the presence of all of you. If anything doesn't jibe, I want you to say so."

The librarian's office of the Serafin Pelayo branch of the Los Angeles Public Library was a small room. The three witnesses and the murderer (but which was which?) sat crowded together. The girl in the gray dress — Stella Swift, junior librarian — shifted restlessly. "It was all so . . . so confusing and so awful," she said.

MacDonald nodded sympathetically. "I know." It was this girl who had found the body. Her eyes were dry now, but her nerves were still tense. "I'm sorry to insist on this, but . . ." His glance surveyed the other three: Mrs. Cora Jarvis, children's librarian, a fluffy kitten; James Stickney, library patron, a youngish man with no tie and wild hair; Norbert Utter, high-school teacher, a lean, almost ascetic-looking man of forty-odd. One of these . . .

"Immediately before the murder," MacDonald began, "the branch librarian Miss Benson was alone in this office typing. Apparently" (he gestured at the sheet of paper in the typewriter) "a draft for a list of needed replacements. This office

can be reached only through those stacks, which can in turn be reached only by passing the main desk. Mrs. Jarvis, you were then on duty at that desk, and according to you only these three people were then in the stacks. None of them, separated as they were in the stacks, could see each other or the door of this office." He paused.

The thin teacher spoke up. "But this is ridiculous, officer. Simply because I was browsing in the stacks to find some fresh ideas for outside reading . . ."

The fuzzy-haired Stickney answered him. "The Loot's right. Put our stories together, and it's got to be one of us. Take your medicine, comrade."

"Thank you, Mr. Stickney. That's the sensible attitude. Now Miss Benson was shot, to judge by position and angle, from that doorway. The weapon was dropped on the spot. All four of you claim to have heard that shot from your respective locations and hurried toward it. It was Miss Swift who opened the door and discovered the body. Understandably enough, she fainted. Mrs. Jarvis looked after her while Mr. Stickney had presence of mind enough to phone the police. All of you watched each other, and no one entered this room until our arrival. Is all that correct?"

Little Mrs. Jarvis nodded. "My, Lieutenant, you put it all so neatly! You should have been a cataloguer like Miss Benson."

"A cataloguer? But she was head of the branch, wasn't she?"

"She had the soul of a cataloguer," said Mrs. Jarvis darkly.

"Now this list that she was typing when she was killed." MacDonald took the paper from the typewriter. "I want you each to look at that and tell me if the last item means anything to you."

The end of the list read:

Davies: MISSION TO MOSCOW (2 cop)
Kernan: DEFENSE WILL NOT WIN THE WAR
FIC
MacInnes: ABOVE SUSP
QL 696 .C9

The paper went from hand to hand. It evoked nothing but frowns and puzzled headshakings.

"All right." MacDonald picked up the telephone pad from the desk. "Now can any of you tell me why a librarian should have jotted down the phone number of the F.B.I.?"

This question fetched a definite reaction from Stickney, a sort of wry exasperation; but it was Miss Swift who answered, and oddly enough with a laugh. "Dear Miss Benson . . ." she said. "Of course she'd have the F.B.I.'s number. Professional necessity."

"I'm afraid I don't follow that."

"Some librarians have been advancing the theory, you see, that a librarian can best help defense work by watching what people use which books. For instance, if somebody keeps borrowing every work you have on high explosives, you know he's a dangerous saboteur planning to blow up the aqueduct and you turn him over to the G-men."

"Seriously? It sounds like nonsense."

"I don't know, Lieutenant. Aside from card catalogs and bird-study, there was one thing Miss Benson loved. And that was America. She didn't think it was nonsense."

"I see . . . And none of you has anything further to add to this story?"

"I," Mr. Utter announced, "have fifty themes to correct this evening and . . ."

Lieutenant MacDonald shrugged. "O.K. Go ahead. All of you. And remember you're apt to be called back for further questioning at any moment."

"And the library?" Mrs. Jarvis asked. "I suppose I'm the ranking senior in charge now and I . . ."

"I spoke to the head of the Branches Department on the phone. She agrees with me that it's best to keep the branch closed until our investigation is over. But I'll ask you and Miss Swift to report as usual tomorrow; the head of Branches will be here then too, and we can confer further on any matters touching the library itself."

"And tomorrow I was supposed to have a story hour. Well at least," the children's librarian sighed, "I shan't have to learn a new story tonight."

Alone, Lieutenant MacDonald turned back to the desk. He set the pad down by the telephone and dialed the number which had caught his attention. It took time to reach the proper authority and establish his credentials, but he finally secured the promise of a full file on all information which Miss Alice Benson had turned over to the F.B.I.

"Do you think that's it?" a voice asked eagerly.

He turned. It was the junior librarian, the girl with the gray dress and the gold-brown hair. "Miss Swift!"

"I hated to sneak in on you, but I want to know. Miss Benson was an old dear and I . . . I found her and . . . Do you think that's it? That she really did find out something for the F.B.I. and because she did . . . ?"

"It seems likely," he said slowly. "According to all the evidence, she was on the best of terms with her staff. She had no money to speak of, and she was old for a crime-of-

passion set-up. Utter and Stickney apparently knew her only casually as regular patrons of this branch. What have we left for a motive, unless it's this F.B.I. business?"

"We thought it was so funny. We used to rib her about being a G-woman. And now . . . Lieutenant, you've got to find out who killed her." The girl's lips set firmly and her eyes glowed.

MacDonald reached a decision. "Come on."

"Come? Where to?"

"I'm going to drive you home. But first we're going to stop off and see a man, and you're going to help me give him all the facts of this screwball case."

"Who? Your superior?"

MacDonald hesitated. "Yes," he said at last. "My superior."

He explained about Nick Noble as they drove. How Lieutenant Noble, a dozen years ago, had been the smartest problem-cracker in the department. How his captain had got into a sordid scandal and squeezed out, leaving the innocent Noble to take the rap. How his wife had needed a vital operation just then, and hadn't got it. How the widowed and disgraced man had sunk until . . .

"Nobody knows where he lives or what he lives on. All we know is that we can find him at a little joint on North Main, drinking cheap sherry by the water glass. Sherry's all that life has left him — that, and the ability to make the toughest problem come crystal clear. Somewhere in the back of that wino's mind is a precision machine that sorts the screwiest facts into the one inevitable pattern. He's the court of last appeal on a case that's nuts, and God knows this one is. QL 696 .C9 . . . Screwball Division, L.A.P.D., the boys call him."

The girl shuddered a little as they entered the Chula Negra Café. It was not a choice spot for the élite. Not that it was a dive, either. No juke, no B-girls; just a counter and booths for the whole-hearted eating and drinking of the Los Angeles Mexicans.

MacDonald remembered which booth was Nick Noble's sanctum. The little man sat there, staring into a half-empty glass of sherry, as though he hadn't moved since MacDonald last saw him after the case of the stopped timepieces. His skin was dead white and his features sharp and thin. His eyes were of a blue so pale that the irises were almost invisible.

"Hi!" said MacDonald. "Remember me?"

One thin blue-veined hand swatted at the sharp nose. The pale eyes rested on the couple. "MacDon-

ald . . ." Nick Noble smiled faintly. "Glad. Sit down." He glanced at Stella Swift. "Yours?"

MacDonald coughed. "No. Miss Swift, Mr. Noble. Miss Swift and I have a story to tell you."

Nick Noble's eyes gleamed dimly. "Trouble?"

"Trouble. Want to hear it?"

Nick Noble swatted at his nose again. "Fly," he explained to the girl. "Stays there." There was no fly. He drained his glass of sherry. "Give."

MacDonald gave, much the same précis that he had given to the group in the office. When he had finished, Nick Noble sat silent for so long that Stella Swift looked apprehensively at his glass. Then he stirred slightly, beckoned to a waitress, pointed to his empty glass, and said to the girl, "This woman. Benson. What was she like?"

"She was nice," said Stella. "But of course she *was* a cataloguer."

"Cataloguer?"

"You're not a librarian. You wouldn't understand what that means. But I gather that when people go to library school — I never did, I'm just a junior — most of them suffer through cataloguing, but a few turn out to be born cataloguers. Those are a race apart. They know a little of everything, all the systems of classification, Dewey, Library of Congress, down to the last number, and just how many spaces you indent each item on a typed card, and all about bibliography, and they shudder in their souls if the least little thing is wrong. They have eyes like eagles and memories like elephants."

"With that equipment," said MacDonald, "she might really have spotted something for the F.B.I."

"Might," said Nick Noble. Then to the girl, "Hobbies?"

"Miss Benson's? Before the war she used to be a devoted bird-watcher, and of course being what she was she had a positively Kieranesque knowledge of birds. But lately she's been all wrapped up in trying to spot saboteurs instead."

"I'm pretty convinced," MacDonald contributed, "that that's our angle, screwy as it sounds. The F.B.I. lead may point out our man, and there's still hope from the lab reports on prints and the paraffin test."

"Tests," Nick Noble snorted. "All you do is teach criminals what not to do."

"But if those fail us, we've got a message from Miss Benson herself telling us who killed her. And that's what I want you to figure out." He handed over the paper from the typewriter. "It's pretty clear what happened. She was typing, looked up, and saw her murderer with a gun.

If she wrote down his name, he might see it and destroy the paper. So she left this cryptic indication. It can't possibly be part of the list she was typing; Mrs. Jarvis and Miss Swift don't recognize it as library routine. And the word above breaks off in the middle. Those letters and figures are her dying words. Can you read them?"

Nick Noble's pallid lips moved faintly. "Q L six nine six point C nine." He leaned back in the booth and his eyes glazed over. "Names," he said.

"Names?"

"Names of four."

"Oh. Norbert Utter, the teacher; James Stickney, the nondescript; Mrs. Cora Jarvis, the children's librarian; and Miss Stella Swift here."

"So." Nick Noble's eyes came to life again. "Thanks, MacDonald. Nice problem. Give you proof tonight."

Stella Swift gasped. "Does that mean that he . . .?"

MacDonald grinned. "You're grandstanding for the lady, Mr. Noble. You can't mean that you've solved that damned QL business like that?"

"Pencil," Nick Noble said.

Wonderingly, Lieutenant MacDonald handed one over. Nick Noble took a paper napkin, scrawled two words, folded it, and handed it to Stella. "Not now," he warned. "Keep it. Show to him later. Grandstanding . . . ! Need more proof first. Get it soon. Let me know about tests. F.B.I."

MacDonald rose frowning. "I'll let you know. But how you can . . ."

"Goodbye, Mr. Noble. It's been so nice meeting you."

But Nick Noble appeared not to hear Stella's farewell. He was staring into his glass and not liking what he saw there.

Lieutenant MacDonald drew up before the girl's rooming house. "I may need a lot of help on the technique of librarianship in this case," he said. "I'll be seeing you soon."

"Thanks for the ride. And for taking me to that strange man. I'll never forget how . . . It seems — I don't know — uncanny, doesn't it?" A little tremor ran through her lithe body.

"You know, you aren't exactly what I'd expected a librarian to be. I've run into the wrong ones. I think of them as something with flat shirtwaists and glasses and a bun. Of course Mrs. Jarvis isn't either, but you . . ."

"I do wear glasses when I work," Stella confessed. "And you aren't exactly what I'd expected a policeman to be, or I shouldn't have kept them off all this time." She touched

her free flowing hair and punned, "And you should see me with a bun on."

"That's a date. We'll start with dinner and —"

"Dinner!" she exclaimed. "Napkin!" She rummaged in her handbag. "I won't tell you what he said, that isn't fair, but just to check on —" She unfolded the paper napkin.

She did not say another word, despite all MacDonald's urging. She waved goodbye in pantomime, and her eyes, as she watched him drive off, were wide with awe and terror.

Lieutenant MacDonald glared at the reports on the paraffin tests of his four suspects. All four negative. No sign that any one of them had recently used a firearm. Nick Noble was right; all you do is teach criminals what not to do. They learn about nitrite specks in the skin, so a handkerchief wrapped over the hand . . . The phone rang.

"Lafferty speaking. Los Angeles Field Office, F.B.I. You wanted the dope on this Alice Benson's reports?"

"Please."

"O.K. She did turn over to us a lot of stuff on a man who'd been reading nothing but codes and ciphers and sabotage methods and explosives and God knows what all. Sounded like a correspondence course for the complete Fifth Columnist. We check up on him, and he's a poor devil of a pulp writer. Sure he wanted to know how to be a spy and a saboteur; but just so's he could write about 'em. We gave him a thorough going over; he's in the clear.

"Name?"

"James Stickney."

"I know him," said MacDonald dryly. "And is that all?"

"We'll send you the file, but that's the gist of it. I gather the Benson woman had something else she wasn't ready to spill, but if it's as much help as that was . . . Keep an eye on that library though. There's something going on."

"How so?"

"Three times in the past two months we've trailed suspects into that Serafin Pelayo branch, and not bookworms either. They didn't do anything there or contact anybody, but that's pretty high for coincidence in one small branch. Keep an eye open. And if you hit on anything, maybe we can work together."

"Thanks. I'll let you know." MacDonald hung up. So Stickney had been grilled by the F.B.I. on Miss Benson's information. Revenge for the indignity? Damned petty motive. And still . . . The phone rang again.

"Lieutenant MacDonald? This is Mrs. Jarvis. Remember me?"

"Yes indeed. You've thought of

something more about —?"

"I certainly have. I think I've figured out what that QL thing means. At least I think I've figured how we can find out what it means. You see . . ." There was a heavy sound, a single harsh thud. Mrs. Jarvis groaned.

"Mrs. Jarvis! What's the matter? Has anything —"

"Elsie . . ." MacDonald heard her say faintly. Then the line was dead.

"Concussion," the police surgeon said. "She'll live. Not much doubt of that. But she won't talk for several days, and there's no telling how much she'll remember then."

"Elsie," said Lieutenant MacDonald. It sounded like an oath.

"We'll let you know as soon as she can see you. O.K., boys. Get along." Stella Swift trembled as the stretcher bearers moved off. "Poor Cora . . . When her husband comes home from Lockheed and finds . . . I was supposed to have dinner with them tonight and I come here and find you . . ."

Lieutenant MacDonald looked down grimly at the metal statue. "The poor devil's track trophy, and they use it to brain his wife . . . And what the hell brings you here?" he demanded as the lean figure of Norbert Utter appeared in the doorway.

"I live across the street, Lieutenant," the teacher explained. "When I saw the cars here and the ambulance, why naturally I . . . Don't tell me there's been another . . .?"

"Not quite. So you live across the street? Miss Swift, do you mind staying here to break the news to Mr. Jarvis? It'd come easier from you than from me. I want to step over to Mr. Utter's for a word with him."

Utter forced a smile. "Delighted to have you, Lieutenant."

The teacher's single apartment was comfortably undistinguished. His own books, MacDonald noticed, were chosen with unerring taste; the library volumes on a table seemed incongruous.

"Make yourself at home, Lieutenant, as I have no doubt you will. Now what is it you wanted to talk to me about?"

"First might I use your phone?"

"Certainly. I'll get you a drink meanwhile. Brandy?"

MacDonald nodded as he dialed the Chula Negra. Utter left the room. A Mexican voice answered, and MacDonald sent its owner to fetch Nick Noble. As he waited, he idly picked up one of those incongruous library books. He picked it up carelessly and it fell open. A slip of paper, a bookmark perhaps,

dropped from the fluttering pages. MacDonald noticed typed letters:

430945q57w7q0Ooqd3 . . .

"Noble here."

"Good." His attention snapped away from the paper. "Listen." And he told the results of the tests and the information from the F.B.I. and ended with the attack on Mrs. Jarvis. Utter came to the door once, looked at MacDonald, at the book, and at the paper. "And so," MacDonald concluded, "we've got a last message again. 'Elsie . . .' "

" 'Elsie . . .' " Nick Noble's voice repeated thoughtfully.

"Any questions?"

"No. Phone me tomorrow morning. Later tonight maybe. Tell you then."

MacDonald hung up frowning. That paper . . . Suddenly he had it. The good old typewriter code, so easy to write and to decipher. For each letter use the key above it. He'd run onto such a cipher in a case recently; he should be able to work it in his head. He visualized a keyboard. The letters and figures shifted into

reportatusualplace . . .

Mr. Utter came back with a tray and two glasses of brandy. His lean face essayed a host's smile. "Refreshments, Lieutenant."

"Thank you."

"And now we can — Or should you care for a cheese cracker?"

"Don't bother."

"No bother." He left the room. Lieutenant MacDonald looked at the cipher, then at the glasses. Deftly he switched them. Then he heard the slightest sound outside the door, a sigh of expectation confirmed, and faint footsteps moving off. MacDonald smiled and switched the glasses back again.

Mr. Utter returned with a bowl of cheese wafers and the decanter. "To the success of your investigations, Lieutenant." They raised their glasses. Mr. Utter took a cautious sip, then coolly emptied his glass out the window. "You outsmarted me, Lieutenant," he announced casually. "I had not expected you to be up to the double gambit. I underrated you, and apologize." He filled his own glass afresh from the decanter, and they drank. It was good brandy, unusually good for a teacher's salary.

"So we're dropping any pretense?" said MacDonald.

Mr. Utter shrugged. "You saw that paper. I was unpardonably careless. You are armed and I am not. Pretense would be foolish when you can so readily examine the rest of those books."

Lieutenant MacDonald's hand stayed near his shoulder holster. "It was a good enough scheme. Certain prearranged books were your ve-

hicles. Any accidental patron finding the messages, or even the average librarian, would pay little attention. Anything winds up as a marker in a library book. A few would be lost, but the safety made up for that. You prepared the messages here at home, returned them in the books so that you weren't seen inserting them in public . . ."

"You reconstruct admirably, Lieutenant."

"And who collected them?"

"Frankly, I do not know. The plan was largely arranged so that no man could inform on another."

"But Miss Benson discovered it, and Miss Benson had to be removed."

Mr. Utter shook his head. "I do not expect you to believe me, Lieutenant. But I have no more knowledge of Miss Benson's death than you have."

"Come now, Utter. Surely your admitted activities are a catamount to a confession of —"

"Is *catamount* quite the word you want, Lieutenant?"

"I don't know. My tongue's fuzzy. So's my mind. I don't know what's wrong . . ."

Mr. Utter smiled, slowly and with great pleasure. "Of course, Lieutenant. Did you really think I had underrated you? Naturally I drugged both glasses. Then whatever gambit you chose, I had merely to refill my own."

Lieutenant MacDonald ordered his hand to move toward the holster. His hand was not interested.

"Is there anything else," Mr. Utter asked gently, "which you should care to hear — while you can still hear anything?"

The room began a persistent circular joggling.

Nick Noble wiped his pale lips, thrust the flask of sherry back into his pocket, and walked into the Main library. At the information desk in the rotunda he handed a slip of paper to the girl in charge. On it was penciled

QL 696 .C9

The girl looked up puzzled. "I'm sorry, but —"

"Elsie," said Nick Noble hesitantly.

The girl's face cleared. "Oh. Of course. Well, you see, in this library we . . ."

The crash of the door helped to clear Lieutenant MacDonald's brain. The shot set up thundering waves that ripped through the drugwebs in his skull. The cold water on his head and later the hot coffee inside finished the job.

At last he lit a cigaret and felt approximately human. The big man

with the moon face, he gathered, was Lafferty, F.B.I. The girl, he had known in the first instant, was Stella Swift.

". . . just winged him when he tried to get out the window," Lafferty was saying. "The doc'll probably want us to lay off the grilling till tomorrow. Then you'll have your murderer, Mac, grilled and on toast."

MacDonald put up a hand to keep the top of his head on. "There's two things puzzle me. A, how you got here?"

Lafferty nodded at the girl.

"I began remembering things," she said, "after you went off with Mr. Utter. Especially I remembered Miss Benson saying just yesterday how she had some more evidence for the F.B.I. and how amazed she was that some people could show such an utter lack of patriotism. Then she laughed and I wondered why and only just now I realized it was because she'd made an accidental pun. There were other things too, and so I—"

"We had a note from Miss Benson today," Lafferty added. "It hadn't reached me yet when I phoned you. It was vaguely promising, no names, but it tied in well enough with what Miss Swift told us to make us check. When we found the door locked and knew you were here. . . ."

"Swell. And God knows I'm grateful to you both. But my other puzzle: Just now, when Utter confessed the details of the message scheme thinking I'd never live to tell them, he still denied any knowledge of the murder. I can't help wondering. . . ."

When MacDonald got back to his office, he found a memo:

> The Public Library says do you want a book from the Main sent out to the Serafin Pelayo branch tomorrow morning? A man named Noble made the request, gave you as authority. Please confirm.

MacDonald's head was dizzier than ever as he confirmed, wondering what the hell he was confirming.

The Serafin Pelayo branch was not open to the public the next morning, but it was well occupied. Outside in the reading room there waited the bandaged Mr. Utter, with Moon Lafferty on guard; the tousle-haired James Stickney, with a sergeant from Homicide; Hank Jarvis, eyes bleared from a sleepless night at his wife's bedside; and Miss Trumpeter, head of the Branches Department, impatiently awaiting the end of this interruption of her well-oiled branch routine.

Here in the office were Lieutenant MacDonald, Stella Swift, and Nick Noble. Today the girl wore a bright red dress, with a zipper which tan-

talizingly emphasized the fullness of her bosom. Lieutenant MacDonald held the book which had been sent out from the Main. Nick Noble held a flask.

"Easy," he was saying. "Elsie. Not a name. Letters. L. C. Miss Swift mentioned systems of classification. Library of Congress."

"Of course," Stella agreed. "We don't use it in the Los Angeles Library; it's too detailed for a public system. But you have to study it in library school; so naturally I didn't know it, being a junior, but Mrs. Jarvis spotted it and Miss Benson, poor dear, must have known it almost by heart."

MacDonald read the lettering on the spine of the book. "U. S. Library of Congress Classification. Q: Science."

Stella Swift sighed. "Thank Heavens. I was afraid it might be English literature."

MacDonald smiled. "I wonder if your parents knew nothing of literary history or a great deal, to name you Stella Swift."

Nick Noble drank and grunted. "Go on."

MacDonald opened the book and thumbed through pages. "QL, Zoölogy. QL 600, Vertebrates. QL 696, Birds, systematic list (subdivisions, A-Z)."

"Birds?" Stella wondered. "It was her hobby of course, but . . ."

MacDonald's eye went on down the page:

e.g., .A2, Accipitriformes (Eagles, hawks, etc.)
.A3, Alciformes (Auks, puffins)
Alectorides, *see* Gruiformes

"Wonderful names," he said. "If only we had a suspect named Gruiformes . . . Point C seven," he went on, "Coraciiformes, see also. . . . Here we are: Point C nine, Cypseli . . ."

The book slipped from his hands. Stella Swift jerked down her zipper and produced the tiny pistol which had contributed to the fullness of her bosom. Nick Noble's fleshless white hand lashed out, knocking over the flask, and seized her wrist. The pistol stopped halfway to her mouth, twisted down, and discharged at the floor. The bullet went through the volume of L. C. classification, just over the line reading

.C9, Cypseli (Swifts)

A sober and embittered Lieutenant MacDonald unfolded the paper napkin taken from the prisoner's handbag and read, in sprawling letters:

STELLA SWIFT

"Her confession's clear enough," he said. "A German mother, family in the Fatherland, pressure brought to bear. . . . She was the inventor

of this library-message system and running it unknown even to those using it, like Utter. After her false guess with Stickney, Miss Benson hit the truth with St . . . the Swift woman. She had to be disposed of. Then that meant more, attacking Mrs. Jarvis when she guessed too much and sacrificing Utter, an insignificant subordinate, as a scapegoat to account for Miss Benson's further hints to the F.B.I. But how the hell did you spot it, and right at the beginning of the case?"

"Pattern," said Nick Noble. "Had to fit." His sharp nose twitched, and he brushed the nonexistent fly off it. "Miss Benson was cataloguer. QL business had to be book number. Not system used here or recognized at once, but some system. Look at names: Cora Jarvis, James Stickney, Norbert Utter, Stella Swift. Swift only name could possibly have classifying number."

"But weren't you taking a terrible risk giving her that napkin? What happened to Mrs. Jarvis . . ."

Noble shook his head. "She was only one knew you'd consulted me. Attack me, show her hand. Too smart for that. Besides, used to taking risks, when I . . ." He left unfinished the reference to the days when he had been the best damned detective lieutenant in Los Angeles.

"We've caught a murderer," said Lieutenant MacDonald, "and we've broken up a spy ring." He looked at the spot where Stella Swift had been standing when she jerked her zipper. The sun from the window had glinted through her hair. "But I'm damned if I thank you."

"Understand," said Nick Noble flatly. He picked up the spilled flask and silently thanked God that there was one good slug of sherry left.

It's a pleasure to bring you this "unknown" story by the great Jack London. Your Editor doesn't dare comment on this fascinating tale in advance — for fear of telegraphing the punch!

But here's a clue for bibliographic bloodhounds: "The Leopard Man's Story" first appeared in 1903; you'll find the identical crime situation in Chapters XVI, XVII, and XVIII of T. W. Hanshew's "Cleek, The Man of the Forty Faces," first published in 1910 — seven years after Jack London conceived the idea. Or, if the earliest Cleek book is unavailable, consult the reissue titled "Cleek, The Master Detective," published in 1918 — Chapter VIII, called (note the zoological similarity too!) "The Lion's Smile."

THE LEOPARD MAN'S STORY

by JACK LONDON

HE HAD a dreamy, far-away look in his eyes, and his sad, insistent voice, gentle-spoken as a maid's, seemed the placid embodiment of some deep-seated melancholy. He was the Leopard Man, but he did not look it. His business in life, whereby he lived, was to appear in a cage of performing leopards before vast audiences, and to thrill those audiences by certain exhibitions of nerve for which his employers rewarded him on a scale commensurate with the thrills he produced.

As I say, he did not look it. He was narrow-hipped, narrow-shouldered, and anaemic, while he seemed not so much oppressed by gloom as by a sweet and gentle sadness, the weight of which was as sweetly and gently borne. For an hour I had been trying to get a story out of him, but he appeared to lack imagination. To him there was no romance in his gorgeous career, no deeds of daring, no thrills — nothing but a gray sameness and infinite boredom.

Lions? Oh, yes! he had fought with them. It was nothing. All you had to do was to stay sober. Anybody could whip a lion to a standstill with an ordinary stick. He had fought one for half an hour once. Just hit him on the nose every time he rushed, and when he got artful and rushed with his head down, why, the thing to do was to stick out your leg. When he grabbed at the leg you drew it back and hit him on the nose again. That was all.

With the far-away look in his eyes and his soft flow of words he showed me his scars. There were many of them, and one recent one where a tigress had reached for his shoulder and gone down to the bone. I could see the neatly mended rents in the coat he had on. His right arm, from

the elbow down, looked as though it had gone through a threshing machine, what of the ravage wrought by claws and fangs. But it was nothing, he said, only the old wounds bothered him somewhat when rainy weather came on.

Suddenly his face brightened with a recollection, for he was really as anxious to give me a story as I was to get it.

"I suppose you've heard of the lion-tamer who was hated by another man?" he asked.

He paused and looked pensively at a sick lion in the cage opposite.

"Got the toothache," he explained. "Well, the lion-tamer's big play to the audience was putting his head in a lion's mouth. The man who hated him attended every performance in the hope sometime of seeing that lion crunch down. He followed the show about all over the country. The years went by and he grew old, and the lion-tamer grew old, and the lion grew old. And at last one day, sitting in a front seat, he saw what he had waited for. The lion crunched down, and there wasn't any need to call a doctor."

The Leopard Man glanced casually over his finger nails in a manner which would have been critical had it not been so sad.

"Now, that's what I call patience," he continued, "and it's my style. But it was not the style of a fellow I knew. He was a little, thin, sawed-off, sword-swallowing and juggling Frenchman. De Ville, he called himself, and he had a nice wife. She did trapeze work and used to dive from under the roof into a net, turning over once on the way as nice as you please.

"De Ville had a quick temper, as quick as his hand, and his hand was as quick as the paw of a tiger. One day, because the ring-master called him a frog-eater, or something like that and maybe a little worse, he shoved him against the soft pine background he used in his knife-throwing act, so quick the ring-master didn't have time to think, and there, before the audience, De Ville kept the air on fire with his knives, sinking them into the wood all round the ring-master so close that they passed through his clothes and most of them bit into his skin.

"The clowns had to pull the knives out to get him loose, for he was pinned fast. So the word went around to watch out for DeVille, and no one dared be more than barely civil to his wife. And she was a sly bit of baggage, too, only all hands were afraid of De Ville.

"But there was one man, Wallace, who was afraid of nothing. He was the lion-tamer, and he had the self-same trick of putting his head into

the lion's mouth. He'd put it into the mouths of any of them, though he preferred Augustus, a big, good-natured beast who could always be depended upon.

"As I was saying, Wallace — 'King' Wallace we called him — was afraid of nothing alive or dead. He was a king and no mistake. I've seen him drunk, and on a wager go into the cage of a lion that'd turned nasty, and without a stick beat him to a finish. Just did it with his fist on the nose.

"Madame de Ville —"

At an uproar behind us the Leopard Man turned quietly around. It was a divided cage, and a monkey, poking through the bars and around the partition, had had its paw seized by a big gray wolf who was trying to pull it off by main strength. The arm seemed stretching out longer and longer like a thick elastic, and the unfortunate monkey's mates were raising a terrible din. No keeper was at hand, so the Leopard Man stepped over a couple of paces, dealt the wolf a sharp blow on the nose with the light cane he carried, and returned with a sadly apologetic smile to take up his unfinished sentence as though there had been no interruption.

"— looked at King Wallace and King Wallace looked at her, while De Ville looked black. We warned Wallace, but it was no use. He laughed at us, as he laughed at De Ville one day when he shoved De Ville's head into a bucket of paste because he wanted to fight.

"De Ville was in a pretty mess — I helped to scrape him off; but he was cool as a cucumber and made no threats at all. But I saw a glitter in his eyes which I had seen often in the eyes of wild beasts, and I went out of my way to give Wallace a final warning. He laughed, but he did not look so much in Madame de Ville's direction after that.

"Several months passed by. Nothing had happened and I was beginning to think it all a scare over nothing. We were West by that time, showing in 'Frisco. It was during the afternoon performance, and the big tent was filled with woman and children, when I went looking for Red Denny, the head canvas-man, who had walked off with my pocket-knife.

"Passing by one of the dressing tents I glanced in through a hole in the canvas to see if I could locate him. He wasn't there, but directly in front of me was King Wallace, in tights, waiting for his turn to go on with his cage of performing lions. He was watching with much amusement a quarrel between a couple of trapeze artists. All the rest of the people in the dressing tent were watching the same thing, with the exception of De Ville, whom I

noticed staring at Wallace with undisguised hatred. Wallace and the rest were all too busy following the quarrel to notice this or what followed.

"But I saw it through the hole in the canvas. De Ville drew his handkerchief from his pocket, made as though to mop the sweat from his face with it (it was a hot day), and at the same time walked past Wallace's back. He never stopped, but with a flirt of the handkerchief kept right on to the doorway, where he turned his head, while passing out, and shot a swift look back. The look troubled me at the time, for not only did I see hatred in it, but I saw triumph as well.

" 'De Ville will bear watching,' I said to myself, and I really breathed easier when I saw him go out the entrance to the circus grounds and board an electric car for down town. A few minutes later I was in the big tent, where I had overhauled Red Denny. King Wallace was doing his turn and holding the audience spellbound. He was in a particularly vicious mood, and he kept the lions stirred up till they were all snarling, that is, all of them except old Augustus, and he was just too fat and lazy and old to get stirred up over anything.

"Finally Wallace cracked the old lion's knees with his whip and got him into position. Old Augustus, blinking good-naturedly, opened his mouth and in popped Wallace's head. Then the jaws came together, *crunch*, just like that."

The Leopard Man smiled in a sweetly wistful fashion, and the far-away look came into his eyes.

"And that was the end of King Wallace," he went on in his sad, low voice. "After the excitement cooled down I watched my chance and bent over and smelled Wallace's head. Then I sneezed."

"It . . . it was . . . ?" I queried with halting eagerness.

"Snuff — that De Ville dropped on his hair in the dressing tent. Old Augustus never meant to do it. He only sneezed."

Perhaps the most widely acclaimed psychological mystery novel of the past two decades was "Before the Fact," by Francis Iles. Howard Haycraft called it — and rightly — the author's masterpiece and described it as "an internally terrifying portrait of a murderer." And Alfred Hitchcock directed the Hollywood version, titled "Suspense," starring Cary Grant and Joan Fontaine.

It has long been suspected that Francis Iles is the pen-name of Anthony Berkeley — which in turn is the pen-name of A. B. Cox. There can no longer be any question as to this theory of authorship, since "Dark Journey" is copyrighted by Anthony Berkeley Cox!

"Dark Journey" is here published for the first time in any American magazine. Like "Before the Fact," it is "an internally terrifying portrait of a murderer" — a superb psychological study of crime and punishment.

DARK JOURNEY

by FRANCIS ILES

CAYLEY was going to commit murder.

He had worked it all out very carefully. For weeks now his plan had been maturing. He had pondered over it, examined it, tested it in the light of every possibility; and he was satisfied that it was impregnable. Now he was going to put it into practice.

Cayley did not really want to kill Rose Fenton.

Indeed, the idea made him shudder, even when he had been drinking. But what else could he do? He was desperate. Rose would not leave him alone. She thought, too, now that she had a claim on him; and she was plainly determined to exercise it. And Cayley very much did not want to marry Rose Fenton.

He never had thought of marrying her. A solicitor's clerk, with a position to make in the world — a solicitor's clerk with every chance of an ultimate partnership in his firm — cannot afford to marry a girl like Rose Fenton. Respectability is the bread of a solicitor's life. Besides, now there was Miriam. Miriam Seale, the only daughter of old Seale himself, the senior partner in Cayley's own firm. . . .

Cayley knew now that he had been risking his whole future by taking up with Rose at all. It had not seemed like that at first. Other men have adventures, why not he? But adventures in any case are not safe for solicitors, and now Rose had decided not to be an adventure at all, but a job. As Cayley knew only too

well, Rose was a determined girl. Rose knew nothing of Miriam.

It seemed curious to Cayley now to remember that once he had been quite fond of Rose. Now, of course, he detested her. He would sit for hours in his cottage over a bottle of whisky, thinking how much he hated Rose. Before Rose became impossible, Cayley had never drunk whisky alone. Now he was depending on it more and more, and one cannot go on like that. One must make an end somehow.

Rose had brought it on herself. She would not leave him alone. She would not see when an affair was — finished. Cayley did not at all want to kill Rose, but he gloated over the idea of Rose dead. And he would never be his own man again till Rose was dead. He knew that. No; Cayley did not at all want to kill Rose, but what else could he do?

And now he was waiting for Rose to come; waiting on the side of the road, in the dark, with his stomach full of whisky and a revolver in his pocket.

As he waited, Cayley felt as if he were made of lead. The night was warm, but he felt neither warm nor cold, afraid nor brave, despairing nor exultant. He felt nothing at all. Both body and mind seemed to have gone inert, so that he just waited and hardly noticed whether the time went fast or slowly.

The noise of the bus roused him from his torpor. He followed its progress along the main road: loud when the line between it and himself was clear, with curious mufflings and dim silences when hedges or a fold in the ground intervened. Rose was in the bus, but Cayley did not feel any excitement at the thought. Everything had become in some strange way inevitable.

Cayley was waiting a couple of hundred yards down a side turning. It was a convenient little lane which Cayley had marked weeks and weeks ago, when he first thought of killing Rose. He and Rose had picnicked there one Sunday, on Rose's afternoon off. They had sat on the wide grassy margin which bordered one side, and Cayley had thought then how he would be able to wheel his motor-bicycle on to it and put out the lights while he waited for Rose. In such a deserted spot, in the dark, with his headlights out, it would be impossible that their meeting could be seen.

Rose had not been able to understand at first why Cayley should want to meet her in such an out-of-the-way place and so far from both the cottage and from Merchester; but Cayley had been able to make her see reason.

Both the plan in his heart and the plan on his lips depended on his

meeting with Rose remaining secret, and that had been very convenient for the former. That explained why Rose was coming to meet him in the last bus from Stanford to Merchester and not in that from Merchester to Stanford, although it was in Merchester that Rose was in service and Cayley worked.

Stanford and Merchester, both towns of some size, were eighteen miles apart, and while it was unlikely that Rose, not indigenous to the district, should be recognized leaving Merchester, it was almost impossible that she could be recognized leaving Stanford. Cayley had been taking no chances at all.

The bus had grumbled to a halt just beyond the turning and roared on again. Cayley heard footsteps coming towards him, scraping in the dark on the gritty surface of the lane. He waited where he stood until they were almost abreast of him, disregarding the calls of his name, rather louder than he liked, which Rose sent out before her in waves of sound through the still night like a swimmer urging the water in front of her.

"Rose," he said quietly.

Rose uttered a little scream. "Coo! You didn't half make me jump. Why didn't you answer when I called?"

"Have you put your trunk and things in the cloakroom?" It was essential to Cayley's plan that Rose should have left her luggage that afternoon at Liverpool Street Station, in London.

"Course I have. . . . Well," added Rose archly, "aren't you going to give us a kiss?"

"What else do you think I've been waiting for?" Cayley's heart was beating a little faster as he kissed Rose for the last time. He thought of Judas. It made him feel uncomfortable, and he cut the kiss as short as he decently could.

Rose sniffed at him. "Been drinking, haven't you?"

"Nothing, really," Cayley returned easily, feeling for his bicycle in the darkness. "Just a drop."

"It's been too many drops with you lately, my lad. I'm going to put a stop to it. Not going to have a drunkard for a husband, I'm not."

Cayley writhed. Rose's voice was full of possession; full of complacent assurance that in future he would have no life but what she chose to allow him. Had any qualms remained in him, that tone of Rose's would have dispelled them.

"Come on," he said sharply. "Let's get off."

"All right, all right. In a great hurry, aren't you? Where's the bike? Coo, I never saw it. It's that dark."

Cayley had wheeled the bicycle into the lane and switched on the headlight. He helped Rose into the

side-car, and jumped into his saddle.

"All serene. So off we go, on our honeymoon," giggled Rose. "Fancy you and me on our honeymoon, Norm."

"Yes," said Cayley. It was odd that, though this was the last time they would ever be together, Rose's hideous shortening of his Christian name grated on him as much as ever.

He drove slowly down the lane. "See anyone you know in Stanford?" he asked as casually as possible.

"So likely, isn't it? A fat lot of people I know."

"But did you?"

"No, Mr. Inquisitive, I did not. Any more questions?"

They turned into the main road, and Cayley increased his speed.

The whisky he had drunk did not affect his driving. His hands held the machine quite steady, though he was now pushing it along as fast as it would go, anxious to arrive and get the business finished. He did not glance at Rose in the side-car beside him. Although it was the last time that Rose would ever ride in that side-car alive, yet her presence exasperated him as much as ever, and the way she would cock her feet up under her so that her knees stuck up in the air. In a dim way Cayley recognized the fact, and was surprised by it. He had expected to feel tolerant now towards Rose's irritating ways. It was a relief to find that, in fact, he had not softened.

Nor had his resolution weakened.

Now that it had come to the point, Cayley was quite calm.

He knew that, normally, he was not always calm, and he had feared lest he might lose his head and somehow bungle things: be queer in his manner, tremble, let Rose see that something dreadful was afoot. But there was no longer any danger of that. Rose could not guess what was going to happen to her; and as for Cayley himself, he felt almost indifferent, as if the matter had all been taken somehow out of his hands. The whole affair was pre-ordained; events were moving forward of their own volition; nothing that he, or Rose, or anyone else, might do now could alter them.

Cayley drove on in a fatalistic trance. He realized vaguely that Rose was protesting against the speed, but disregarded her. It was no use Rose protesting against anything now.

Cayley's lonely little cottage was not on the main road. It, too, was down a side turning, and a good half-mile from the village. The village itself, with its couple of dozen cottages and two little shops, was tiny enough, but Cayley had always been glad that he was half a mile from it. He liked solitude. Since he

had determined to kill Rose, he had realized how his liking for solitude had played into his hands. Even so small a thing as that was going to help to destroy Rose.

As he turned off the main road his love of solitude rose up in him in a passionate wave. Had Rose really imagined that he was going to let her into that little corner of the world that he had made for himself—Rose, with her inevitable vulgarity of speech and mind?

A tremor of hatred shook him as he saw her sturdy form trampling about the house which, a fire-blackened ruin when he bought it out of his small savings, he had rebuilt with his own hands; Rose, marching like a grenadier through the garden he had created; Rose, so assured in her ownership of it all that he would be made to feel an interloper in his own tiny domain. Miriam would never be like that. Besides, Miriam was . . .

Cayley thought fiercely how peaceful everything would be again once Rose was dead: how peaceful, and how hopeful.

A hundred yards away from the cottage he shut off his engine. Late though the time was, it was just possible that old Mrs. Wace, who "did" for him, might not yet have gone. She liked to potter and potter in the evenings, and Cayley had not been foolish as to try to hustle her off the premises early. And slightly deaf though she was, Cayley had already been careful to find out that she could hear his motor-cycle drive up to the little shed at the bottom of the garden where he kept it.

Rose, of course, expostulated when his engine stopped, but Cayley was ready for that.

"Run out of juice," he explained glibly. "Lucky we got nearly home. Give me a hand to push her, Rose."

"Well, that's a nice thing to ask a girl, I must say," objected Rose for form's sake.

Between them they pushed the bicycle past the cottage.

Before they reached the shed, Rose evidently considered it due to herself to protest further.

"Here, this is a bit too much like hard work for me. You didn't ought to ask me to do a thing like that, Norm, and that's a fact."

"All right," Cayley said mildly. "I can manage alone now." There were indeed only a few more yards to cover.

"Well, it's your own fault, isn't it?"

Cayley did not answer. The bicycle was heavy, and he needed all his breath. Rose walked behind him.

"Here, half a mo'. I'll get my suit-case out before you put the bike away, if you *don't* mind."

"It doesn't matter," Cayley threw

back over his shoulder. "I'll get it out in a minute."

He brought the bicycle to a standstill outside the shed and opened the door.

Rose, a dim figure in the velvety August night, was peering up at the stars.

"Coo, it's black enough for you tonight, I should think. Never known it so dark, I haven't."

"The moon doesn't rise till after midnight," Cayley answered absently, busy turning the bicycle round in the lane. It was better to turn it now, then it would be ready.

"Proper night to elope, and no mistake," Rose's voice came rallyingly. "Is that why you chose it, eh? Getting quite sloppy in your old age, Norm, aren't you? Well, that'll be a nice change, I must say."

Cayley straightened up from the bicycle and wiped the sweat from his forehead. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing. I just thought you'd been a bit standoffish lately." There was a sentimental, almost a yearning note in Rose's voice.

"Nonsense, darling. Of course I haven't."

"In fact, I don't mind telling you, I thought at one time you didn't mean to treat me right."

"I'm going to treat you right, Rose," said Cayley.

"Still love us, Norm?"

"Of course I do."

"Where are you, then?"

Cayley's fingers closed round the small revolver in his pocket. "Here."

"Well, can't you come a bit closer?" Rose giggled.

Cayley took her arm. "Come inside the shed for a minute, Rose."

"What ever for?"

"I want you to."

Rose giggled again. "Coo, Norm, you are a one, aren't you?"

Cayley's mouth and throat were dry as he drew Rose across the threshold and closed the door. But he was not really afraid. The dreamlike state was on him again. Things were not real. All this had happened somewhere before. Rose was dead already. The two of them were only enacting, like ghosts, a deed that had been performed ages and ages ago, in some other existence; every movement and word had been already laid down, and there could be neither deviation nor will to deviate.

Once more Rose uttered her silly, throaty giggle.

"What do you want to shut the door for? I should have thought it was dark enough already."

Cayley had already proved, by repeated experiment, that with the door of the shed closed Mrs. Wace, even if she were in the cottage, could not hear a revolver-shot; but of course, he could not tell Rose that.

He drew the revolver from his pocket. He was still quite calm.

Hot hands were clutching for him in the darkness and he held the revolver out of their reach.

"Honest, I'm ever so fond of you, Norm," whispered Rose.

"So am I of you, Rose. Where are you?"

"Well, that's a nice question. Where do you think I am? Can't you feel me?"

"Yes." Cayley found her shoulder and gripped it gently while he edged behind her. Methodically he felt for the back of her neck and placed the muzzle of the revolver against it.

"Here, mind my hat, *if* you please. Here . . . what's the game, Norm?"

Cayley fired.

The shot sounded so deafeningly loud in the little shed that it seemed to Cayley as if anyone not only at the cottage but in the village, too, must have heard it. A spasm of terror shook him. How could anyone in the whole of England not have heard it? He stood rigid, listening for the alarm that must inevitably follow.

Everything was quiet.

Cayley pulled himself together. Of course, the shot had been no louder than his experiments in the daytime. There was no time now to give way to fantastic panic of that sort. He realized that he was still holding Rose's body in his arms. He had been so close to her when he fired that she had slumped down against him, and he had caught her mechanically. He laid her now on the floor of the shed. Then he lighted a stub of candle which he had brought here days ago for just that purpose. There was no window in the shed, and the door was still closed.

Cayley could not believe that Rose was dead.

It had been too easy, too quick. She could not have died in that tiny instant. Not Rose. She was too vigorous, too vital, to have the life blown out of her like that in a tiny fraction of a second.

He looked at her lying there, in her best frock of saxe-blue silk, her black straw hat, brown shoes, and pink silk stockings. People bled, didn't they, when they were shot? But there was no blood. Rose was not bleeding at all.

Cayley's forehead broke out in a cold sweat. Rose was not really dead, after all! He had missed her, somehow, in the darkness. The gun had not been touching her head at all, it had been touching something else. Rose was only stunned. Perhaps not even stunned: just pretending to be stunned: shamming.

Cayley dropped on his knees beside her and felt frantically for her heart. He knew Rose was dead, but he could not believe it. Her

heart gave no movement.

"Rose!" he said, in a shaky voice. "Rose — can't you speak to me? Rose!" He could not believe Rose was dead.

Rose lay on her back staring up at the roof of the little shed, her eyelids just drooping over her eyes. Cayley did not know why he had spoken to her aloud. Of course Rose could not answer. She was dead.

The tears came into Cayley's own eyes. He understood now that it was too late, that there had never been any need to kill Rose at all. He could have managed everything by being firm. Just by being firm. Rose would have understood. Rose had always been sensible. And now, for the want of a little firmness, Rose was dead and he was a murderer.

"Oh, God," he moaned, "I wish I hadn't done it. Oh, God, I wish I hadn't done it."

But he had done it, and Rose was dead. Cayley got up slowly from his knees.

It was dreadful to see Rose lying there, with her head on the floor. There was an old pillion cushion on the shelf. Cayley took it down and put it under Rose's head. Somehow that made her look better.

Besides — Rose might not be dead. If she came to it would be nicer for her to have a cushion under her head.

Cayley stiffened. Had that been a noise outside? He stood stock-still, hardly daring to breathe. Was someone prowling about? He listened desperately. It was not easy to listen very well, because the blood was pounding so in his ears. It made a kind of muffled drumming, like waves on a distant shingle beach. Beyond the drumming he could detect no sound.

Very slowly he lifted the latch of the door. It was stiff, and for all his caution rose with a final jerk. Cayley started violently. The latch had made only a tiny click, but in his ears it sounded like the crack of doom.

He edged the door open, got outside, and closed it behind him. Then he stood still, listening again. There was no sound. He began to walk softly towards the cottage, fifty yards away.

He walked more and more slowly. A horrible feeling had suddenly taken possession of him: that someone was following, just as softly, in his tracks. The back of his head tingled and pricked as the hair lifted itself on his scalp; for something was telling him that the door of the shed had opened and Rose had come noiselessly out. Now she was following him.

He could feel her presence, just behind him. Cold beads chased each

other down his back. He tried to turn his head to make sure that Rose was not really there, but could not. It was physically impossible for him to look back towards the door of the shed. All he could do was to stand still and listen, between the pounding of the waves in his ears. The flesh of his back quivered and crept. Every second he expected Rose to come up and touch him on it. He could almost feel her touch already. It was all he could do to stop himself from shrieking.

At last, with a little sob, he forced himself to turn round.

There was nothing but inky darkness behind him.

But somewhere in that inky darkness, between himself and the shed, Cayley could not get rid of the feeling that someone, or something, stood. He dragged the revolver out of his pocket again and levelled it at the shed. At any moment a shape might loom towards him out of the blackness, and he must be ready. He stood rigid, waiting, his tongue parched and his throat dry. Then, with a sudden effort, he walked rapidly back to the shed.

The door was still closed.

Cayley put the revolver back into his pocket and walked quickly over to the cottage.

Outside it he halted for a few moments, working his jaws to obtain some saliva in order to moisten his tongue and throat. The kitchen was at the back of the cottage. As he peered round the angle, Cayley could see the light streaming out of the window. Mrs. Wace had not gone.

Cayley's knees shook together. Mrs. Wace had not gone, and she must have heard the shot. It was impossible that she could not have heard it, deaf as she was. He had miscalculated in his experiments. They had been made in the daytime, and sound travels further in the silence of the night. He had not allowed for that. Mrs. Wace had heard the shot, and now she was waiting to find out what it meant. Cayley stood for a minute in the grip of a panic so violent that his limbs shook and his teeth chattered, and he could not control them. It was all he could do at last to drag himself round the corner of the house and, unseen, stare through the uncurtained kitchen window.

Mrs. Wace was doing something by the larder door. She had her hat and coat on. Cayley watched her take up three onions, look at them, drop one into a string-bag and put the other two back into the larder. He searched her face. There seemed to be nothing on it but preoccupation with what she was doing. Was it possible that she had not

heard the shot after all?

He walked quickly round to the front of the house and went into his living-room.

From a cupboard on the wall he took a whisky-bottle and a glass. Then, putting back the glass, he pulled the cork out of the bottle and put the mouth of it to his lips, gulping down the neat spirit in thirsty haste. Not until half its remaining contents had gone did he put the bottle back on the shelf.

Almost immediately the stuff did him good. He waited a moment while the heartening glow steadied his limbs. Then he walked firmly into the kitchen.

Mrs. Wace was just going out through the back door. She stopped when she saw him, and it seemed to Cayley that she looked at him queerly.

Cayley's fingers tightened round the revolver in his pocket as he searched her face.

"Ah, back, are you?" said Mrs. Wace comfortably.

Cayley breathed with relief. His fingers relaxed on the revolver. The next instant they tightened again.

"Back? I haven't been away. I've been sitting in the garden, smoking."

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes," observed Mrs. Wace indifferently. "Good night, Mr. Cayley."

"Good night, Mrs. Wace."

Cayley went back to his living-room, his knees weak with relief. If Mrs. Wace had heard anything, or voiced any suspicion, he would have shot her dead. He knew he would. It would have been madness, but he would have done it. He took the whisky-bottle and tumbler from the shelf and poured himself out a stiff dose. He realized now that he was trembling.

Instantly the same feeling came to him as in the shed. Rose was not dead at all. She had only been stunned. She would come to if he gave her some whisky. He caught up the bottle and hurried with it down the garden through the dark.

Outside the door of the shed he stopped. He could not go in: he just could not go inside. Suppose after all that . . .

"Rose!" he called shakily. "Rose!"

It took a full minute, and another swig at the bottle, before he could get a grip on himself again.

Rose was lying just as he had left her. She was quite dead.

Cayley took another, smaller mouthful of whisky and set the bottle down on the shelf with a hand that no longer shook. What a fool he had been! Everything had gone splendidly. All he had to do now was to proceed with his plan.

It was a good plan.

To her mistress in Merchester

and to her only living relative, an elderly aunt, living in Streatham, Rose had written, on Cayley's instructions, that she was going out to Canada to be married. Canada somehow sounded more convincing than America. Rose really had believed that Cayley was going out to Canada, to open a branch there for his firm.

Over her luggage Cayley had been equally clever. Rose was to have left Merchester that afternoon for London, and deposited her trunk at Liverpool-street Station. In a busy place like Liverpool-street Rose would never be noticed or remembered. Equally unnoticed, Cayley would be able to claim the trunk later with the check that would be in Rose's handbag, and dispose of it at his leisure. There would be nothing at all to connect him with Rose's disappearance.

Rose had made objections, of course. When, in Merchester, she was only half-a-dozen miles from Cayley's cottage, why travel all the way up to London and come back to Stanford? But Cayley had been able to convince her. He was not leaving for Canada till the next day.

It was essential that Rose should not be seen coming to the cottage. If she were, her good name would be lost, even though they were getting married in London the next morning before sailing. The argument had gone home, for Rose was always very careful about "what people would say."

So though she had demurred at the expense, for she had a parsimonious mind, Rose had in the end consented. If she had not consented, Cayley would never have dared to kill her. Rose had agreed to her own death when she agreed to take her trunk up to Liverpool-street Station.

Cayley stood now, looking down at her.

He was no longer afraid of Rose's dead body. The whisky he had drunk was making him sentimental. Two tears oozed out of his eyes and ran absurdly down his cheeks. Poor old Rose. She had not been such a bad sort, really. It was a shame that he had had to kill her. A rotten shame. Cayley wished very much that he had not had to kill Rose.

In a flash, sentiment fled before a sudden jab of terror.

Suppose Rose had not brought the check for the trunk with her after all! Suppose she had left it somewhere, or given it to someone else to claim for her! Cayley saw now that he had left this weak spot in the armour of his plan.

He had taken no steps to ensure that Rose should have the check with her: he had simply taken it for granted that she would. And if she had not, and he were unable to

claim the trunk, everything would miscarry. In that case the trunk would sooner or later be opened, and then it would be known that Rose had disappeared, and then . . .

Cayley shivered with fear.

In vain he tried to point out to himself that even if it did become known that Rose had disappeared, there would still be nothing to connect her disappearance with himself. In Merchester he had always kept very quiet about his relations with Rose. But his mind, numb with panic, refused to accept the reasoning. Everything hung for him on the vital question: had Rose brought the check with her?

Rose's handbag lay on the floor, half underneath her. Cayley pushed her body roughly aside to snatch it up. His fingers shook so much that he could hardly open it.

The next moment he uttered a sob of relief. The check was there. "One trunk . . ." The words danced before his eyes. He was safe.

He took another pull at the whisky-bottle.

He was safe: and now he must proceed, quite calmly, with the rest of his plan.

Cayley would never have believed that Rose was so heavy.

It had seemed simple, in advance, to put her into the side-car, prop her there to look natural, and drive with her to the disused quarry, where her grave was already prepared, and the spade waiting to fill it in. But now that it had come to the point, it was dreadful to have to pick her up and stagger with her through the darkness, like a sack of potatoes in his arms. Cayley was gasping for breath by the time he reached the side-car.

But the physical effort had helped him. He was no longer nervous. He was exultant. It takes courage and brains to commit a successful murder. Cayley, doubtful at times before, knew now that he had both. And there were people who thought him — Cayley knew they did! — a weakling, a little rat. Now he could smile at them. Rats can bite.

Before he set out for the quarry, Cayley went back to the shed. The candle had to be put out, and he wanted to have a good look round to make sure that no traces were left. The risk was infinitesimal, but Cayley was not taking even infinitesimal risks; and there are always tramps.

There were no traces. Only a few spots of blood on the leather of the cushion, which Cayley wiped off with a wisp of cotton-waste, burning the waste at once in the flame of the candle. No one could possibly tell that a newly-dead body had been lying in that shed.

Before he blew out the candle Cayley pulled the precious check for

the trunk out of his trouser-pocket, where he had stuffed it, in order to stow it away more carefully in his wallet. It was funny how he had nearly lost his head just now over a little thing like that. He glanced through it gloatingly before tucking it away. The wording, which before had shimmered in a blurred way before his panic-stricken eyes, was now soberly legible.

The next instant his heart seemed to stop beating. Then it began to race faster than the engine of his own motor-cycle. For the check was not on Liverpool-street at all: not even on Stanford. It was on the station quite close to Cayley's cottage. Rose had not been up to London. She had kept the money Cayley had given her, and travelled only to the local station. Cayley had committed the fatal mistake of under-rating Rose's parsimony. And by her parsimony Rose had ensured that her last appearance alive should be inevitably connected with her lover.

With a sick horror Cayley sat down in the doorway of the shed and nursed his head in his hands. Then he moaned aloud. What was he to do now? What, in Heaven's name, could he do now?

Cayley never knew how long he had sat like that, in a lethargy of self-pity and despair, nor how long it was before coherent thought returned to him. The first shock, which galvanized his mind into activity once more, was the realization that all this time Rose was waiting for him — waiting, in the side-car. Cayley choked down the hysterical laugh which leapt in his throat. Rose never had liked waiting.

He jumped up.

Instantly, as if it had only needed the reflex action of his muscles to stimulate his brain, he saw that the position was not, after all, so desperate. The trunk would remain in the cloakroom for days, perhaps for weeks, before anything was done about it. By that time Cayley could, if the worst came to the worst, be in South America.

But perhaps the best thing to do would be to claim it boldly, in a day or two's time. It was quite unlikely that the porter-cum-clerk would remember who had left it. Rose was not known there. It was not as if suspicion would ever be roused. Suspicion is only roused when a person is reported missing. Rose never would be so reported. No, the position was not desperate at all. Cayley's spirits began to rise. The position was not even bad. Except for a small adjustment or two, his plan still held perfectly good.

He began to whistle as he wrapped a rug carefully over Rose, and drove her off. It was only a couple of miles

to the quarry. In a quarter of an hour the whole business would be done.

Yes, the boldest course usually paid. He would claim the trunk himself. And he could arrange some slight disguise, just in case of accidents. A disguise, yes. Why . . .

Cayley's thoughts broke off with a jerk. He cursed. His engine had stopped.

He came to a standstill by the side of the road. The trouble was simple: he had run out of petrol. Cayley felt terribly frightened. He had filled the tank before first setting out to meet Rose; how could it have emptied so soon? It almost looked as though Providence . . .

It was not Providence, but a leaking feed-pipe. Feverishly Cayley screwed up the loose nut and delved into the side-car for the spare tin of petrol, pushing Rose to one side without a thought. He blessed his foresight in having put the tin there. Really, every possibility had been foreseen.

As he got back into the saddle once more, a sound struck his whole body into frozen immobility. Someone was approaching along the lonely country road. Someone with large, heavy feet. Someone who flashed a lamp. It was the millionth chance, and it had come off.

Cayley kicked in agony at his starter, but the carburetor had emptied. He kicked and kicked, but not even a splutter came from the engine. Then, as the footsteps drew abreast of him, he stopped kicking and waited, petrified.

"Hullo," said the constable. "Breakdown?"

Cayley's dry tongue rustled over his drier lips. "No," he managed to mutter. "Just — just filling up . . . petrol."

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Cayley. Ah! Fine night."

"Yes. Well, I must be getting on." Cayley prayed that his voice did not sound such a croak as he feared. The light of the constable's lamp flickered over him, and he winced. Before he could stop himself, the words had jumped out. "Switch that light of yours off, man."

"Sorry, Mr. Cayley, I'm sure." The constable sounded hurt.

"It was blinding me," Cayley muttered.

"Ah, new battery. Well, good night, Mr. Cayley. Nothing I can do?"

"Nothing, thanks." Cayley kicked at his starter. Nothing happened.

The constable lingered. "Quite a treat to see someone, on a lonely beat like this."

"Yes, it must be." Cayley was still kicking. He wanted to scream at the man to go. He would scream in a minute. No, he must not scream. He

must hold the edges of his nerves together like flesh over a wound, to keep the panic within from welling out. "Good night," he said clearly.

"Well, good night, Mr. Cayley. Got a load, I see?"

"Yes," Cayley's head was bent. He spoke through almost closed teeth. "Some potatoes I . . ."

"Potatoes?"

"Yes, a sack. Look here, man, I said switch that light out."

"Now, now, Mr. Cayley, I don't take orders from you. I know my duty, and it's my belief —"

"Leave that rug alone!" screamed Cayley.

The constable paused, startled. Then he spoke weightily, the corner of the rug in his great hand.

"Mr. Cayley, I must ask you to show me what you've got in this here side-car. It don't look like potatoes to me, and that's a fact. Besides —"

"All right then, damn you!" Cayley's voice was pitched hysterically. "All right!"

The sound of the shot mingled with the sudden roar of the engine. As he twisted to fire Cayley's foot had trodden on the starter. This time it worked. The bicycle leapt forward.

Cayley drove on, as fast as his machine would carry him. His face was stiff with terror. He knew he had not killed the policeman, for he had seen him jump aside as the bicycle plunged forward.

What had possessed him to fire like that? And what, ten times more fatal, had possessed him to fire and not to kill? Now he was done for. Cayley knew that his only chance was to go back and find the policeman: to hunt him down and kill him where he stood. That was his only chance now — and he could not do it. No, he could not. Too late Cayley realized that he was not the man for murder.

What was he going to do?

Already the constable would be giving the alarm. Policemen everywhere would be on the look-out for him soon. He must not stop. His only hope was to get as far away as possible, in the quickest time.

He sped on madly, not knowing where he was going, turning now right, now left, as the road forked, intent only on putting as long and as confused a trail as possible between himself and the constable.

He drove till his eyes were almost blind and his arms were numb with pain, and Rose drove with him.

Rose!

He could not dispossess himself of her, he dared not leave her anywhere. He dared not even stop. If he stopped, they might pounce on him. And then they would find her.

And if he did not stop — just stop to bury her somewhere — then they would find her just the same in the end. But he dared not stop. His one hope was to keep flying along. So long as he was moving he was safe.

He drove on: insanely, anywhere, everywhere, so long as he was still driving. His eyes never shifted from the road ahead of him; but after a time his lips began to move. He was talking to Rose, in the side-car.

"I got it for you, Rose. You would have it, instead of riding pillion. Well, now you've got it. This is our last drive together, Rose, so I hope you're enjoying it."

What was to happen when his petrol gave out he dared not think. He could not think. His brain was numb. All he knew was that he must keep on driving: away, away, from that policeman and the alarm he had given. Where he might be he had no idea or the names of the villages and little towns through which he tore.

It did not matter so long as he kept on. One word only fixed itself in his sliding mind: Scotland. For some reason he had the idea that if he could but reach Scotland he would have a chance.

At breakneck speed he thrust on, with Rose, to Scotland.

But Cayley was not to reach Scotland that night. Whether it is that, in panic, the human animal really does move in circles, whether it was that in his numbed brain there still glowed an unconscious spark of his great plan, the fact is left that, while Cayley still thought himself headed for Scotland, he instinctively took a rough track which presented itself on the right of the road when he came to it, and that track led to the top of the same quarry in which he had meant to bury Rose.

But Cayley never knew that, any more than he recognized the wooden rails bordering the edge when they seemed to leap towards him in the beam of his headlight. Then it was too late to recognize anything, in this world.

There were other things, too, which Cayley never knew. He never knew that the constable, a motor-cyclist himself, had seen his inadvertent treading on the self-starter. He did not know that the constable, highly amused, had thought that Cayley's motor-cycle had run away with him. Above all, he did not know that the constable never had the remotest idea that a shot was ever fired at him.

Vincent Starrett's most celebrated sleuth is Jimmie Lavender (watch for a hitherto unpublished Lavender story to appear soon). But did you know that Mr. Starrett also created a woman detective? We introduce her to you — Sally Cardiff — in her most scintillating exploit.

MURDER AT THE OPERA

by VINCENT STARRETT

Two circumstances marked the première of the new opera as notable, even in anticipation. First, and perhaps foremost, it was by all accounts a sensational musical event; something that was going to be talked about in the press and from the pulpit. Second, in spite of her recent scandalous divorce from Palestrina, Edna Colchis was going to sing — and Palestrina was going to direct her.

The murder of Mrs. Emmanuel B. Letts during the sulphurous first act was, of course, unpredictable.

From her seat in the "diamond circle" — specifically, the Hassard box (Mondays and Fridays) — Sally Cardiff watched the surge and flow of opulent Chicago, with the little smile of one for whom such spectacles were providentially ordained. When, occasionally, she replied to the remarks of young Arnold Castle, at her side, she did so pleasantly but without removing her eyes from the scene of colorful congestion.

Young Mr. Castle was cynical. "Fifty per cent of them are here to see what happens between those two," he observed. "This Colchis now," he continued irritably, "what do they expect her to do? Blow up in the middle of the performance?"

His cigar lighter, which he clicked exasperatingly as he talked, was a magnificent affair. It was of gold, by Lemaire, and contained everything but running hot and cold water.

"If she felt that way," said Miss Cardiff, "she would not appear at all. But nothing will go wrong. They are both artists — and egotists."

"As for the opera," persisted Castle, "I suspect it has been greatly overrated. They say there isn't a *tune* in the whole show. Just discord!"

She laughed lightly. "Why do you come?" Then she blushed: "Never mind!" Her smiling gaze swung to the nearer boxes and her voice fell. "Mrs. Letts is wearing her fabulous necklace to-night. You see, it isn't a myth, after all."

"It's vulgar," said young Mr. Castle. "She's a lighthouse. Besides, it's dangerous. In times like these she should keep her jewels in a vault. I wouldn't feel safe with that thing in a church. Who's the fat bounder behind her?"

Miss Cardiff said "*Sh!*" The fat bounder had turned his head in their direction. Mrs. Hassard answered the question. "That's Higginson," she said briefly.

"Get out!" cried Castle, enlightened. Everybody knew who Higginson was. He was Mrs. Letts' secret service department, an ex-prize-fighter employed by Mrs. Letts as private detective and, if occasion should arise, slugger. The job was a sinecure, for the police also kept a friendly eye on the exits and entrances of the wealthy Mrs. Letts. It was easier to prevent an attempt upon her middle-aged person than to imagine what might happen to the heads of the department if any such attempt were made.

"He looks uncomfortable," added young Mr. Castle.

Hassard grinned satirically. "He doesn't like dressing up. He'd be more at home at the back of the house, talking to the fireman."

"Do you think so?" murmured Miss Cardiff. "I was thinking that he rather liked his part."

"He's too fat," observed the critical Castle. "Out of training. Soft living and locking up nights agrees with him. A child could stop him. I think I might even take him on myself," he added appraisingly.

Miss Cardiff again said "*Sh!*" and continued immediately: "Please don't! I never shall forget the time you tried to thrash a taxi driver."

"I won't touch him to-night," grinned Castle. "I suppose he's here to keep an eye on the necklace. Anyway, there are plenty of dicks in the house — eh, Hassard?"

Hassard thought it likely there were a number of detectives scattered through the house — all as uncomfortable in evening dress as Higginson.

Sally Cardiff continued to be fascinated by the audience. From time to time she put her glasses to her eyes, the better to observe some specimen of interest. She saw everything. Everything pleased her. The human values represented were, she knew, in large part spurious; but the circumstance had no power to spoil her appreciation of the cosmic whole. Life was like that. And life was exhilarating — quietly exhilarating.

Mrs. Letts, meanwhile, sat calmly in her chair, nodding occasionally to an arriving acquaintance, but for the most part placid and phlegmatic. She had once been beautiful, and she was still an attractive woman. She

had oodles of money — more money than any of the peacocks around her — but she was not a snob. She was simply elderly and a bit tired. She had greeted the Hassards and their party as they came in, and then had forgotten about them. After a time she appeared to nod, and was not shaken from her lethargy until a rapturous burst of applause noted the coming of the famous maestro.

Palestrina paused in his impressive march and bowed profoundly. The applause redoubled. He raised his baton, and it subsided almost abruptly.

"He's got the hair, all right," commented young Mr. Castle.

"*Sh!*" said Miss Cardiff, for the third time.

The baton descended and there stole through the house the opening notes of the overture to "The Robber Kitten" — a small, wailing cry from the violins, quickly abetted by the bull fiddles. The audience shivered deliciously. The cry mounted eerily on little cat feet until it was a strident shriek; then it dropped to the first whispering wail. The crescendo was repeated. It was heard a third time. Then all the violins and fiddles went crazy together and filled the auditorium with harsh, discordant sound. This continued for some time. Somewhere in the background of it all a wild, high melody persisted — a tortured, uncomfortable strain — and the brasses joined the uproar, at intervals, with savage gusts of laughter.

The critics, in retrospect, decided that the whole had been "a succession of unpleasant sense impressions telling a brutal story with dramatic emphasis."

Whatever the critics may have thought, the house was stunned; then thunders of applause swept the auditorium. Palestrina turned and bowed in several directions. . . .

But the questing eyes of Sally Cardiff, at that moment, caught a familiar face in the glow of an orchestra light; and she put up her glasses for a better view. *Interesting!* The man playing one of the first violins was almost the double of Palestrina, the conductor. They might even have changed places without suspicion — as far as personal appearance went.

Again the baton was upraised, and again the kittens' wail crept through the place, to end abruptly with the shriek of the adult felines. And as the wild cry failed and dropped the figure of a man stole from the wings, costumed to represent an enormous cat. He was in full evening dress below the jaw, but a furred headpiece set with pointed ears created the impression of feline masculinity; his tremendous mustachios stood out

like bristling antennae. Orlando Diaz, the famous tenor. As *Grimalkin*, the Robber Kitten.

He began to sing.

Nobody, of course, paid the slightest attention to Mrs. Emmanuel B. Letts. Yet it might have been observed that at the beginning of the performance she had leaned forward in her chair — to use her glasses — and that a little later she had leaned back again. In point of fact, she did this several times. Her interest in cats, however, was notorious. She was interested in a cat hospital.

The performance went on. More cat-eared, whiskered singers stole on and off the stage. The row was terrific. Colchis appeared and sang divinely — if the word may be applied to the singing of an almost diabolic rôle — and no mishap occurred to mar the flagrant felicity of the situation.

At the conclusion of the first act the applause was boisterous. Colchis popped in and out of the wings like an animated jack-in-the-box, receiving flowers, while Diaz was even more modest than usual. He was, indeed, the last to appear, to take his bow, and he contrived to lend to the simple act a suggestion of protest. In every gesture he seemed to say that the triumph belonged to Colchis.

"Smart man," commented Sally Cardiff, on whom no nuance of behavior was lost. "He minimizes the Colchis triumph by appearing to abet it."

But at last the ovations were at an end, and the audience dispersed to the lobbies and lounges to smoke and wrangle over the performance. Many sat on in their seats, among them Mrs. Emmanuel B. Letts, to whom — after a respectful moment — Higginson bent forward and addressed a superficial word. What he said, it developed later, was merely: "Well, modom, what did you think of it?"

But Mrs. Letts was already quite dead. She was never to know how the story ended. Rather, she was to furnish — for days to come — a news sensation more fascinating than any the city had known in years.

"Murder!" shrieked the newsboys in the snowy streets, even before the first performance of "The Robber Kitten" was at an end. And then they shrieked: "Murder-wurder! All about the turrible-urrible murder-wurder in the opery-wopery!" Or words to that effect. Emerging from the great casino into the worst blizzard the city had experienced since '69, the jackdaws and peacocks of the social set were assaulted by the ferocious clamor of the gamins.

Only a few had the faintest inkling of what had occurred almost under their noses.

And Mrs. Emmanuel B. Letts sat on in her gilded box, her fabulous necklace still gleaming on her mottled throat, while silent men stood by and waited the emptying of the great barn that had become her tomb.

II

Robbery, it seemed apparent, could not have been the motive. There was the famous necklace to prove that. Unless the murderer had somehow failed at the last moment. Was it possible that he had — with consummate cleverness — committed his crime, then been forced to escape without his plunder?

The idea occurred to Dallas, chief of the Detective Bureau, but he put it out of his mind for the time. It seemed unlikely. Jealousy, thought Dallas — or hatred — would be a more likely motive. These wealthy society women! He knew them. They purred and cooed and "deared" one another, but each loathed the ground on which the other walked. For that a woman had turned the trick, Dallas had no doubt at all. It looked, he said, like a woman's job. Academically, a detective has no right to a strong opinion until he has a fact or two upon which to base it; but in actuality all detectives are prejudiced from the beginning.

Only two opera parties had been asked to remain — those occupying the boxes immediately adjoining that of Mrs. Letts. It was obviously impracticable to hold the entire audience. But the theater staff was on hand in a phalanx — all the ushers, and the box office bandits, and the hat check robbers, and the numerous management. Not to mention a terrified young man and young woman from the audience, who were regarded by Dallas with the deepest possible suspicion. The two had occupied main floor seats on stolen tickets, which they averred they had purchased from a scalper.

Around the scene of the crime a magnificent activity was apparent. Detectives from the Bureau and from the Coroner's office dashed in and out of the lethal box. Reporters jostled and quarreled around the door. Flashlights exploded, and the acrid powder smoke drifted out across the vacant auditorium like an aftermath of battle. In the mezzanine lobby beyond the tier of boxes, the presumptive witnesses huddled on long sofas or paced nervously in the deep pile of the carpet.

Dallas and the coroner sat perilously on the extreme outward ledge of the box, facing the corpse, with Higginson at one side. The background was occupied by two burly detectives from the Bureau.

"Well, Higginson," the detective chief began abruptly, "it looks as if

the first explanation ought to come from you."

There could be little doubt of it, since presumably the man had sat behind the murdered woman throughout the whole first act. There was, however, this in his favor: he had himself reported the demise at the conclusion of that first installment. Thereafter, for two long and ghastly further installments, with Dallas as his shadowy companion, he had continued to sit behind the stiffening body. Somebody had to sit there, to keep Mrs. Letts from toppling from her chair.

This had been Dallas's idea. It had occurred to him that nothing was to be gained by stopping the performance and dismissing the audience. And removal of the body would only have created a sensation that he had no wish to father. There was always the possibility, too, that the murderess — if unsuspicious — might return to the scene of her crime. She would hardly dare to leave the building, argued Dallas, thus inviting an individual attention. It was the detective's whim to ascertain which of the friends of Mrs. Emmanuel B. Letts — female — would first attempt to greet her, after the performance. He held a high opinion of the nerve and subtlety of women.

As it happened, nobody made the attempt.

Higginson, although subdued, was faintly peevish. He knew Dallas very well indeed. "Honest to God, chief," he answered, speaking his own tongue for the first time in weeks, "I told you all I know about it."

"Tell me again," said Dallas. "I want Marlowe and Duffield to hear the whole story. And the coroner," he added.

Messrs. Marlowe and Duffield, of the Bureau, bent their united gaze on the unhappy man.

Higginson's wild eye avoided contact with the body in the gilded chair. The incredible scene was now lighted by a blaze of electricity, in which the fabulous necklace glinted and sparkled like a proscenium arch.

"I got a telephone call, boys," said Higginson, in a low voice. "That's the way it was. During the first act. An usher came to the box. He just put his hand in and touched my arm. I was sitting back a bit — just over there. I slipped outside, and he said I was wanted on the telephone. It was a message for Mrs. Letts, he said."

"Did you tell her you were leaving the box?" asked Duffield swiftly.

"No, I didn't, Duffy." Higginson also knew Messrs. Marlowe and Duffield. "There didn't seem to be any use. It was probably some nuisance, I figured, and I could take care of it as well as her. If I'd told her, she'd just have sent *me*, anyway."

Duffield nodded.

"So I just slipped out and went to the 'phone myself. It was downstairs in the lobby — the public telephone near the east door. Oh, I know what you're all thinking! I ought to have known better. Who would call her on that telephone, eh? Who would know the number? I know! Good God, do you suppose I'd have gone if I'd known what was going to happen?"

"What happened at the telephone, Hig?" The question came from Marlowe. There was a certain sympathy in his voice that Higginson was quick to sense and appreciate.

"Not a damn' thing, Joe! Just a voice I didn't know, saying, 'Is that you, Higginson?' And I said, 'Yes — who's this?' And he said, 'Hold the wire a minute. There's an important message coming for Mrs. Letts.'"

"And you held the wire," finished Duffield dryly. "Meanwhile, this bird — or somebody else — was beating it around to the box you'd left and knifing Mrs. Letts!"

Higginson nodded slowly. "Yes," he agreed. "I guess that's what happened, Duffy."

"It was a man on the telephone, though. You're sure of that?" The detective's voice was strident. Outside, the witnesses pricked up their ears.

"Oh, it was a man on the *telephone*, all right," cut in Dallas, with a faint sneer. "But it wasn't necessarily a man that did this job."

"Why so, chief?" There was disagreement in Duffield's query.

"Motive," answered the chief laconically. His voice sank. "You can't imagine a *man* caring enough, one way or another, to kill this old woman, can you?"

"One way or another about what?" asked Duffield.

"Anything," said Dallas vaguely. He added: "If it was a man, Duff, it'd be a case of robbery — and the necklace would be gone. Look at it!"

"*Mmmm*," admitted the other. "It's a whooperdoo, all right."

"It's a lallapaloosa," said Dallas.

"Ever any attempts on her before, Hig?" asked Marlowe.

"Not in my time."

"Is that her glove?" The detective indicated a long and crumpled white object on the floor of the box.

"It's hers," answered Higginson gloomily.

The left hand and arm of the murdered Mrs. Letts were bare to the shoulder. The right hand and arm were gloved to a point above the elbow. They all studied the impassive woman for a moment, while Mrs. Letts' eyes continued to stare blankly across the empty pit. She seemed to be accepting, with her usual placidity, this new experience of death and dissolution.

Her opera glasses lay on the floor a little distance from the body. Duffield picked them up. "Looks as if somebody had stepped on these," he observed. "This scratch is pretty fresh."

Higginson shrugged. "Afraid *I* did that, Duffy," he confessed. "Last week. She lent 'em to me — at 'The Love of Three Oranges.' I dropped 'em and kicked 'em around a bit."

"At the *what?*" demanded Duffield, incredulously.

" 'The Love of Three Oranges,' " said Higginson. "It's another opera."

"My God!" said Duffield.

"Forget that," snapped Dallas, impatiently. "It's obvious what happened. Hig got his call — I *suppose* he did — and left the box. While he was gone, the dame who did the job slid inside, crawled up behind the victim, and pushed a knife into her back. A very neat job, too! Not a sound, apparently — although there might have been a little squeal, with perfect safety. I understand there was noise enough on the stage to cover almost anything. There was during the last two acts, anyway, while I was here. Then she slipped back to her own box and waited for the show to go on. All we've got to do," he concluded sardonically, "is find the woman."

The coroner was thoughtful. "It took nerve," he remarked, at last. "You think one of these dames . . . outside . . . ?"

"Sure, it took nerve," said Dallas. "No, I don't think one of these we've got did it — not necessarily. But they were nearest to this compartment. Maybe one of them saw something — or heard something. Anyway, if there was any society row on, they'll be sure to have heard of it. We've got to start somewhere. Let's have 'em in and get it over with."

"All right," said the coroner. "When did Higginson discover Mrs. Letts was dead?"

"At the end of the first act. He didn't notice anything wrong when he came back. It was dark in the box. He was tired of waiting at the telephone, and he sort of sneaked in and took his seat quietly. That right, Higginson?"

"That's about it," agreed Higginson.

"When he did discover it, he called *me*," concluded Dallas, "and I called *you*. And here we are," he added cheerfully.

"How about the usher that called Higginson away?"

"Left with Higginson and didn't come back. Knows nothing about it — he *says*."

"Call them in," said the coroner.

There entered first, as it happened, Miss Sally Cardiff. The summoner — Detective-Sergeant Duffield — for

obscure reasons of his own (reasons having to do with her eyes and hair), had singled her out as the first victim of the inquisition.

She stopped short inside the curtains. Her eyes were very wide. They were even eager.

"Then it's true!" said Sally Cardiff.

Slightly taken aback, Dallas answered. "What's true?" he asked.

"That Mrs. Letts has been murdered!"

"Where did you hear that?" asked Dallas.

"I can *see* it — now! But I knew it before. It could only be that. Why else should the place be running over with policemen and reporters? What else could all the whispering mean? Why detain the box-holders nearest to Mrs. Letts and send the rest of the audience away? And, by the way, I think *that* was a mistake, Mr. Detective."

Her eyes sparkled with animation. "Why," she said, "I knew there was something up when I saw Higginson bolt out of the box. And when *you* returned . . . !"

"The deuce you did," said the chief of detectives. He recovered a bit from his astonishment. "When would that be, Miss Cardiff? I mean, when you saw Higginson bolt out of the box."

"At the end of the first act. I saw him lean over and say something to Mrs. Letts. Perhaps I didn't actually *see* it — but I sensed his movement — you know? And a minute later I saw him get up and leave. I supposed Mrs. Letts had been taken ill."

"Do you know Higginson?"

"I do not. But I have seen him before — with Mrs. Letts."

"It is Mrs. Letts that you know?"

"Only casually — to speak to — in such places as this. She nodded to us all when she came in, but there was no conversation."

"Not in the same set, perhaps?" inquired the detective, with pensive malice.

But there was no sting in the question for Sally Cardiff. "Exactly," she smiled. Then the words burst from her quickly: "Who killed her?"

Dallas laughed shortly and silently. "That's what we are trying to find out. You appear to be a young woman with ideas. Have you any that might help us to answer your own question?"

Miss Cardiff was suddenly apologetic. "I'm sorry," she murmured. "I just can't help being curious. I'm a — a nuisance that way! I haven't a suspicion in the world."

But her eyes still glanced avidly in all directions — seeing everything, appraising everything. She was burning to ask a dozen questions, and a little ashamed of her curiosity.

After all, what was it to her? She was probably under suspicion, herself! Oddly, she felt no sense of crawling flesh in the presence of the murdered woman. Only a desire to look — to question — even to touch. To go down on her hands and knees and hunt upon the floor for clues. Good heavens! Was *this* the result of all her philosophy and reading? To make of her an amateur detective — stirred to a morbid *Who-lust* by the smell of blood?

For an instant she felt a little silly. Dallas was watching her.

"So you think it was a mistake for me to send away the audience?" he continued. "Just why, Miss Cardiff, if you don't mind?"

She hesitated. "I hardly know," she answered. "It was an impulsive remark — perhaps intuitive. I know, of course, that nobody from our own box went near this place; but I suppose I *can't* answer for the persons in the box beyond. I think your action struck me as being rather the obvious thing, Mr. . . ."

"My name is Dallas," said Dallas, politely.

"Mr. Dallas. So obvious, in fact, as in all likelihood to be wrong. You see? That is, the man who did this would hardly — unless, of course, he were very clever indeed, and realized that the obvious thing might be overlooked . . ."

She was speaking, ultimately, to herself, and frowning very prettily over it, it occurred to Duffield.

Dallas studied her with profound interest. "Why do you say the *man?*" he asked suddenly.

"But wasn't it?" she cried. She stooped swiftly to the floor of the box. "Mrs. Letts's glove! See how it has been torn back from the elbow. No woman ever removed a glove that way. Why, it's almost inside out. And he's snapped a button off. Did you find the button, Mr. Dallas?"

Dallas laughed harshly. "We hadn't quite got around to that glove yet, Miss Cardiff," he answered, and swung sharply on his underlings. "Find that button, quick!"

Miss Cardiff studied the distance between the chair occupied by the corpse and the low railing of the box. "It might have jumped over the rail," she observed, "if the glove was removed in haste. And probably it was."

"Hustle downstairs and see if that button's under the balcony, Marlowe," snapped the chief of detectives. "You, too, Duffield!" Then he cleared his throat with some violence. "You are a remarkable young woman, Miss Cardiff," he continued mildly. "What else does the glove tell you?"

He waited almost respectfully for her reply.

"You see," she answered, holding out the glove for his inspection, "in a long glove of this sort there is a gusset, or opening, in the center of the palm; it extends to a point some inches upward on the wrist. This is buttoned at the top by three buttons, and it's easier to open the buttons and work the hand out through the opening than it is to take off the glove. That's the way Mrs. Letts would have done it, herself, if — for instance — she just wanted to cool her fingers."

"I see," said Dallas. "And a man wouldn't do it that way?"

"He might, I suppose; but it's unlikely. His first thought would be to turn the glove back at the top and rip it downward."

"And a woman *wouldn't?* I see!"

Miss Cardiff turned the glove back into its proper shape. "Now here," she continued calmly, "is a point that is perhaps in favor of *your* theory. Notice how the fingertips are stained. They are . . ."

But Dallas fairly snatched the glove from her hand.

"It's blood!" he crowed. "By George, Miss Cardiff, it's blood!" By his gleeful shout he tacitly accepted her, for the moment, as his fellow worker in the vineyard of detection — a tremendous compliment.

Miss Cardiff retrieved the glove and sniffed it. "No," she said, "it's rouge. I thought it was; that's why I said what I did."

For an instant Dallas was petrified. Then, "Of course!" he bellowed. "Of course, it's rouge!" He smiled. "Then it *was* a woman, after all."

"It *may* have been," admitted Miss Cardiff, and then they both looked accusingly, for a moment, at the dead lips of Mrs. Emmanuel B. Letts. It was plainly to be seen that no rouge had been upon those lips for a long time. Certainly no scarlet rouge.

The chief of detectives thrust his head over the railing and called down to his searchers below.

"Just got it, chief," floated upward the voice of Duffield. "By golly, she was right! It popped over like a blooming poker chip."

"Come up here again," said Dallas jovially, "and take some lessons from a detective that knows her business. . . . By George, Miss Cardiff," he continued with enthusiasm, "you are a howling wonder! There's one thing, though, that you won't discover for a time — and neither will I."

Miss Cardiff looked anxious. "What is that?" she asked.

"*Why* the murderess found it necessary to remove that glove. It's certain that Mrs. Letts didn't take it off, herself; so the other

woman must have. You've made that clear, at least."

Miss Cardiff's brow cleared.

"Oh," she said, "I thought you knew why the glove had been removed. Surely the impression of the ring is quite plain on the poor woman's third finger. And from the little bulge in the corresponding finger of the glove, the stone must have been a heavy one. Obviously, a valuable ring has been stolen."

Dallas sat stunned. For a long moment he stared his complete amazement. When he spoke it was in a husky whisper.

"A ring," he echoed. "A valuable ring?" Then his eyes swung to the gleaming, glittering toy on the dead woman's throat. His bewilderment at last found other words. "She took a ring — and left that necklace?"

"Of course," smiled Sally Cardiff cheerily. "The necklace is an imitation."

III

Could a woman have committed the crime? Sally Cardiff doubted it. Dallas, of course, was simply prejudiced. Intuition was a funny thing. It whispered to Dallas — a man — that a woman had done this deed. To Sally Cardiff — a woman — it whispered that a man had done it. Perhaps she, also, was prejudiced.

The blow, of course, delivered from behind — and by a person stretched along the floor, and therefore *upward* — had been, no doubt, a vigorous one. But there were powerful women in the world. Some of them, doubtless, had been in the audience that night. And perhaps the murderer had *not* stretched himself on the floor to deliver his blow. Mrs. Letts had sat well back in the box — it was dark — he could have been in the shadow of the curtains. It was all really much simpler than it appeared. But the glove button *was* an evidence of masculinity, Dallas to the contrary notwithstanding.

And yet — what of the rouge on the fingertips?

Women, at times, shook hands with one another. And not heartily, as men did. They purred softly and touched fingertips! It was possible that Mrs. Letts had greeted some such creature before entering the box — and that the creature, an instant before, had dabbed at her lips.

If only the weapon could be found! Mrs. Letts had been wearing an evening dress of silver metal cloth. It had been cut high, since her back was none too lovely. The knife had penetrated the cloth to reach the flesh. Miss Cardiff hummed softly to herself. There were possibilities in the situation. But the knife was with the murderer — or the murderess. Have it your own way, Mr. Dallas!

Probably it had been cleaned, anyway, and restored to its original innocence.

"And yet . . ." murmured Miss Cardiff, puckering her forehead.

It was quite late. Indeed, it was quite early. It was, in point of fact, 3 A.M. Mrs. Letts had been dead about six hours, roughly speaking. Maybe five-and-a-half. Let Dallas figure it. What difference did it make? But it *did* make a difference — didn't it? It was a legitimate supposition that the murderer — who was not a fool — had selected his time. Roughly. He couldn't be sure of Higginson, of course. Higginson *might* have left the telephone without waiting for the "important message for Mrs. Letts"; in which case. . . . Anyway, the murderer had worked rapidly.

He had telephoned from somewhere *inside* the opera house. Even Dallas must be sure of that. However, there were a number of telephones in the building; they were scattered about the several lobbies and lounges, in convenient corners. For that matter, there were telephones in the *office!* At the ticket window! In every room occupied by a member of the management!

It was a shocking thought.

"*Tut!*" said Miss Cardiff.

A minute later it was less shocking. Even a member of the official staff would not have been fool enough to telephone through the switchboard. He would have gone to a public telephone. His call would then be received by an *outside* operator and would re-enter the opera house by way of another public telephone. The number of the second public telephone would be known, of course, to the murderer. Very simple. Very clever.

Miss Cardiff drew her robe more comfortably about her shoulders. The room was cooling off. It seemed that weeks had passed since her interview with Dallas. She had been at home for more than an hour. On the way home there had been much conversation. The others had been able to tell Dallas nothing at all. Young Mr. Castle had been all for arresting Higginson at once. The Hassards had seen nothing — heard nothing — but the opera. Had the occupants of the other box? They were all closer to Mrs. Letts than the Hassard group. Closer socially. They knew more about her.

But what was there to know?

There was Emmanuel B. Letts, of course. He was still living — somewhere in the East. The divorce had occurred at least ten years before the première of "The Robber Kitten." It had been quiet enough: whatever scandal attached — and there was nothing sensational that

one remembered — had attached to the banker Letts. As far as the murder was concerned, he seemed a bit out of the picture.

Miss Cardiff reviewed the episodes of the opera. Mrs. Letts had died during the first act. At what point? Was the uproar, at the moment, particularly furious? The overture, after all, had been the noisiest part of the performance; and Mrs. Letts was placidly alive when the overture had concluded. She recalled a trifling incident to prove it. The overture had ended, the applause of the audience had subsided, and the lines of the opera had begun. Mrs. Letts had put up her glasses and leaned forward in her chair. After a time she had leaned back again. That was all. But it proved conclusively that Mrs. Letts was not murdered during the overture.

But did it prove . . . ?

"Oh dear!" murmured Sally Cardiff.

Was it conceivable that Mrs. Letts had been murdered in that instant of leaning forward and leaning back again? The moment would have been admirably propitious for a murderer intent on avoiding the chairback. And the racket, at the time, surely had been sufficient. Diaz was singing an aria describing his exploits as the Robber Kitten, and doing a good job of it. The house was intent on the stage. Immediately thereafter there had been a duet between Diaz and Colchis, which could hardly have been described as a lullaby. It was a bit screechy. The orchestra, in the instrumental intervals, had been consistently boisterous. A tiny little scream in Mrs. Lett's box might well have gone unnoted.

Miss Cardiff continued to recall the incidents of the evening. Something had struck her as odd. What was it?

After a moment it occurred to her. The man in the orchestra pit who had looked like Palestrina!

She bit her lips on the fantastic thought that flashed through her mind. Mrs. Letts was a noted patron of the opera. She knew everybody. Without her guarantee it was doubtful if the opera could survive. Undoubtedly she knew Palestrina.

But did musicians use rouge?

Absurd!

Did conductors? Did Palestrina?

What wild and ridiculous nonsense! Palestrina, in point of sober fact, was actively conducting his orchestra at the moment Mrs. Letts lay back in her chair and died. Wasn't he? Of course, he was. A houseful of people could testify to that. He had been right there from the beginning.

Very well! But for the sake of the argument — what if Palestrina had *not* been there, behind the conductor's stand, all the time? At *any* time! Was the likeness between himself and the violin-player in the orchestra so great that one could pass as the other? Was it possible that a violin-player could, without the genius of Palestrina, conduct an orchestra with Palestrina's genius?

Would it have been possible for a violin-player to escape from the orchestra pit — at the conclusion of the overture, say — and go about another business?

"Oh dear!" murmured Miss Cardiff again. She sat up straight in her chair. "I'm getting quite, quite mad. But I do wish I had looked for that man in the orchestra again. *Did* he go away? And, if he did, *did* he come back?"

Then another thought occurred to her, more paralyzing than the first.

IV

The newspapers, in the morning, called attention to the statement of the coroner's physician with reference to the violence of the blow given Mrs. Letts by her assailant. It had been, it appeared, very powerful. The flesh about the wound was bruised and discolored. The inference was that only a man could have delivered such a stroke. The newspapers were, in point of fact, inspired to this utterance by Dallas, himself, who was anxious that his private theory concerning a woman should remain in obscurity. No use warning one's suspects in advance of the big pinch. His woman obsession was one he was loath to give up, although Sally Cardiff had shaken it.

Duffield, meanwhile, had turned up a sensation. It completely revolutionized Dallas's notions when he heard about it. The word came to him over the telephone, and the chief of detectives banged his fist on the desk and swore with savage triumph.

"Good work, Duff," he said. "Wait there till I join you. I'm coming right away."

Duffield, a bit of a genius himself, had been visited by an inspiration. . . . A pilot had crashed the night before — a commercial pilot — while eastbound for New York, and now lay cursing in a small hospital in northern Indiana. The newspaper account had been brief. Duffield had read it in an early edition. The pilot, it appeared, was concerned about the fate of his passenger; but as there had been no passenger found in the wreckage, the Indiana authorities had assumed the man to be delirious.

Duffield, without orders, had hurried to the Indiana hospital — by

fast plane — and was at the pilot's bedside when he telephoned his superior. Dallas joined him at top speed, by early train. Top speed was what the company called it; but in actuality the middle west was all but snowbound.

"Listen, chief," said the subordinate, when he had taken his superior aside, "he said it again, right after I telephoned you!"

"The deuce he did!" said Dallas.

"Yep. There was a doctor with us, and he heard it too. He thought the fellow was trying to say 'Let's go!' which is a common phrase, it seems, among flyers. I didn't try to tell him anything different."

Dallas grinned happily. He inhaled the aseptic odors of the hospital corridor with appreciation. "It looks good to me, Duff," he said.

"It's the goods," said Duffield. "What the pilot was saying was '*Letts*,' as sure as you're a foot high. His passenger was Emmanuel B. Letts — and Emmanuel B. Letts is missing! They must have left Chicago some time last night. They got caught in the blizzard, tried to go over it — or around it — or something — and finally they crashed."

"Is this fellow going to die?"

"No — he's going to pull through."

"I suppose," said Dallas reflectively, "it couldn't have been that . . . ?"

"Not a chance," interrupted Duffield. "I thought of that. I thought maybe this fellow had done the job, himself, and was making a sneak. But why? He ain't a gunman or a gangster. He's a professional pilot. It only makes it harder, that way, chief! There's no sense looking for a hard answer. This fellow couldn't have had anything against Mrs. Letts. He couldn't have done the job — the way it was done. The other way it's easy. A woman's husband . . ."

"All right," said Dallas. "It just occurred to me. Well, we've got to find Letts. Where was the crash?"

"About five miles from here — out in the country."

"Who found the pilot?"

"A farmer. He lives near where it happened. He telephoned the police here, when he heard the crash, and they went out and got him. Got the pilot."

"No suspicions, of course," said Dallas, "so they wouldn't look around. I'll bet they've trampled the snow like a flock of elephants."

Duffield shrugged. "Well," he said, "the snow's been falling pretty steady ever since. There wouldn't have been any footprints, anyway."

"He couldn't go far," mused Dallas. Then he brightened and spoke more cheerfully. "Maybe he was hurt! He'd almost *have* to be.

Maybe the farmer's got him. Anyway, he's hiding somewhere."

"They ain't always hurt," said Duffield, morosely. "First thing he'd think of 'd be a train. He'd have to get that *here*."

"Would he?" questioned Dallas. "Well, that's something. You've looked up the morning trains, I suppose?"

"The storm has shot schedules all to hell," said Duffield. "The train you came on should have left Chicago last night. There's plenty of time as far as trains are concerned."

"This fellow have anything in his pockets?"

"Nothing we want."

"*Hmph*," grumbled Dallas. "Well, you're a good dick, Duffy! Let's get going."

They assured themselves that there was no chance of the pilot's miraculous recovery and disappearance during their absence, then plunged into the snow-clad streets. Their first visit was to the railroad station. No stranger had been inquiring for trains east, however, and they pushed on to police headquarters, where their advent created a sensation. Dallas was a very famous detective.

"I'll go with you, myself," said the chief of police, with flattering emphasis. "My driver knows every road in the county."

"He'll need a snow plow," observed Duffield grimly. "I wish criminals would stop operating in the winter."

The drive to the scene of the accident was cold and difficult; but at last they stood beside the twisted framework of the plane — a gaunt and melancholy spectacle with its insulation of gleaming snow. A glance was sufficient to tell the experienced Chicagoan detectives that a hunt for clues would be useless. They stood in snow to their knees and looked gloomily at the tragic tangle of wood and metal. They kicked their aching feet against the dead motors, and swore thoughtfully.

"Any roadhouses near here?" asked Dallas, at length. "Hotels? Any place he could have gone?"

"There's Braxton's," said the police chief. "It's five miles the other way."

"Letts wouldn't necessarily know his directions," said Dallas. "All right. Let's go to Braxton's."

They drove toilsomely to Braxton's — a two-story shack whose creaking signboard, festooned with snow-bunting, announced its *raison d'être* in a single laconic word: *Tourists*. The slattern in charge was unimpressed by their descent. No guests had come to her the night before, nor during the morning hours

either. She brightened when they ordered coffee, which they drank standing.

Then again the snow-piled highway took them. They were heading back, now, toward the town. On all sides stretched desolate miles of glistening white. Trees were hung with it. Fences drooped with its weight.

Not far from the wrecked plane the land fell away into a hollow, from out of which now rose a lazy question-mark of smoke.

"What's that?" asked Dallas.

"Neilson's," answered the police chief briefly. "The fellow that found the pilot," he explained. "He don't know anything about it."

"Oh?" said Dallas. "Let's have a look at him, anyway. There seems to be a bit of a path there."

They swung inward and upward for a piece; then their wheels spun uselessly in unbroken drifts of snow and ice. Duffield climbed out of the car.

"Get back to the road, if you can," he said. "I'll go up to the house."

He plunged forward on foot, wading in snow to his waist, and at length breasted the hillock. Behind him the stalled car fumed and chugged, endeavoring to back.

Duffield's eyes fell first on the low dwelling of the farmer Neilson, all but snow-bound in the hollow. Then he saw something else. From an upper window a man was watching him, who, after an instant, began frantically to wave his arms. He seemed to be summoning Duffield to the house. Neilson, no doubt — but what the devil did the fellow want? Had he seen the car?

He strode onward with large steps and at length burst a path to the farmhouse door. The man at the window had disappeared. In the doorway, suddenly, were two men. The second man was obviously Neilson; he could be no one else. But the first man was a man of substance and position if ever Duffield had seen one. He was tall and powerful, running a bit to flesh, and his garments were expensive and of the latest cut. Obviously, too, they had been exposed to the elements.

The big man was excited. "I heard your car from the window," he said, "and I thought I had a glimpse of it. Are you going up to town?"

There was no doubt in Duffield's mind. He had never seen Emmanuel B. Letts or his portrait; but he knew that this was Emmanuel B. Letts.

"Why, yes," he drawled. "Wanta come along?"

"You bet," said the stranger. "I had a breakdown, last night, and had to put in for repairs. I'll tell you about it as we go along."

"Reckon I heard about that," smiled Duffield. "Your pilot's in the hospital, ain't he?"

"Pilot?" echoed the other. "No, no — I heard about that, myself. Poor chap! No, I was driving. Wait till I get my traps." He hurried away upstairs, leaving Neilson staring at Duffield with deep suspicion.

"You don't belong in these parts," said the farmer, after a moment. "What was it you was wanting, when you came along?"

"Your house guest," answered Duffield promptly. He swung his heavy overcoat aside, then swung back the jacket underneath. Before the menace of his little badge the farmer fell away. "Not a word out of you," continued the detective. In a swift whisper he asked: "What did he give you?"

Neilson's eyes fell, then lifted. "A hundred dollars," he said defiantly.

"Keep it," said Duffield. "What'd he tell you?"

"He was with the pilot that was wrecked; but he didn't want it known. It was a secret trip, he said, and would hurt business if it was spread around."

"Keep your mouth shut till you're told to open it," said Duffield, "and I'll keep still about the hundred."

Letts was lumbering down the crooked stairs, clutching his satchel. He was now attired in a significant leather jacket.

"I'll be glad to get away," said the big man happily. "Not but what your hospitality has been fine, Mr. Neilson; but I've got things to do, after all." He turned on Duffield with belated suspicion. "You live around here, I suppose? Just breaking a path to town, eh?"

"Right you are," said Duffield jovially. "And glad to have you with me, Mr. . . . ?" He hesitated before the name.

"I'll make it worth your while," nodded Letts. "My name is Rogers. Maybe you can tell me about the trains out of town. I'm a stranger in the neighborhood, myself."

They fought their way through the drifts, stepping where possible in the holes made by Duffield in his advance upon the house. As they crested the rise, the detective noted that his companions had worked the car back into the road. Two of them — Dallas and the local chief — were performing a slow dance in the snow, pausing occasionally to kick their aching feet against the framework of the car. The chauffeur sat stolidly behind his wheel.

"Friends of mine," said Duffield, in answer to the other's inquiring glance. "All going up to town, the same as we are."

They finished their plunge to the roadway and stopped beside the car. Dallas and the police chief were trying not to stare.

"In you go, boys," cried Duffield. "This gentleman is going along as far as the railway station."

The police chief climbed in beside his chauffeur. Dallas slipped into the rear seat and made room for the newcomer beside him. The last to enter the car was Duffield. The car started with a jerk.

"This is Mr. Rogers, chief," said Duffield, chattily. "He wants to catch the first train east."

Dallas smiled blandly on their sudden prisoner. He had looked at a portrait of Emmanuel B. Letts before leaving Chicago. He softly rubbed his knuckles.

"I sympathize with Mr. Rogers," he murmured; and laid his heavy hand on the other's shoulder.

V

Young Mr. Castle was annoyed. He had no objections to playing chauffeur to Sally Cardiff — it was his ambition to land a permanent job in that and other servile capacities — but her detectival activities set his back up. The excitement of Mrs. Letts's murder had gone to her head, apparently. He was forced to admit, however, that Miss Cardiff was not unduly excited. She was eager, but calm enough, all things considered. She was even dispassionate. Her theories of the murder were fantastic, they were the utmost nonsense; but she argued them plausibly. Somewhere, he felt certain, there was a flaw in her reasoning; but he was never able — while she was talking — to put his finger on it.

"And the publicity of it," he had stormed at her. "Suppose you were right! Can't you just see the newspapers? My dear girl, there would be nothing left for you to do but open a private inquiry agency."

"My curiosity is impersonal," she explained. "It's just — just curiosity! I really don't care two straws whether the murderer gets justice or doesn't. It's the chase — you know? My wits against his — and both of us against the police. I don't think I'm morbid, Arnold. As for Dallas — can't you see him taking all the credit? Why, I'll *hand* it to him. I'll toss it to him as I would to a — a fish!"

"Good old sea lion," grinned Castle.

That had been their latest discussion of the subject. It all flickered, cinema-like, through his mind as he sat behind the wheel of his gray roadster and looked up at the gloomy windows of the big warehouse beside which, at the moment, he

was parked. Sally Cardiff was inside.

In time she emerged. On the instant all his dissatisfaction fell away. Her face was beaming. Her step was brisk and triumphant. With what decision her tall heels clicked on the stone flags! And what a glorious small person, in all aspects, was this same Sally Cardiff!

"Don't get out," she said, climbing in beside him. She sank back with a long sigh of relief. "It's over," she said.

"You've failed?" he asked quickly — hopefully.

"I've won!"

He drove the roadster furiously through a narrow crack between two taxicabs, beat a changing traffic light by an eyelash, and turned a corner in haste.

"Where to?" he asked, after a time.

"I'm wondering," said Miss Cardiff. "To the Detective Bureau, I suppose. Not that I fancy myself, now, in the rôle of tale-teller; but there's the chance that I'll be able to keep Dallas from making a fool of himself."

"You're quite sure you're not making — *er* — committing an error, yourself?"

"Oh, quite!"

He sighed. "What did you find in the warehouse?" There had been a package under her arm when she emerged. Now it lay across her knee. He eyed it with suspicion.

But she did not lift the parcel. Instead, she opened her small purse, with infinite care, and extracted a tiny envelope.

"Slow down," she ordered, "and look inside."

He almost expected to see a human eyeball staring up at him.

What he saw was exactly nothing. Or did she mean that thread of dust that had settled in a corner of the envelope? As he looked, she shifted the container in her hands; and the thread of dust turned over on its side and glinted.

He looked quickly away. "What is it?"

"Mrs. Letts, you will recall, wore a metal cloth evening dress. It was cut high. The knife passed through it. This is a shred of the material."

"Get out!" he scoffed. But he was astounded.

"Actually. It can't be anything else. It adhered to the point of the knife."

Castle was stunned. "Oh, come off, Sally!" he cried at last. "It couldn't!"

"It did. Ordinarily, it wouldn't. I mean, it wouldn't adhere to an ordinary knife. This knife was not ordinary. It was rather a blunt knife, with a damaged tip. You remember what the coroner's physician said

about the wound? An unusually violent blow was required. That was why. The blade didn't have a point."

He was still incredulous. "And you found it — still clinging to the knife?"

"Oh, no! It was on the jacket of the other man. Almost under the arm. I'm glad it was a rough jacket. The knife, of course, was cleaned — but this little shred — just a twisted thread or two — remained in the broken tip. It was dislodged by the murderer's second thrust — *later* — and remained among the hairs of the jacket."

"Well, I'll be hanged!"

"Somebody will be," smiled Miss Cardiff. "No — they don't hang them, any more, do they?"

"And the knife proves this, too?"

"Yes — the point is damaged, as I explained. I've got it here, with the jacket."

"How on earth did you get away with them?"

"I simply dared them to stop me."

"Great Scott!" said young Mr. Castle, feebly inadequate. After a moment he asked: "Won't they tell?"

"I don't know. I warned them not to — but I suppose they know, by now, what I was really after. I don't care much. The rest of it is up to Dallas. After all, I'm not a policeman."

Castle smiled a mirthless smile. "No?" he interrogated; and answered himself with grave irony: "No — I suppose not!"

"Nevertheless, I suppose we must get to Dallas with our evidence."

"I suppose we must," agreed Mr. Castle.

They were incongruous figures on the steps of the Detective Bureau — that sinister gray building with its dingy corridors.

A staring desk sergeant directed them to Dallas's office. In the outer chamber a hard but smirking secretary stopped them. Dallas, it appeared, was in conference.

"My God," said Castle, "do they have them here, too?"

Miss Cardiff smiled attractively. "If you could just slip my name in to him," she whispered, "I think he might consent to see us. In fact, I'm sure of it." She proffered her visiting card.

The secretary smirked and frowned and smirked again. "I ain't saying I haven't heard of you, Miss Cardiff," he observed. "Well, just wait a minute, and maybe — "

He disappeared through a swinging door, into a room across which they saw another door. They heard the second door close behind him.

They waited exactly two minutes.

Then Dallas came hurriedly into the anteroom. He was very courteous.

"I'm glad to see you, Miss Cardiff," he said, ignoring Castle. "But I *am* busy — there's no use denying it. If it's important . . . ?" He smiled a hard, ingratiating smile.

"It *is* rather important, I think," answered Miss Cardiff. "I've come to tell you who killed Mrs. Letts."

The chief of detectives stared, speechless. After a moment, "Oh!" he murmured. After another moment he grinned. "To tell you the truth, Miss Cardiff, we've got the fellow, ourselves. Brought him up from Indiana, last night. I was questioning him when you arrived. You were certainly right about his being a man."

"He was running away, then?" cried Sally Cardiff.

"Just as fast as he could go," agreed Dallas.

"And he has confessed?"

"He *will* confess, before I get through with him," said Dallas grimly. "At the moment, between ourselves, he's holding out."

"What does he say? Of course, he hasn't a leg to stand on!"

"I agree with you, but he hasn't been able to see that — yet. Look here, have you got proof?"

"Positively."

"Good enough! It isn't customary to discuss these matters, but with *you* I will." Dallas was at once flattering and unctuous. He needed proof — it was all he did need.

"He admits he attended the opera — privately — but swears he knows nothing of the murder. Gave a very good imitation of a man being shocked, when we told him. Says his presence in Chicago was entirely due to business matters — very important! So important that he came here from the East secretly. Something to do with a bank merger which, if it got out, would upset business to beat he— to beat the band. Affect the stock market, and so on. Very plausible. He had his story all ready, obviously. So secret that, after the opera — and incidentally after the murder — he took a fast plane to get back to New York. Unfortunately, he crashed in Indiana. We were on the job — and we got him."

Miss Cardiff had listened to this explanation with growing wonder. "Who under the sun are you talking about?" she asked, at length.

"Emmanuel B. Letts," said Dallas. "Former husband of Mrs. Emmanuel B. Letts, deceased. Who are *you* talking about?"

"Oh, my goodness!" cried Sally Cardiff. "You've got the wrong man!"

For an instant they stared at each

other in silence. It was Dallas who spoke first. "Oh, I think not," he said. But his eyes were worried.

"But you *have*," she insisted. "I *know* it!"

The smirking secretary put his head in at the door for an instant. He made signs to Dallas.

"Get out of here!" roared Dallas in a fury. Then with an effort he controlled himself. "You were saying, Miss Cardiff?"

"I think," said Sally Cardiff, "I'd better tell you my story from the beginning, Mr. Dallas. I'm sure you must have forgotten the most important clue of all — the rouge on Mrs. Letts's glove."

"That rouge!" said Dallas scornfully. "It had nothing to do with it."

"It had everything to do with it. Does Mr. Letts use rouge?"

"Of course not. At least, I'm certain he doesn't."

"So am I. If you'd said he did, I'd have been bothered. Listen, Mr. Dallas. Mrs. Letts wasn't killed by anybody in the audience. She was killed by someone on the stage."

Into the harassed eyes of the detective chieftain crept a look of relieved understanding. He understood it all now. This attractive girl had simply gone cuckoo. She had been thinking too hard about the murder. It often happened that way.

He smiled tolerantly. "I hardly think that can be the case, Miss Cardiff," he said. "After all, the people on the stage had their own business to attend to. They were singing — and dancing — and carrying on — and Mrs. Letts, you will remember, was killed during the first act."

"You think I'm crazy?" Sally Cardiff laughed delightedly. "I give you my word, Mr. Dallas, if you arrest Mr. Letts for this crime, you will have a very nasty time on your hands — afterwards!"

The worried look again crept into Dallas's eyes.

"Well, well," he cried jovially, "let's hear your story, Miss Cardiff. I'm sure it will be an interesting one — and very clever."

"I'll tell you," she answered, "for the sake of Mr. Letts. Once more, I say, Mrs. Letts was killed by somebody on the stage."

For the second time she opened her tiny purse and extracted her envelope. She laid it in his hand. Then she fumbled with her parcel. There emerged a shaggy jacket of theatrical aspect and a gaudy dagger somewhat battered at the tip — but all the more formidable by reason of the damage. A toy that had become an ugly weapon.

"The envelope," continued Sally

Cardiff crisply, "contains a few threads of Mrs. Letts's dress. These other things came out of a theatrical warehouse, this afternoon — the warehouse where 'The Robber Kitten' is in storage till its next performance. This is the knife that murdered Mrs. Letts. The threads clung to this battered tip, you see, and later were transferred to the jacket of an actor who was murdered in the play. Not really murdered, you understand. In the opera! It took nerve to pretend to murder a man on the stage after *really* murdering a woman in the audience!"

She paused impressively; but Dallas had no words to utter.

"There is a rehearsal on at the opera house, right now, Mr. Dallas. It will last until five o'clock. Our man will be there. Will you come with me?"

For a long minute Dallas met the challenge of her eyes. Then he wilted.

"And Letts?" he questioned.

"Why not bring him along?"

There was another silence. Then Dallas spoke with epoch-marking decision.

"I'll do it," he said. "Wait till I get my hat."

VI

The orchestra was hard at work and, miraculously, playing something tuneful. But there was little time for listening, and after a few moments of unconscious lagging Castle hastened after his companions. No questions were asked of them. Here and there in the darkened house were other groups, standing or sitting: officials, critics, members of the company not engaged on the stage.

They crowded through a small door, concealed by curtains, climbed a flight of steps, and suddenly found themselves backstage. Only Letts and Dallas — and on different errands — had been in such a place before. A number of performers were standing around; but small attention was paid the newcomers. The light behind the scenes was gratifyingly dim.

"Now, Mr. Dallas, we must work quickly — before we are suspected. I almost wish you had worn a disguise."

"Good Lord!" gulped Dallas. "I never wore one in my life."

"We've simply got to find the telephone he used," said Sally Cardiff. "The one he *must* have used. Remember, it was a public telephone. He would never have operated through the switchboard. Now where would the dressing rooms be, Mr. Letts?"

The mountainous Letts indicated.

"I see. Very well, then — he

would go first to his dressing room, remove his mustache and his furry ears, pick up his dagger, then return to this section. Without his costume — it was only a headdress, after all — he would appear to be just a man in evening garments. The house was in darkness — the play was going on. Everybody was intent on the story. His makeup would not be noted. If he left by the door by which we entered, he would be out among the audience in a jiffy — just a quiet man walking up the aisle."

"There are no telephones in the auditorium proper, Miss Cardiff," said Emmanuel B. Letts positively. "They're all in the lobbies and lounges."

"Yes — and so he did *not* go out into the audience. The nearest exit light is over there." She walked swiftly to the door she had indicated and opened it. "Exactly! This is an entrance to the mezzanine lobby — an exit, if you like." She put her head outside and cocked it at an angle of interrogation. "And at the far end of this corridor there's a telephone booth! Quite perfect, you see. He knew beforehand exactly what he would do. He knew the number of the other telephone he was to call. From the first booth he called the second booth; and when a boy answered, he asked that Higginson be summoned from Mrs. Letts's box. Higginson came — and was asked to hold the wire. Then the other man quietly stood his receiver on the shelf and hurried to the front."

She stepped into the corridor, and the others followed.

"Why did nobody see him?" asked Castle suddenly. "The lobbies and lounges are studded with pages and ushers."

For a moment Sally Cardiff was stunned. It was a question she had never asked herself. Was it possible, after all, that there had been more than one person in the plot? *Had* somebody seen the murderer and kept silence?

"For that matter," said Dallas, a shrewd eye suddenly on Emmanuel B. Letts, "why did nobody but the boy who summoned him see Higginson go to the telephone and return? We questioned the whole staff about that."

But Emmanuel B. Letts knew the answer. "I think I can answer both questions, Miss Cardiff," he said gallantly. "The opera was being presented for the first time. The ushers, once their charges were safely seated, slipped off to their own points of vantage — wherever they may be — and watched the opera. They always do it, unless it is something familiar and boring to them. Most

of them, in fact, are students of music — that's why they have these jobs."

"Why, yes," smiled Sally Cardiff, "I think that must have been it. At any rate," she continued, briskly, "he met nobody — nobody, at any rate, who later connected him with the crime. He knew Mrs. Letts's box, and he slipped in quickly. Then I think he dropped softly to his knees. Mrs. Letts's back was to him. She must have been very close to his hand."

Dallas nodded. "It's a good thing his knees didn't crack when he knelt!"

But Sally Cardiff answered him in all seriousness. "He knelt," she said, "at a moment when the orchestra was playing its loudest, or when the orchestra and chorus were in full swing together. Obviously he had no immediate business, himself, on the stage. Everything was planned with the utmost care."

"And the rouge?" asked Dallas.

"He had it on his face. It was part of his makeup. Some of it he rubbed off, no doubt, before leaving his dressing room. But it worried him. He knew it would be noticed if *he* was noticed. I think as he hurried along the corridors, before reaching the lounge and entering the box, his nervousness kept him dabbing at his cheeks — possibly he thought that way to conceal his features. The rouge would adhere to his fingertips, and then — after the murder — when he tried to remove the glove — you see?"

Dallas nodded unwillingly. "The rouge was on the fingertips of the glove," he reminded her. "It was once your opinion —"

"No, yours — *yours* always! I said it *might* have been a woman *or* a man; but I always believed the murderer to have been a man. First he attempted, as I pointed out, to tear the glove off by turning it inside out — a wholly masculine idea. It wouldn't work that way — so, he tugged at the fingers."

"Why did he want the ring?"

"I don't know — but I think, now, that robbery was not his motive. I doubt that he knew the necklace wasn't genuine. To him it would seem real enough. It was only when I saw it at close quarters that I realized it was false."

"Why did he kill her?"

"I don't know, Mr. Dallas — I only know he did."

"What was she to him?" persisted the chief of detectives.

"I can only guess."

Emmanuel B. Letts was registering embarrassment. He coughed deprecatingly. "One hears gossip," he said. Then he stopped and tried again. "I don't pretend that this has

hit me very hard, Dallas. There's been nothing between Mrs. Letts and myself for a long time. Still, I'm shocked; and I'd like to see justice done. As I say, one hears gossip — whether or not one wishes to. People persist in believing that I must still be interested in her actions." He shrugged and his face twisted.

"Well, she met him in Italy, when she was there. She helped him, as she had helped others. I suppose, ultimately, she thought she had fallen in love with him. She was not —" he hesitated — "wholly admirable. I'm sorry to say that. For him, of course, it was — to be brutal — just duck soup! An elderly woman with tons of money; and all she asked in return was a little — shall we say? — attention."

Sally Cardiff looked at him with horror and compassion. And over and above and backgrounding his unhappy disillusionment rose now from the theatre the triumphant strains of a great love chorus.

"Then that," said Sally Cardiff, in a low voice, "explains a great deal, Mr. Letts. When she discovered that —"

"Exactly."

"Exactly what?" demanded Dallas, annoyed.

"He was the co-respondent in the Colchis-Palestrina divorce," said Sally Cardiff. "Obviously, he was through with *her* — with Mrs. Letts. She had helped him to rise, and then when he no longer needed her —"

Dallas digested this information. "That would give *her* a reason for hating *him*," he agreed. "If *she* had killed *him*, I could understand it. But —"

Miss Cardiff nodded. "It's still puzzling," she admitted.

"It's crazy," said Dallas.

"Unless she were going to break him, in some way," contributed young Mr. Castle, with sudden inspiration.

Miss Cardiff looked startled, as so did Dallas. Emmanuel B. Letts, wiser in the ways of the world even than the policeman, only nodded his head.

A glorious tenor voice was now ringing through the auditorium — soaring on wings of song to the utmost peaks of infinity. When its last note had died away there came from the stage and from the interior of the house a burst of spontaneous applause that reached the group that stood and plotted in the lobby.

Then voices were heard — closer at hand.

"They're coming," gasped Sally Cardiff, in sudden panic. "Mr. Dallas — shall you — shall I —?"

For the first time she was nervous. But it was not fear — if anything it was stage fright.

"Leave it to Dallas," counseled young Mr. Castle; and he attempted to draw her away. But she slipped from his grasp and stepped quickly through the lobby door into the wings.

A tall young man, obviously Italian, was striding toward the dressing rooms. His face was still flushed with pleasure at the recognition of his peers. He paused and looked with benevolent curiosity at the group that suddenly confronted him — prepared, if it was their wish, to be amiable for a moment or two. Perhaps an autograph . . . Perhaps . . . ?

"Mr. Diaz," said Sally Cardiff casually, "there is only one thing that still bothers me. Well, two! But first of all — what was your *reason* for murdering Mrs. Letts?"

Orlando Diaz did not collapse. For an instant, though, he wavered, and Dallas stepped forward. Then a long sigh passed the tenor's lips and he drew himself upright. He bowed profoundly to the small person who stood before him.

"It was because, dear lady, she had threatened to end my operatic career — and because I knew that she would do it."

"And the ring?" she continued. "The ring you took from her finger?"

"It was my own, dear lady — one that I had given her. It was foolish to take it. It would have been foolish to leave it. Either way, it would have pointed to me. As it has done."

She nodded her understanding, and, turning, took the arm of Arnold Castle. Even as they moved to leave they saw Dallas again step forward.

But at the door she stopped him. "I can't go yet," she said. "I simply can't, Arnold. Run back, like an angel, and find Palestrina. I've simply *got* to know. Ask him if he has a brother in the orchestra."

Mr. Castle ran back. After a time he returned.

"He *has*," he reported. "A *twin* brother."

"I was sure it must be something like that."

After a long silence, during which the car sped nowhere in particular, his secret admiration burst its seals. "Sally," he said, "you're simply *great!* There aren't any words in the dictionary to touch you. *Do* you mind if — like good old Watson — I ask one final question?"

"Of course not, silly!"

"What under the canopy was the first thing that led you to suspect Diaz? Someone on the stage, rather than someone in the audience!"

"It was that belated curtain call. You remember it? They clapped and clapped and clapped — and still he didn't come. At last he *did* come.

It was most unlike him — unlike *any* opera star. I wondered where he had been, and what he had been doing. And after a while I knew something had kept him. He just got back in time — and I think it was a very narrow squeak for Diaz."

"It was," agreed Arnold Castle, with conviction. "All the good it did him in the end! Do you know, Sally, I think I'm a little afraid of you! It's rather alarming to contemplate — *er* — having a detective in the family — *er* —"

Miss Cardiff blushed a little.

"Don't be silly," she said. "There'll be times when I'll be grateful for a good old Watson."

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Dead Detective *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

As the Professor went to his knees he wiped a moist eye. Fearless young detective Tom Reardon lay dead on the floor of the hideout; shot through the heart; his service revolver with two shots fired, several feet from his body.

Near him was the corpse of Harry Erdell, torture bandit, whom Reardon had sworn to get. The bullet that finished Erdell went through his left arm and into the heart, though he had been shot also in the right chest.

"Talk," Fordney ordered Erdell's moll, hard-eyed, tight-lipped Lil Craney.

"I'm in the kitchen when Harry answers the door and Reardon bulls his way in," she said. "He shoves Harry into the living room here and orders him to get his hands up and keep them there. Harry obeys; didn't move a muscle; just stands there while this *brave*, lousy dick blasts him twice!

"Then Reardon spots me in the kitchen and orders me to come in. Harry kept his gun there. I grabs it and puts it behind me. As I gets to the door Reardon starts to fire but I beats the murderin' dick to the pull. That's all. He killed Harry in cold blood. I shot him in self-defense. Make somethin' of that!" she sneered.

The gun Lil used had flour on butt and barrel. Returning from the kitchen where he saw no evidences of baking, Fordney said: "I *will* make something of it — something of your little *oversight*. You are under arrest for Reardon's deliberate murder! It won't be necessary to *prove* also that you murdered Erdell!"

A single clue proved Lil's account a lie. What is it?

Solution

Lil said that Reardon shot Erdell while his hands were in the air, yet the bullet that killed him went through his arm and into his heart! Lil, the much stronger personality of the two-timing duo, shot Reardon from the kitchen, then fearful that the weak Erdell would talk under duress, killed him with Reardon's gun.

The Adventure of

THE MAN WHO COULD DOUBLE THE SIZE OF DIAMONDS

by ELLERY QUEEN

The Characters

ELLERY QUEEN . . . . . *the detective*
NIKKI PORTER . . . . . *his secretary*
INSPECTOR QUEEN . . . . . *his father*
SERGEANT VELIE . . . . . *of Inspector Queen's staff*
PROFESSOR LAZARUS . . . . . *an inventor*
KENYON . . . . . *an American diamond dealer*
VAN HOOTEN . . . . . *a Dutch diamond dealer*
BRYCE . . . . . *a British diamond dealer*
MASSET . . . . . *a French lapidary*
DR. COOK . . . . . *the examining physician*

Scene

A Diamond Dealer's Office in New York — The Queen Apartment — A Hotel Room

SCENE 1: *Kenyon's Office, Maiden Lane*

(*Kenyon is laughing very hard. He is a hard-headed business man. Professor Lazarus is an enthusiastic crackpot.*)

LAZARUS: . . . and in my wonderful new diamond-manufacturing process — Why are you laughing, Mr. Kenyon?

KENYON: (*Stops and coughs*) Hrrrm! You're an inventor, you say, Professor Lazarus?

LAZARUS: Inventor, chemist, physicist, explorer into the hidden secrets of Nature . . . yes, Mr. Kenyon, a man of pure science, pure science! That's why I've come to you first, Mr. Kenyon. You're one of the leading diamond experts on Maiden Lane.

KENYON: (*Gravely*) Thank you, Professor. And you — uh — say you can *manufacture* diamonds? (*He suppresses a laugh.*)

LAZARUS: (*Excited*) It's a colossal

discovery! Are you familiar with the experiments of Moissan — changing pure carbon into artificial diamonds?

KENYON: (*Tolerantly*) Oh, come, Professor. Moissan's process has no commercial future. The cost of making the diamonds is considerably more than the diamonds are worth!

LAZARUS: True, Mr. Kenyon, true. But I've gone far beyond Moissan! My new process will revolutionize the diamond industry — change the financial structure of the world!

KENYON: (*Laughing*) Financial structure of the . . . (*Wiping the tears away*) Sorry, Professor Lazarus. I . . . I've got a tickle.

LAZARUS: (*Offended*) They laughed at Leeuwenhoek and Pasteur and Galileo. Well, laugh! Let 'em all laugh! (*Mutters*) They always laugh at a genius. . . .

KENYON: (*Sharply*) See here, man. You expect me to believe you've discovered a process by which you can manufacture diamonds at a cost that's not prohibitive? Fairy tales!

LAZARUS: Mr. Kenyon, give me a perfect diamond, and in seven days I'll return it to you *twice as large!*

KENYON: The man who could double the size of diamonds! (*He laughs again.*)

LAZARUS: (*Excited*) *Don't* laugh at me! I've done it, I tell you!

KENYON: (*With mock gravity*) Sort of scientific miracle, eh?

LAZARUS: Scientific fact! I've discovered one of Nature's secrets, Mr. Kenyon!

KENYON: Professor Lazarus and Mother Nature, Incorporated. Uh . . . how do you accomplish this miracle?

LAZARUS: (*Slyly*) Aha! Wouldn't you like to know! But I'll tell you this. It's a complex process based upon the introduction into the molecular structure of perfectly formed natural diamonds certain chemical elements — don't ask me which ones, I won't tell you! But by this process I can double the size and weight of the original diamond! I've found a way to *grow diamonds chemically!*

KENYON: (*Amazed*) I believe you're really serious.

LAZARUS: Serious! I've devoted my whole life to it!

KENYON: (*Thoughtfully*) Perhaps I've been hasty, Professor. But why come to me? Why not go it alone?

LAZARUS: Because I'm penniless. My life's savings have gone into perfecting the formula and developing the apparatus. I need financial backing, Mr. Kenyon!

KENYON: (*Dryly*) I should say you need raw material! — in this case,

perfect diamonds. Didn't you say you've got to start with natural diamonds?

LAZARUS: Yes, Mr. Kenyon. Now look. I don't blame you for being skeptical. You're a business man. So I don't expect you to take me on faith.

KENYON: (*Surprised*) You mean you're actually prepared to demonstrate your process, Professor?

LAZARUS: Of course, Mr. Kenyon!

KENYON: *Under any conditions I may impose on you?*

LAZARUS: Absolutely any conditions!

KENYON: (*Very serious — abruptly*) Professor Lazarus, be back here tomorrow!

SCENE 2: *The Same, Next Day*

(*A slight argument is going on.*)

VAN HOOTEN: (*He is a fat Dutch merchant*) Andt I say it is all poppycock!

KENYON: It won't hurt to look, will it, Van Hooten?

BRYCE: (*A slim London business man*) Kenyon's right, Van Hooten. You've been stuck away in that Amsterdam diamond-exchange of yours so long you've grown barnacles. Take a chance, old boy!

VAN HOOTEN: All righdt, I take a chance, Mr. Bryce. Doubling the size of diamonds! (*Short laugh*) I don't know whether it is to laugh, or to cry.

KENYON: Fine! Then you're with us, too, Bryce?

BRYCE: (*Chuckling*) Hard to convince, but open to proof. The true British spirit, Kenyon. Yes, I'm with you and Van Hooten. How about you, Monsieur Masset?

MASSET: (*A pudgy little French expert*) I am thinking.

VAN HOOTEN: (*Snort*) Masset is thinking! Do not breathe.

KENYON: We really need you in this little syndicate we're forming, Masset. As a lapidary you've no equal. You're better qualified than any of us to detect a possible fraud.

MASSET: Monsieur Kenyon, that is a bouquet I cannot resist smelling! Gentlemen, Masset enters the syndicate! Mynheer Van Hooten, Mr. Bryce — congratulate yourselves! (*They all laugh a little.*)

VAN HOOTEN: But to double the size of diamonds! This professor is a fraud. He must be.

BRYCE: I know it sounds like a fantastic idea. . . .

MASSET: (*Thoughtfully*) *Qui sait?* In the eighteenth century le comte Saint-Germain proved to King Louis the Fifteenth that not only could he remove flaws from diamonds but increase the size of pearls!

VAN HOOTEN: (*Scoffing*) A legend, Masset! Folklore!

BRYCE: Well, we'll soon see. Per-

sonally, I think the man's a quack, Kenyon.

KENYON: Judge for yourselves. Now we're all agreed on our conditions, gentlemen? (*As they agree a door opens off accompanied by a warning-bell, which keeps ringing.*) Yes, Wolfe? He's here?

MAN: (*Entering*) Yes, Mr. Kenyon. It's Professor Lazarus.

KENYON: Send him in. And remember, Wolfe — no interruptions!

MAN: Yes, Mr. Kenyon. This way, Professor Lazarus.

LAZARUS: Thank you, thank you! (*The door closes and the bell stops.*)

KENYON: Come in, Professor! I want you to meet some business friends of mine. We've decided to form a little syndicate . . . just in case. Mynheer Van Hooten, the Amsterdam diamond merchant — Mr. Bryce, the London diamond-dealer — Monsieur Masset, the famous lapidary.

LAZARUS: A syndicate, eh? Excellent, excellent. Delighted!

VAN HOOTEN: Don't be too delighted, Professor Lazarus. We are a court of examination — no more!

BRYCE: Frankly, Professor, we don't know whether you're the genius you claim to be, or a lunatic.

MASSET: You will find us hard, Professor Lazarus. We do not believe you. But on the million-to-one chance that you have really stumbled on a new scientific principle. . .

KENYON: In a word, we're willing to be shown. (*They all murmur assent.*)

VAN HOOTEN: Providing, of course, thadt the conditions under which the experiment is conducted protecdt the syndicate against any possibility of loss, Mynheer!

LAZARUS: Naturally, naturally, Mr. Van Hooten. You would be fools not to protect yourselves!

KENYON: All right, then. Professor, do you see the steel safe-door in that wall of my office?

LAZARUS: Yes, Mr. Kenyon?

BRYCE: That safe-door leads into Mr. Kenyon's strong-room. The strong-room is completely lined with steel and has only one means of entrance and exit — the burglar-proof safe-door you see there.

MASSET: In that strong-room, mon professeur, you will *try* to double the size of diamonds!

LAZARUS: I understand. But air — I'll need air to breathe —

KENYON: My strong-room is air-conditioned. ("Ah!") Incidentally I'm having the door-combination changed. And only Van Hooten, Bryce, Masset and I will know the new combination!

VAN HOOTEN: You comprehend, Professor? Not you! You will be admitted by one of us into the strong-room each morning, andt

released each nighdt! (*Lazarus indicates that he grasps the idea.*)

BRYCE: You may install your apparatus in the strong-room and go to work on our diamonds, Lazarus!

LAZARUS: Very fair, very fair, gentlemen. But may I make one condition? No one must disturb my work. I refuse to allow anyone to enter that strong-room the entire week of my experiment — either while I'm working there during the day, or while it's locked up for the night!

VAN HOOTEN: (*Suspiciously*) Ah! Andt why is that, Professor?

LAZARUS: Obviously I must protect *myself*. I can't afford to let anyone learn the secret of my process! (*Remarks of: "That's fair," "Of course," etc.*)

MASSET: Agreed, then. But we warn you, monsieur le professeur! That room will be guarded as if it were the Bank of France!

BRYCE: We should have experienced searchers to see that — (*Coughs*) — the Professor doesn't carry off our diamonds some night after his day's work.

KENYON: How about four detectives from Police Headquarters? Two to stand guard outside the strong-room all day, two all night.

VAN HOOTEN: Andt each nighdt when you leave the strong-room, Lazarus, you will be searched from headt to foot!

MASSET: *Mais certainement!* That I insist on!

BRYCE: (*Smoothly*) And to leave utterly nothing to chance, gentlemen — I suggest we have a trustworthy physician in attendance to — ah — complete the nightly search. (*Enthusiastic agreement from the others.*)

KENYON: (*Dryly*) You see, Professor, we're taking no chances. Since we're each lending you a valuable diamond to experiment on, take my word for it — you won't get the slightest opportunity to steal them!

LAZARUS: Steal! I'm a scientist, not a thief! Very well, we start tomorrow when I bring my apparatus in. But remember: Absolute secrecy! If the world learned of what we can do, the value of diamonds would be ruined forever! (*They agree*) Tomorrow each of you have a perfect diamond for me, in Mr. Kenyon's office, and I promise you — in one week your four diamonds will have grown to twice their present size! (*He laughs*) Like the Count of Monte Cristo — in one week you'll be able to cry: The world is mine!

SCENE 3: *The Queen Apartment, a Week Later*

(*Kenyon is ending his story.*)

KENYON: . . . and then, Mr. Queen,

Professor Lazarus went to work in my strong-room at the office.

ELLERY QUEEN: (*Thoughtfully*) Amazing. Amazing story, Mr. Kenyon.

INSPECTOR QUEEN: So that's why you asked for the services of four of my detectives a week ago, Mr. Kenyon! (*Chuckles*) Weren't you gentlemen a little plastered when Lazarus turned on his highfalutin gas?

NIKKI PORTER: Why, it's fantastic! An Arabian Nights' story!

ELLERY: Why did you bring your friend Dr. Cook with you, Mr. Kenyon? No offense, Doctor; just curiosity.

KENYON: Dr. Cook is the physician who's been examining Lazarus every night when he quits the strong-room.

DR. COOK: (*He is a scientific robot*) Would have refused anyone but Kenyon, Mr. Queen. Old friends. But of all the nonsense! Wait till you hear the end of this!

KENYON: In the week that's passed since the Professor began his mysterious work in my strong-room, we've taken every precaution against fraud, Mr. Queen. Well, this afternoon at five we let the professor out, as usual. Seventh day — his time was up. "Well?" we demanded. "Show us our diamonds, twice as large!" The Professor was nervous . . .

INSPECTOR: (*Chuckling*) Doubling the size of diamonds!

NIKKI: Of course he failed, Mr. Kenyon?

ELLERY: And asked for more time? That would be the natural development.

KENYON: Exactly what happened! Well, the detectives and we five men — we searched him — Dr. Cook here examined him with special care — and then, satisfied the diamonds weren't on him, we let him go for the night.

DR. COOK: And the syndicate went into a huddle. (*Chuckles.*)

KENYON: After an argument, we decided to extend the Professor's time a few days. The others left, I went out for dinner . . . and started to worry. Suppose something *was* wrong! I'd got the other three into this; they'd contributed valuable diamonds as well as I. . . . Well, I ran back to my office. The two detectives on night-duty let me in — I unlocked the safe-door of the strong-room and went in. . . .

INSPECTOR: (*Sharply*) Don't tell me. . . .

NIKKI: The four diamonds you gave Lazarus to work on —

ELLERY: They were gone from the strong-room, Mr. Kenyon?

KENYON: (*Despairing*) Vanished! Not

a sign of them! I turned that strong-room upside down! Tore his apparatus to pieces! Then I called the detectives in. They thought I was crazy, till they saw for themselves.

ELLERY: Seems simple enough, Mr. Kenyon. Professor Lazarus managed to smuggle the diamonds out with him during the past week, perhaps taking one diamond at a time, and your nightly searches just didn't turn up his hiding-place.

KENYON: Impossible, Mr. Queen! We didn't overlook even the most far-fetched hiding-place! That's why I stopped to pick up Dr. Cook on my way to see you tonight, after I left messages for Van Hooten, Bryce, and Masset that the diamonds were gone.

DR. COOK: I give you my word, Mr. Queen — I can't imagine where the fellow could have been hiding those diamonds when he took them out.

ELLERY: How about his clothing?

KENYON: We examined every stitch on his body every night — not only we four, but the detectives, too!

INSPECTOR: The men I put on this job, Ellery, wouldn't slip up on a body-search. They're perfectly reliable.

NIKKI: I know! Lazarus must have a hump on his back — a false hump! Or else he's got a hollow wooden leg, or something!

DR. COOK: No hump, false limp, finger . . . nothing like that.

ELLERY: How about his hair, Doctor? Has he a beard?

DR. COOK: No beard, and the man's as bald as an eagle.

ELLERY: His mouth, Doctor. Did you examine him there?

DR. COOK: Lazarus has no teeth of his own. He uses dental plates, which I examined carefully every night. No cavities of any kind. Nor could he have taken the diamonds out in his ears or nasal openings.

NIKKI: A glass eye! I'll bet that's it.

DR. COOK: No, Miss Porter. He has two very sound eyes.

ELLERY: Possibly he carried some *object* out of the strong-room in which a diamond might have been concealed. A watch — ("No!") — cigaret case — ("No . . .")

INSPECTOR: Wallet? ("It was examined.") Tobacco pouch? ("No, Inspector.") A finger-ring? ("No.")

NIKKI: A cane! A walking-stick that's hollow!

KENYON: (*Sighing*) The Professor has no stick. I tell you we examined everything. Even his pen and pencil.

ELLERY: Mr. Kenyon, is there a drain or water-tap in the strong-room?

KENYON: No opening of any kind except the air-conditioning vent and intake — and they were thoroughly searched.

NIKKI: Then couldn't he have hidden the diamonds *inside* of him, Dr. Cook?

ELLERY: (*Chuckling*) Excellent question, Nikki! Could he?

DR. COOK: I performed every conceivable test that would be conclusive, Mr. Queen — gastroscope, otoscope, nasal speculum, and so on. If X-Ray or fluoroscope would have helped, I'd have used those, too, because Mr. Kenyon and his associates told me to leave absolutely nothing to chance. I give you my word as a medical man, Mr. Queen — Professor Lazarus did *not* hide those four diamonds anywhere *in* his body! (*The phone rings.*)

NIKKI: I'll answer it, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: No, I'll take it, Nikki. Probably Headquarters, with my men's report of the theft. . . .

ELLERY: Fascinating problem, gentlemen! (*The inspector answers the phone.*) It appears we're dealing with the most ingenious thief of modern times. We'll have to see your Professor Lazarus . . .

INSPECTOR: Ellery, stop a minute. I can't hear . . . Hello! Who?

SERGEANT VELIE: (*On the other end*) This is Velie, Inspector!

INSPECTOR: Oh! Yes, Velie? Why aren't you home with your wife?

VELIE: I'm married to my job, ain't I? Inspector, you'll have to buzz downtown. A murder.

INSPECTOR: Why do they always pick out a man's bedtime! Well, well, Velie. Where is it?

VELIE: Some crummy hotel — the Jolly, or Jelly, or somepin', on East Twenty-fourth. Guy was found dead in his room by a chambermaid. Somebody's played chopsticks on his naked skull.

INSPECTOR: I'll be right down. Identify the corpse yet, Velie?

VELIE: Oh, sure. Some nut inventor, from the papers in his room . . .

INSPECTOR: Nut invent —! (*Hoarsely*) Velie! What was his name?

VELIE: Aw, you wouldn't know him, Inspector. A phony professor. Let's see, now. Yeah . . . Lazarus — Professor Lazarus!

SCENE 4: *A Room in a New York Hotel, Later*

(*A mean little hotel room filled with chattering detectives, police, etc.*)

VELIE: (*Over the hubbub*) Say, Whitey! Inspector's yellin' for that fingerprint report! (*Whitey shouts*) What? That's nice! The old man'll love that! . . . Joe! Ain't you through muggin' the stiff? Get pictures of the struggle — bloody lamp, overturned chairs,

torn clo'es . . . man, what a brawl this musta been!

INSPECTOR: (*Calling*) Velie! Where's Prouty? . . . Quiet, men!

VELIE: (*Bellowing*) Qui-et, you hyenas! (*The hubbub quiets*) Doc Prouty's gone already, Inspector. Nothin' sensational, he says. Guy just died from those blows on the head while he was fightin' with his killer. Happened tonight.

INSPECTOR: That's *very* helpful! Ellery, did you see this?

ELLERY: (*Absently*) What, dad? Oh, sorry.

NIKKI: Ellery Queen! You don't seem the least bit interested! What is it, Inspector? . . . Oh, what a *beautiful* diamond.

VELIE: My old woman'd give her right eye for a sparkler like that. Where'd you find it, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: In Lazarus's right hand. Mr. Kenyon!

VELIE: Kenyon! Over here, Mr. Kenyon! Watch it! Don't step on his hand!

KENYON: (*He is very upset*) Oh! Did I? I mean . . . For heaven's sake, this is awful! Awful!

ELLERY: (*Low*) Let's see the diamond, dad . . . Hmm . . .

INSPECTOR: Kenyon, do you recognize this diamond? (*Kenyon examines it.*)

KENYON: It's Bryce's! The diamond Bryce contributed to the syndicate for the Professor's experiment!

INSPECTOR: That settles it. Only Van Hooten, Bryce, Masset, and Kenyon knew about Lazarus's experiment — even the detectives on day and night duty didn't know what was going on!

VELIE: So it musta been one of the syndicate that bumped off the dead con man.

KENYON: One of *us*? Don't be —! (*Thoughtfully*) One of *us*?

INSPECTOR: One of you four men came to the professor's hotel room tonight, caught him with the stolen diamonds, and tried to take them away. Lazarus fought back and was beaten to death with this heavy metal table lamp. Murderer grabbed the diamonds and beat it.

NIKKI: But in the excitement he overlooked one of the diamonds — the one in the dead man's hand —

VELIE: Or maybe he thought he'd taken all four and didn't find out it was only three till he got away — then he was scared to come back.

NIKKI: But the big question is: Which of the four members of the syndicate killed Professor Lazarus?

INSPECTOR: What d'ye think, Ellery?

ELLERY: (*Thoughtfully*) Three secrets may have died with Lazarus.

First, the secret of his diamond-doubling process — whose authenticity I doubt. Second, the secret of his murderer's identity — in this well-lighted room, after a considerable struggle, Lazarus must certainly have recognized his assailant. And third, the secret of how Lazarus managed to spirit those diamonds out of Kenyon's strong-room — past the suspicious eyes and searching hands of the four owners of the diamonds, two experienced detectives, and a medical doctor!

NIKKI: It's enough to make you dizzy. I can't *imagine*!

ELLERY: At the moment, neither can I, Nikki. I confess — I'd rather know how Lazarus accomplished the thefts than who murdered him!

VELIE: You would.

INSPECTOR: Velie!

VELIE: (*Hastily*) Yeah, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: Round up Van Hooten, Bryce, and that French lap — lap — whatever he is! — Masset. Get 'em down here on the double and we'll go over 'em — lightly!

VELIE: (*Fading*) Lemme slap on the hot towel . . . !

INSPECTOR: Ellery, *you* can play around with the mystery of how Professor Lazarus stole those diamonds — *I* want to know who beat him to death!

SCENE 5: *The Same, Later*

(*Inspector Queen is grilling the suspects. Bryce is saying:* "*Yes, that* is *my diamond, Inspector.*" *The others demand the return of their property.*)

INSPECTOR: Murderer's got 'em! I want to know where you men were tonight. Bryce?

BRYCE: (*Nervously*) I was out strolling . . . returned to my hotel, found Kenyon's message that the diamonds had been stolen . . . thought it was a — a joke . . .

INSPECTOR: Mynheer Van Hooten? You were in the Park writing poetry, I suppose?

VAN HOOTEN: (*Yelling*) I go back to my New York office! Later I go back to my hotel — find Kenyon's message —

INSPECTOR: (*Softly*) So you've no alibi, either. How about you, Monsieur Masset?

MASSET: I, too, Monsieur l'inspecteur — I return to my office on Maiden Lane. And I, too — I later find Monsieur Kenyon's message about the theft of the diamonds . . .

VELIE: For a bunch of business men, these guys were sure pushovers for that con-man Lazarus!

NIKKI: Yes, Sergeant, and the Professor would have got away with it, too, if one of them hadn't gone to his hotel, killed him — and stolen the diamonds himself!

ELLERY: Hush, Nikki. Let dad handle this.

NIKKI: (*Indignantly*) I know, Ellery, but such *deceit*, such — such bloodthirstiness! They're all trying to look so innocent!

VAN HOOTEN: I want back my diamondt! Get it back, I say!

MASSET: (*Bitterly*) Mine, too. Bryce, you are fortunate. Your diamond was left behind. But mine —

BRYCE: But how did he *do* it? I can't understand it!

INSPECTOR: There's a lot of things I can't understand! Hold it, you four. Ellery, come here a minute.

ELLERY: (*Absently*) Yes, dad? (*They go to one side.*)

INSPECTOR: Any ideas?

ELLERY: Dad, I'm baffled. Baffled! It's an impossible crime!

INSPECTOR: What's impossible about it? No tricks to *this* murder. All we have to do is find the murderer —

ELLERY: I don't mean the murder, dad — I mean Lazarus's theft of the diamonds from Kenyon's strongroom! I shan't sleep till I find out how he smuggled them past seven searchers!

INSPECTOR: Hang it, son! This is a murder-case, not a puzzle!

ELLERY: This time *you* handle the murder, dad — I'll take the puzzle. (*Thoughtfully*) I've *got* to figure out how the Professor did it!

SCENE 6: *The Queen Apartment, Next Morning*

INSPECTOR: And your check of the alibis, Velie?

VELIE: Whaddaya mean alibis? Van Hooten an' Masset claimin' they were workin' in Maiden Lane . . . but no one *saw* them! Bryce takin' a walk all by his lonely . . . (*The door opens*) Good mornin', Miss Porter.

INSPECTOR: (*Glumly*) Morning, Nikki.

NIKKI: (*Bouncing in*) *Good* morning! My, such gloomy faces. No luck on the murder, Inspector Queen?

INSPECTOR: I guess luck will be our only hope of solving it at that, Nikki. Ellery's no help.

NIKKI: He *has* been acting remote. Where is he this morning?

VELIE: Aw, the Master-Mind's in his bedroom poundin' the floor like an expectant papa.

INSPECTOR: Ellery didn't sleep a wink all night, Nikki.

VELIE: If y'ask me, for once in his life the Maestro's stumped. (*The bedroom door opens*) Aha! He enters!

ELLERY: (*Briskly entering*) Morning, everybody!

INSPECTOR: Come on, son — have some breakfast. You must be all tuckered out after last night.

VELIE: Forget it, Mr. Queen. You can't hit the jackpot every time. (*Ellery chuckles.*)

NIKKI: Ellery Queen! You're grinning! Inspector, Sergeant — he *knows* something!

ELLERY: Certainly I know something. I've spent ten sleepless hours figuring it out!

NIKKI: And just what is it you've been puzzling over, Mr. Queen?

ELLERY: How Lazarus managed to smuggle those diamonds past seven searchers. (*The Inspector and Velie groan.*) I've thought of every conceivable way in which he could have stolen the diamonds. Dad — I've solved the puzzle of the theft!

INSPECTOR: (*Sarcastically*) Fine! Now you can start solving the puzzle of the murder.

ELLERY: (*As if to himself*) Yes, I'm sure I'm right — it's the only possible answer. *I know how those diamonds got out of the strong-room!*

VELIE: Okay, Mr. Queen, so you win the puzzle champeenship of the world. But for cryin' out loud —

INSPECTOR: How about the *murder?* Ellery, we've got to know who *murdered* Lazarus!

ELLERY: (*Absently*) Oh, that? I know that, too!

ELLERY QUEEN *has just said that he knows how the diamonds got out of* KENYON'S *strong-room, and also who murdered* PROFESSOR LAZARUS. *Do you? You can have some additional fun by stopping here and trying to solve the double mystery before* ELLERY *reveals the solution. Naming the criminal is not sufficient, if you play the game fairly. You must get the correct reasoning, too. . . . Now go ahead and read* ELLERY QUEEN'S *own solution to "The Adventure of the Man Who Could Double the Size of Diamonds."*

The Solution

SCENE 7: *The Same, Immediately After*

INSPECTOR: We're losing time, Ellery! Tell me who murdered Lazarus.

ELLERY: To do that, dad, I'll have to begin with the theft of the diamonds . . .

VELIE: (*Groaning*) There he goes again!

NIKKI: The man with the one-track mind!

ELLERY (*Gently*) But it's the heart of this case, children. How did Professor Lazarus get those diamonds past seven searchers — the four owners, the two detectives, and the doctor? I saw no light until I asked myself one tremendously simple, one gigantically obvious, question: *Was it really Professor Lazarus who took those diamonds out of the strong-room?*

NIKKI: Oh, dear. Oh, *dear!* That's the answer!

ELLERY: Yes, Nikki! A score of facts proved that not only *didn't* Lazarus take those diamonds out, he *couldn't*. It was *impossible* for Lazarus to have smuggled them past the seven men — and you can't find the answer to an impossibility. Therefore *Lazarus* wasn't the thief — someone *else* must have been!

INSPECTOR: But Ellery, only Professor Lazarus entered that strong-room all week — a condition he'd laid down himself before he began working there!

ELLERY: Yes, but is it *true* no one else entered that strong-room? It is *not* true. Because one other person *did* go in there before the diamonds were reported gone — and by his own admission was in there *alone!* And what's more, when he left the office, he knew he wouldn't be searched — because they were all protecting themselves against *Lazarus*. Therefore I knew that the only other person known to have been in the strong-room alone *must* be the thief! And who was that person?

NIKKI: Kenyon! It was Mr. Kenyon! (*Velie ad libs assent.*)

INSPECTOR: Sure! Kenyon himself told us he returned to his office last night "worried" that something was wrong — that the detectives on guard let him in — that he went into the strong-room *alone*, and the detectives didn't rush in there until he yelled the diamonds were gone!

VELIE: Boy, that's masterful. Kenyon goes in, swipes the ice himself, then comes out, hollers he's been robbed, beats it over to the Professor's hotel room, kills the ol' guy, scrams, hides the di'monds, then picks up Dr. Cook an' brings him to you, Mr. Queen, to back up his story about how hard they searched Lazarus!

ELLERY: Yes, and in giving us that story, he brilliantly distracted our attention from himself and directed it towards Lazarus as the thief. Quite a psychologist, Kenyon! One of the cleverest rogues in my experience. He devised a theft of such colossal simplicity that I was nearly taken in by the complicated props.

NIKKI: Then Professor Lazarus wasn't a confidence man at all! *Could* he double the size of diamonds, Ellery?

ELLERY: (*Laughing*) Well, he didn't, Nikki, so I imagine the poor fellow was just an earnest crank who thought he'd solved one of the riddles of the universe.

NIKKI: Wasn't it foolish of Kenyon to overlook the diamond in the Professor's dead hand — Bryce's diamond?

ELLERY: Overlook it! Nikki, Kenyon left that diamond there *pur-*

posely. For the same reason he *killed* Lazarus . . . to clinch the illusion that it was Professor Lazarus who'd stolen the diamonds in the first place.

INSPECTOR: Wait a minute, Ellery. Granting Kenyon was the only one who could have taken the diamonds out of the strong-room, how does that prove he also killed Lazarus?

VELIE: Yeah, why couldn't it 'a' been one o' the other guys who bumped off the professor?

ELLERY: (*Laughing*) Kenyon's magic spell is still on you. Don't you see? The murderer planted one of the four diamonds in the victim's hand. To *leave* a diamond in the victim's hand meant that the murderer had to *have* the diamond. Who had the diamonds? The thief. Therefore the thief must have been the murderer. And who is the only possible thief? Kenyon. Conclusion: Kenyon is the murderer!

NIKKI: Q. — E. — D.!

VELIE: (*Awed*) Gosh! Inspector, why can't *we* figger 'em out so nice an' clean?

INSPECTOR: (*Sadly*) Velie, I've been trying to answer that question ever since I became a father! (*The music comes up.*)

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Careless Visitor *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

"Well," Jerrold Mauston continued, "I left my small apartment yesterday morning at 11 A.M. I keep no servants, you know. I arrived at my little cottage in the country at 1 o'clock, did some painting and worked in the garden until 7 o'clock when I drove home. I arrived back at 9 P.M. I let myself in, picked up the evening paper from the table, flopped into a chair and read the day's baseball scores.

"It was while I studied the Brooklyn-Giants box score that I suddenly knew someone had been in my apartment in my absence. There was not the slightest evidence, from where I sat, however, that *anything* had been disturbed.

"It was only when I examined my desk that my certainty was confirmed. Someone *had* gone through a pile of manuscript."

"Steal anything?" asked Fordney.

"No. On leaving the apartment I always throw the manuscript of the book on which I am working into the wood box by the fireplace. Across the face of it I have written, 'rejected five times, the worst thing I've ever done'. The stuff I leave lying about has no value — but my wood box script, well — that's the best work I've yet done.

"But the point is, Fordney, how did I *know* without leaving my chair that someone had been in the apartment during my absence?"

"Stop anywhere on returning to town?" queried the Professor.

"No, nowhere. Nor did I talk with a single person."

"Quite, — then it's perfectly obvious how you knew," Fordney chuckled.

How did Mauston know {before examining his papers} that someone had been in his apartment during his absence?

Solution

The EVENING newspaper, which he "picked up from the table."

Freeman Wills Crofts's Inspector French, one of the few great detectives of fiction who talks, thinks, and acts like a real-life policeman, has appeared in only four short stories. Your Editor is happy indeed to bring you one of those four — "The Hunt Ball," published here for the first time in America.

THE HUNT BALL

by FREEMAN WILLS CROFTS

HOWARD SKEFFINGTON had reached the end of his tether. He sat, hunched forward and staring unseeingly into the fire, as he faced the terrible conclusion to which inexorably he was being impelled: that his only escape from ruin lay in the death of his former friend, Justin Holt.

He, Howard Skeffington, must murder Holt! If he didn't, this pleasant life he was living, this fortune which seemed almost within his grasp, would be irretrievably lost. He would have to leave the country and everything he valued and look somewhere abroad for a job. And what job could he get?

To a certain extent Skeffington was an adventurer. Possessed of a good appearance, charming manners and an admirable seat on a horse, he had made friends at Cambridge with some of the young men from this Seldon Sorby country, this centre of the hunting life of England. At their homes he had spent vacations, riding their horses with skill, if not distinction. Alone in the world and not drawn to any career which involved hard work, he had conceived the idea of settling down at Seldon Sorby, and if possible marrying money.

The first part of this scheme he had carried out successfully. He had taken rooms in the district and been accepted as a member of the hunt. He had joined an associated and very select club and his social prospects seemed flourishing.

But he was up against one difficulty — money. His capital, he had estimated, would last him for four years, and on these four years he had staked his all. If before the end of that period he was unable to bring off the second part of his programme, he would be finished: down and out.

His chances in this respect, however, he considered rosy. Elaine Goff-Powell, Sir Richard Goff-Powell's only daughter, would have

enough for any husband. Moreover he was sure she admired him, and he had made himself very agreeable to her father. Elaine was neither a beauty nor a wit: in fact, in moments of depression he realized she was, as he put it, damned plain and damned dull, too. But this gave him all the more hope. It wiped out the most dangerous of his potential competitors. As yet he had not risked a proposal, but he felt the time would soon be ripe and he had little fear of the result.

Unhappily, while the affair was moving, it was not moving quickly enough. Unless an engagement could be achieved soon, his resources would not stand the strain. Another five or six hundred would undoubtedly enable him to pull it off. As it was, the thing would be touch and go.

He had done what he could to borrow, but with indifferent success. Professional money-lenders would not touch him. Friends who might with luck be good for a tenner, certainly would not stretch to anything more: and it would take a good many tenners to be of use to Skeffington.

In this difficulty he had embarked on a course which normally he would have avoided like the plague. He had taken to cheating at cards. He realized very fully the risk he ran, but he did not see that any other way was open to him.

For some weeks he had managed successfully and he had determined to put his fortunes to the test at the Christmas Hunt Ball, which was to take place in a few days. With reasonable luck he would be accepted, and then this dreadfully wearing period of his life would be over.

But now, five days before the ball, disaster had overtaken him. His cheating had been discovered.

And yet not wholly discovered. What had happened was this.

During a game at the club one of the men, this Justin Holt, suddenly ceased playing. His face took on an expression of agony, and after swaying about for a moment, his head pitched forward on the table, the cards dropping from his nerveless fingers. The others jumped to their feet, but before they could do anything Holt raised himself. He was covered with confusion and apologized profusely. He had, he explained, got a severe pain and giddiness. It had come so suddenly that for the moment it had bowled him over, but already it was better. Infinitely he regretted breaking up the party, but with the others' consent he would go home and lie down. When they wanted to help he hesitated, then asked Skeffington, who lived in his direction, if he would mind seeing him to his quarters.

The affair puzzled Skeffington,

who had never before seen such a seizure. But for him the mystery was soon cleared up. When they were alone Holt suddenly found himself able to walk normally and the expression of pain vanished from his face.

He remained, however, looking extremely worried. "I did that little bit of play-acting for a reason, Skeffington," he said. "The truth is, I saw what you were doing. I've been suspicious for some time, and so, I may tell you, have been a number of the others. But to-night I watched you, and I saw the whole thing. Skeffington, you're finished at Seldon Sorby."

To Skeffington it sounded like a sentence of death, but he quickly pulled himself together. Staring at Holt as coolly as he could, he said: "Perhaps you'll kindly explain what you're talking about?"

Holt shook his head irritably. "Don't be a complete fool," he begged. "I tell you I saw it. There's no use in your pretending. I know."

"You can't know anything," Skeffington returned doggedly. "If you had seen anything at that table, you'd have said so at the time. You didn't."

"I didn't," Holt explained, "for an obvious reason. I have some thought for the hunt, if you haven't. I didn't want to make a scandal. If we had been by ourselves I would have spoken. But with outsiders present naturally I didn't."

"Very thoughtful," Skeffington sneered. "It hasn't occurred to you that your consideration has rendered your story useless? Even if you had seen anything, which I deny, you can't prove it."

"I can tell what I saw."

"That's not proof. I shall deny it and then where will you be? You will have made a libelous statement which you can't prove. I think, my dear Holt, you, and not I, will be the one to retire."

Again Holt shook his head. "That sounds all right, Skeffington, but you know as well as I do that I would be believed. You know, or you ought to, that several of the men suspect you as it is. If I describe what I saw you do, they will believe me."

"You just try it on," Skeffington said as contemptuously as he could. "It doesn't matter what anybody believes or doesn't believe privately. You can prove nothing, and you'll be the one who will suffer."

"That may be," Holt admitted, "but I'll tell you what I shall do. I'll give you three days to think it over. If by then you have sent in your resignation from the hunt, I will never refer to the matter again. If you have not resigned, I shall tell the committee. You do what you like."

Though Skeffington had attempted a mild bluff, he knew that Holt had the whip hand. It was true what the man had said: he would be believed rather than Skeffington. Holt's transparent honesty was universally recognized, whereas Skeffington was aware that his own reputation was by no means too secure. His phenomenal luck had been remarked on jokingly — or was it jokingly? — by several members, and the somewhat spectacular wins which had produced these remarks would be remembered — if Holt told what he had seen.

Skeffington rapidly considered the matter. He must somehow get Holt to keep silence. There must be no scandal, for scandal would mean complete ruin. The least breath and all chance of marrying Elaine Goff-Powell would be at an end. Indeed, if he didn't pull off an engagement at the ball next Tuesday, this last hope would be gone. He could not propose again for some weeks, and his money would not stretch to that.

But what could he do to restrain Holt? Nothing! Holt was one of those men who believed in doing what they considered was their duty. No, he could not hope to influence Holt.

Then first occurred to Skeffington the terrible idea that there was a way in which he could silence his enemy. One way: and only one.

Skeffington felt that he was at the most dreadful crisis of his life. To give up his present position, and practically penniless, to begin looking for a job — for which he had no training — would mean destitution, misery and death. And he could look forward to nothing else — if Holt were to live. But could he face the alternative; if Holt were to die? . . . Drops of sweat formed on his forehead.

He realized of course that his future did not depend solely on Holt. If Elaine turned him down he would equally be ruined. Therefore if Elaine turned him down there was no need to consider Holt any more. He was down and out in any case.

But if Elaine accepted him? Then Holt's actions would become vital. In this case . . .

All Skeffington's instincts were now prompting him to gain time. At all costs he must close Holt's mouth till after the ball. Then he, Skeffington, would either disappear and go under, or he would somehow deal with Holt. He turned to the man and spoke quietly and with more hesitation.

"Don't be in a hurry, Holt, I must think this over. Without admitting anything, I see you can do me a lot of harm. You have given me an ultimatum: resign or take the consequences. I want you to compromise."

"Compromise?" Holt was shocked. "How can I compromise on a thing of that sort? Why, it's fundamental! You're not a fool, Skeffington: you must see that."

Skeffington shrugged. "I suppose you're right," he admitted presently. "Well, I'll tell you. I'll agree to your conditions provided you give me six days instead of three to make my arrangements. And what's more: during these six days I promise not to enter the card room. At the end of the six days, if I haven't resigned, you can go to the committee. Hang it all, Holt, that's not too much to ask. I must fix up some reason for the resignation. I'll have an uncle die in America and leave me money, or something of that kind. Then I'll go abroad and that will be the end of me so far as you're concerned."

Holt hesitated.

"Look here," went on Skeffington, "I'll not ask six days. Give me till the ball. We'll meet there and I'll let you have every satisfaction."

"But damn it, Skeffington, you mustn't come to the ball."

This was what Skeffington had feared. He shrugged, then turned away. "Oh well," he said coldly, "if you're going to be unreasonable I withdraw my offer. You tell the committee now, and when I am approached I shall deny everything and ask for your proof. And if you don't give it I shall press for your expulsion, and if you don't leave I shall start proceedings against you for defamation of character. A worse scandal that than my going to the ball!" He paused, then continued in a pleasanter tone. "But I don't want to do that. If you will wait till the ball it'll give me a chance to explain my departure. That's all I ask." He suddenly changed his tone. "I'm not attempting any extenuation, Holt, but try and imagine the ruin this means for me. It's not like you to kick a man when he's down."

There had been some further argument and Skeffington had triumphed. Holt had agreed to say nothing provided that at or before the ball Skeffington resigned.

Left alone, Skeffington hardened his heart and began to work out the solution of his terrible problem. First, if Elaine refused him. By borrowing from his friends and selling some of his stuff he could raise, he thought, a couple of hundred pounds. He had better do this at once and buy tickets to the Argentine, where he thought his knowledge of horses might stand him in good stead. No doubt before leaving he could borrow a little more. Enough to get past the immigration laws at all events. It would be hell after what he was accustomed to: but it would be at least a chance for life.

But if Elaine accepted him?

Then he was set up for life with all the money he could want: his future absolutely assured — if only Holt were dealt with.

Skeffington took care to speak to various members of the committee and others to whom Holt might have told his story, and in every case he was satisfied from their manner that they had heard nothing. Holt therefore was the only danger. If he were silenced, Skeffington would be safe.

For three days Skeffington thought over the problem and then at last he saw how the man might be eliminated, and with absolute secrecy. Admittedly there would be a little risk at one point, but that point once passed, no further hitch could arise. Carefully Skeffington made his preparations. He avoided the club on the excuse of private business and kept rigorously out of Holt's way.

At last the fateful night arrived, a dark and bitter evening with the ground like iron and a frosty fog in the air. The Christmas Hunt Ball was *the* social event of the year, when the local four hundred thronged the Seldon Sorby Town Hall and everyone who was anyone felt he must be present. The somewhat drab building was transformed out of all recognition with bunting and greenery, and the hunt colors made the gathering what the local paper invariably called a spectacle of sparkling brilliance.

The first two essentials of Skeffington's plan were to drive some people to the ball and to park his car in a secluded place near the back entrance of the hall. The former he managed by inviting a young married couple called Hatherley and a bachelor friend named Scarlett to accompany him, the second by a careful timing of his arrival, coupled with his knowledge of how the park filled. The market at the back of the hall was used as a park, and there he succeeded in placing the car in the corner he desired. He knew that before long it would be completely surrounded and that no one was likely to remain near it.

In the car, hooked up under the dash, was a heavy spanner round which he had wrapped a soft cloth. It was so fixed that he could lift it out by simply opening the door and putting in his hand.

He had taken just enough whisky to steady his nerves, and in spite of the terrible deed which was in front of him, he felt confident and in his best form.

To his delight Elaine had greeted him with more than her usual warmth. For half the evening he had danced exclusively with her, and now he led her to a deserted corner

and with trepidation put the vital question. A thrill of overwhelming satisfaction shot through him when he heard the answer. Elaine would marry him, and further would agree to the engagement being announced at once.

But that thrill was accompanied by a pang of something not far removed from actual horror. To preserve what he had won he must now pass through the most hideous ten minutes of his life. Now also he realized that there would be more danger in the affair than he had anticipated. However, there was no alternative. The thing must be faced.

When he judged the time propitious — when the chauffeurs were at supper — he told Elaine that he wished to ask her father's blessing on the engagement. She suggested accompanying him, and he had to use all his tact to prevent her. However, by assuring her that he could speak more movingly of her goodness and charm if she were not present, he was able to leave her dancing with Scarlett.

Instead of seeking out Sir Richard Goff-Powell, Skeffington found Holt. Waiting till he had handed on his partner, he passed him, and without stopping, murmured: "Come to the cloak room. I've something to show you."

Skeffington hung about the passages till Holt hove in sight. "I've decided to resign," he said in a low voice, "but I've got a strange letter which I wish to show you. We can't talk here in private. Come out to my car and let me explain what has arisen."

Holt was unwilling, but Skeffington persuaded him by the argument that if they were seen discussing confidential matters, it might connect him with the resignation.

Skeffington passed out to the park, followed by his victim. Though the tops of the cars were faintly illuminated by distant lights, the spaces between them were dark as pitch. As they walked Skeffington removed his immaculate gloves, fearing telltale stains or even smears of blood. He was satisfied that they reached the car unobserved.

"Here's the letter," he said, opening the forward door and taking a paper from a cubby hole. "My inside light has failed, but the letter's very short and you can read it by the side light. I'll switch it on. Then we can get in out of the cold and discuss it."

Holt, grumbling about being brought out of the warm hall, moved forward to the front of the wing to bring the paper to the lamp. In doing so he momentarily turned his back to Skeffington.

To produce this movement had been Skeffington's aim. Instead of

switching on the light, his fingers grasped the spanner, and as Holt made that slight turn he brought the heavy tool down with all his force on the man's head. Holt dropped like a log.

With a tiny pocket-torch Skeffington glanced at his victim's head. It was all right. There was no blood, but there was deformation of the bone. There could be no doubt that Holt was dead.

Hastily Skeffington completed his programme. Opening the rear door of his car, he tried to lift the body in. This he found more difficult than he had expected. He had to leave it sitting on the floor propped up against the seat and go to the other side of the car and draw it in after him, returning to lift in the feet, one by one. He left it on the floor covered with a rug, then hastened back to the hall. This time also he was sure he was unobserved. A wash, a brush and a stiff glass of whisky, and he was once more in the ballroom.

He would have given anything to have slipped off to his rooms, but he daren't do so. Instead he found Sir Richard, and taking his courage in both hands, he went up to him.

"I have something to tell you, sir," he began, "and I most sincerely hope you will be pleased. Elaine has done me the honour to say she will marry me," and he expatiated on his news.

Sir Richard did not appear particularly pleased, but neither did he raise any objection. He shrugged and said the matter was one for Elaine. As soon as Skeffington could, he returned to the young woman.

How he endured to the end of the proceedings Skeffington scarcely knew. But at long last Elaine departed with her family and he went in search of his friends.

"I'll bring the car to the steps," he told the Hatherleys, then adding to Scarlett: "You might come and help me if you don't mind. It's a job to get out of such a jam."

Reaching the car, Skeffington opened the near forward door for Scarlett, then went round to the driver's side and got in himself. He thus had a witness of all his proceedings, while Scarlett had not seen the body.

As Skeffington pulled in to the steps a commissionaire opened the rear door for Mrs. Hatherley. He lifted away the rug, then swore hoarsely while Mrs. Hatherley gave a shrill scream.

What happened then seemed a confused muddle to Skeffington. He got out and tried to edge round to the door through the dense crowd which had instantly formed.

"What is it?" he heard himself shouting. "What's wrong?"

He heard murmurs all about him.

"A man!" "Seems to be dead!" "There in the back of the car!" — then an authoritative voice which he recognized as that of the chief constable of the county: "Keep back everyone, please, and let Dr. Hackett pass. Doctor, will you please have a look here."

Everyone but Skeffington and Scarlett moved back. Someone provided a torch. For a moment time seemed to stand still, then the doctor said slowly: "It's Holt and I'm afraid he's dead. A blow on the head. Must have been instantaneous."

Time began to move once more, in fact it now raced so quickly that Skeffington could hardly keep up with it.

As if by magic police appeared. The guests were politely herded back into the ballrooms. Skeffington was asked by a sharp-looking young inspector if he could give any explanation of the affair, and when he replied that he could not, he was told not so politely to wait where he was for a further interrogation.

The whole place buzzed as if a swarm of colossal bees had invaded it. Then gradually people began to leave, their names and addresses taken and a few questions put and answered. At long last the police returned to Skeffington.

He had taken a little more whisky, enough to subdue his fear and steady his hands, but not enough to make him stupid.

"Will you tell me what you know of this affair, Mr. Skeffington?" asked the local superintendent, who had now arrived and taken charge of the proceedings.

Skeffington replied without hesitation. He had driven Mr. and Mrs. Hatherley and Mr. Scarlett to the ball. He had parked in the corner of the market. All had then got out and gone into the hall. When Mrs. Hatherley was ready to go home he and Scarlett had gone for the car. He had driven it to the steps and when the rear door had been opened the body had been found. The affair was just as great a mystery to him as to the super.

It was a simple story and Skeffington told it well. Superintendent Redfern asked many questions, but he could not in any way shake the tale, and at last he thanked Skeffington and said that would be all.

Rather shakily Skeffington drove home.[1]

During the next couple of days events moved quickly at police headquarters at Seldon Sorby. The place had been shaken to the core. Such a murder, taking place at the most fashionable event in the town's year, and involving the death of a relative

[1] Note to Reader. — Where had Skeffington given himself away.

of Lord Bonniton, the master of the most famous hunt in the country, seemed almost a national disaster. The chief constable was frantic and without delay had wired to Scotland Yard for help. A couple of hours later Chief Inspector French and Sergeant Carter had arrived to assist in the inquiry. French had heard all that had been done, had studied the various statements made, and had examined the Town Hall and market. As he had not thereupon laid his hand on the guilty party, the chief constable had asked querulous and suggestive questions.

"Silly fool," French grumbled to Carter that night at their hotel. "Does he think we're thought readers? If he was in all that hurry, why didn't he do the job himself?"

Later that evening French sat smoking over the lounge fire and imbibing cup after cup of strong coffee, as he puzzled his brains in the attempt to find some line of investigation which would give him his solution. He had put in train all the obvious inquiries: about Holt's career and recent activities, who had seen him at the ball, who had been in the market while the cars were parked, and such like, but he wanted to find some short-cut, some royal road almost, to the criminal. Sir Mortimer Ellison, the Assistant Commissioner at the Yard, had given him a hint before he started. "It's a society place," he had said, "and the big bugs are society people. You'll find them touchy down there because this case will get them on the raw. Hence the quicker you pull it off, the better for all concerned." And now he had been down for two days and he was no further on than when he arrived.

For three hours he considered the matter and then a point struck him, a very simple point. It might not lead to anything, but, on the other hand, it might. The following day he would try a reconstruction.

Accordingly next morning he demanded a man of the approximate build of the deceased and a car like Skeffington's. These he took to a secluded corner of the police yard.

The dummy was a young constable named Arthurs. He grinned when French explained that he wanted to smash in his head.

"Right, sir," he agreed. "I hope you'll remember the wife and kiddies when I'm gone."

"No one, I'm afraid, will know how it was done," French assured him. "Now, Arthurs, just where you're standing I hit you a bat on the head and stove in your skull. See?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, go ahead. You don't want me to do it in reality, I suppose?"

"I'm afraid, sir, if my skull . . ."

French jerked round. "Good

heavens, man, use your brains! Collapse!"

With a sudden look of comprehension Arthurs sank quietly on to the ground beside the car, while French adjured him to relax completely.

"Now, Carter, lift him into the position the dead man occupied."

Carter opened the rear door, and lifting the grinning Arthurs beneath the arms, tried to get him into the car. But like Skeffington he found he couldn't do it from where he was standing. He also had to go round to the other side and draw him in.

"Can't you pull in the legs?" French prompted.

Carter tried. "No, sir," he returned, "I'll have to go back and lift them in."

French watched him, a smile of satisfaction playing on his lips. "I rather thought that might happen," he declared. "Come along to the mortuary." He looked into the car. "Thank you, Arthurs, we've done with you. You made a good corpse."

On reaching the room where Holt's clothes lay, French took out his powdering apparatus and dusted the deceased's patent leather shoes. Several fingerprints showed up. French blew away the surplus, then photographed the prints.

"Now the deceased's fingers," he went on.

Soon the ten impressions were taken and photographed in their turn. A proper comparison would require enlargements and detailed observation, but a certain amount could be learned from mere casual inspection. French quickly satisfied himself. Most of the prints belonged to the deceased himself, but certain others were not his. From their position they might well have been caused by lifting the feet into a car.

Two hours later the club started a new waiter in the bar. Gradually a row of used glasses accumulated, each neatly labelled with the name of the drinker. At intervals French tested and compared the fingerprints. Suddenly the affair clicked. Skeffington had lifted Holt's shoes.

The correct line of investigation was now indicated. Judicious enquiries brought to light Skeffington's financial position and mysterious luck at cards, Holt's strange illness, and the fact that Holt had asked Skeffington to accompany him to his rooms. The fact of the latter's engagement also became known. Here, French saw was the motive.

"He thought putting the corpse in his own car would absolve him from suspicion, but the prints on the shoes are proof positive that he did it," he concluded to the chief constable. "We're ready for an arrest, I think?"

"To-night," nodded the chief constable.

Again your Editor eats humble pie. . . . Again we give you a short short (and hang editorial policy!) — this "miniature" by the eminent conductor of "The Conning Tower" and witty anchor-man of "Information Please," who poses a provocative problem: Was it murder? and if so, who do you *think did it?*

THE PICTURE COLLECTOR

by FRANKLIN P. ADAMS (F.P.A.)

In 1924, Mr. James Van Buren Harwood, a highly prosperous broker, a man of fine taste in books and pictures, was getting along with Julia, his wife; but not more than getting along. There was no hostility, in public or private. The Harwoods had been married for fourteen years. Julia Harwood was beautiful; her interests were not conspicuously different from those of her husband.

For four or five years Harwood had been going about town with Miss Ethel Grannis, twenty-four and personable. Miss Grannis was employed as secretary to Benjamin Kamrath, head of the Kamrath Galleries, specializing in modern painting.

For Harwood, as soon as money became plentiful with him, became a collector of paintings. "What a thing to spend money on!" his friends would say. "Exactly my comment," would be his retort, "on your country-club memberships, your bridge and poker playing, your summer home in the country. I can buy a good many fine pictures for what those things cost you; and in five, ten years I still have the pictures. You haven't even got your score cards to show for it. And in a year, or fifteen years, a picture I buy for two hundred dollars might be worth twenty thousand dollars."

Harwood and Miss Grannis began by talking about painting and painters. He would ask her opinion, which was good and invariably honest, about this or that picture; generally he deferred to it. She grew fond of him, as women grow when they feel that men are dependent on them. . . . In two or three years he, with natural taste heightened by Miss Grannis' expert knowledge, became as adroit a buyer and as good a judge of picture values as the average dealer.

As happens with amateur collectors — and Harwood's love for pictures was utterly uncommercial — he began to specialize. The paintings of the young American Edgar Cole

became his obsession. . . . Cole was a young man from Pocatello, Idaho. His subjects were all Pocatello: stores, storekeepers, Idaho farms and farmers, barbers — one of Saturday night in a barbershop got his first critical acclaim in the Sunday New York *Times* and *Herald Tribune* — street scenes; nothing but pictures of what he had grown up with.

He was almost a discovery of Harwood's. Harwood had seen and bought, with Miss Grannis' sympathetic approval, the first Cole to be shown in the East. He paid fifty dollars for it. Later he bought all that he could pick up; even wrote to Cole, praising his work. Cole, then barely recognized, gratefully sent him a portrait of an old Idaho miner.

In 1928, Cole, by this time pretty well known, came to New York to attend the first exhibit of his pictures. Harwood was there for varnishing day, met Cole, and was astounded at his frailness, though he couldn't have been more than thirty. Harwood invited him to dinner at his house; there were only Cole, Miss Grannis, and Mr. and Mrs. Harwood. And though the dinner was unalcoholic, for Cole had said that he didn't drink, Cole excused himself at the end, saying that he felt ill, and so he appeared. The Harwoods and Miss Grannis talked for an hour or so, mostly about the wraithlike incorporeality of the artist, till Miss Grannis went home at ten o'clock.

That winter there occurred the death of DuPlessis, the famous French modernist, whose pictures had been bringing five thousand dollars, and frequently more. A tremendous rise in prices immediately followed the news of his death. A dealer who had a DuPlessis would increase his price from seventy-five hundred dollars to thirty thousand dollars — and get it. A man who bought three, ten years ago, for two hundred dollars sold them to a dealer for thirty-five thousand dollars.

And the next autumn, November, 1929, Cole had his second show in New York. Harwood, like many others versed in finance, lost not only every cent that he had, but more; his debts ran to one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, with no assets, for his house wouldn't bring the price of the mortgage. No assets but his precious — to him — Coles; but they wouldn't bring much: the open market for pictures by living Americans was especially poor now.

But Harwood again invited Cole to dinner, Miss Grannis and Mrs. Harwood again being present. Cole, no more robust-looking than before, this time remained after dinner. The four went to the big living room, the one with the eight Coles on the walls. The talk was general, small, and a

few perfunctory words were said about DuPlessis' death. And at ten-thirty Cole rose to leave.

At the door, as he was about to go out, he dropped to the floor. Harwood ran to a near-by doctor's office. The doctor came at once. Cole was dead.

In a week a Cole owner could name his own price for a picture. Harwood sold forty of his for seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars within two months.

I told this story to two women. One said that Harwood killed or poisoned Cole. The other said that Miss Grannis, also knowing how the prices of his pictures would increase, poisoned him. An autopsy? No suspicion attached to anybody.

And a novelist, male — I told him first, because I foolishly thought that he could write a mystery novel about it — said, elegantly, "Nuts! The Mrs. killed him, put something in his dinner. She knew Harwood wanted to marry the gal, she wanted plenty of alimony, and she knew how broke Harwood was. Mystery, my eye!"

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Death Car *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

All doors of the blue sedan were locked, the windows up. A man in a blue slack suit was slumped over the wheel. The motor throbbed lowly.

Sgt. Brill gave the right front door his attention and stepped aside. The air cleared, Fordney took over.

On the dead man's lap was a pencilled message scrawled on the back of a business envelope.

MARY:
I can't stand the gaff. I'll be gone in a few minutes.
DICK.

A tube was attached to the exhaust pipe. The only other object in the car was an almost empty whisky bottle, its top missing. The Professor was interested in the man's pockets — and their contents.

There were a half-empty package of cigarettes, lighter that failed to light, $140 in currency, 90 cents in change, handkerchief, and in the watch pocket of the trousers, a letter in feminine handwriting, torn to bits.

"Do you observe anything odd about this envelope, Sergeant?" the professor asked.

Brill studied it, shook his head. "No, looks all right to me. What's wrong with it?"

"Observe the pockets in the slack suit," Fordney suggested.

The Sergeant did. "I still don't get it, Professor. The only thing that puzzles me is why he locked the doors in this isolated spot in the woods."

"The envelope, Sergeant," said Fordney, "is *un*creased, yet there is no pocket in the man's suit deep enough to accommodate this size envelope without *folding*. However," he added, "there is another clue that proves quite definitely that this man was not a suicide."

What is it?

Solution

There was no PENCIL in the car or in the man's clothing.

Do you like Mr. and Mrs. North? If you do, meet Mr. and Mrs. Meadow — especially meet Mrs. Meadow, whose first name is Desdemona but who is more affectionately known as "Squeakie." A brilliant newcomer to the field of distaff detectives, Squeakie (who can "feel" a murder by "the prickling of her thumb") will worm her way into your heart. . . . A Queen discovery, published here for the first time anywhere.

SQUEAKIE'S FIRST CASE

by MARGARET MANNERS

I'LL NEVER forget that night, not if I live to be as old as Methuselah and have as many wives as Solomon. God forbid!

Squeakie was brushing her hair and counting. She's been doing a hundred strokes lately. I usually put pink wax stopples in my ears, but that night I was too busy trying to lay down the law to her. A husband has some rights and one of them ought to be a power of veto, especially if his wife goes in for learned courses in anything from Shakespeare to hobgoblins. The last time it was psychology and she was "handling" me.

Squeakie (her real name is Desdemona, her father was mad . . . about Shakespeare, so is she) is difficult to approach in these matters; the effect is about the same if you walk on a step that isn't there.

Squeakie's voice went on. "Twenty-two, twenty-three . . ."

"But look, Squeakie," I said, "I don't want you to ride a broomstick."

"Twenty-eight, twenty-nine. Don't be silly, David."

"I don't know why you of all people should want me not to be silly," I said.

She peeped at me between the strands of hovering hairs that were trying to follow the brush that attracted them. She made a good looking witch.

"I don't intend to ride any broomstick. I've told you over and over. The idea is to get a complete historic view of the insides of people. Thirty-four, thirty-five."

I stared at her. Where had thirty to thirty-three gone? Had she been counting by remote control? "Insides of people" suggested lots of things.

She said, "I wish you wouldn't wear those purple pajamas. I always have nightmares when you do. Thirty-nine, forty."

I said sternly, "They're not purple, they're mauve. Anyway, you bought them." Then I came down

as I thought to brass tacks.

"I won't have any more of this foolishness; you've got to give it up."

She turned away from the mirror and shook her curly brown mop at me. "Brushing is doing wonders. Can't you see the life in it?" she said seriously.

I was caught off guard. I said, "Yes," and began to look for the life in it. Then I ground my teeth and sprang off the bed. "Squeakie! I don't mean the hair. You know what I'm talking about. I mean that so-called esoteric study . . ."

She smiled and interrupted me. "Oh, that. I've been trying to tell you. It helps me to understand people. You can't understand people's minds in the tenth century or in any other century unless you can share their thoughts. You know — what they believed, their superstitions, their crimes. It's a kind of mythology. Every age has one. As a reporter that should be clear to you. For example, everyone today believes in microbes and germs. Causing disease, you know."

"But Squeakie," I gasped, "that's not a superstition. Bacteria do cause disease."

Her sweet little face became darkly prophetic under the halo of electrified hair. "Ha!" she said triumphantly, "Living today, that's what you think. But what will people think two hundred years from now?"

I bit the cuff of the mauve pajamas and gave up.

She looked at the clock and began counting again. "Sixty-one, sixty-two."

I couldn't stand it any longer. "Squeakie," I said gently.

"Mmmmm? Sixty-four, sixty-five . . ."

"How do you know it's sixty-one? You stopped counting strokes at forty. How do you know?"

She pointed to the leather framed clock.

"The clock? Squeakie!"

"Oh, David, don't you see? I look at the second hand when I stop counting. I allow one second per stroke. It's easy."

There was something wrong somewhere. "But," I said, "you can't add, darling!"

"David, don't be silly. Of course I can add. I just don't do it your way. I subtract. Eighty-two . . ."

"Kiss me good-night, darling," I said, "I want to go to sleep."

She's wonderful. But sometimes I get a little confused.

The last thing I remembered was Squeakie saying "ninety-two." I was listening to her chest with a huge stethoscope, begging her to say ninety-nine. But she wouldn't. Then I tried to pull the stethoscope out of

my ears. There was a terrible noise in my head, like a siren shrieking, but the ear pieces wouldn't come out. I shook them and shook them and . . .

I opened my eyes and felt as if the top of my head were coming off.

Squeakie was shaking me. "David! David! Wake up!"

I spoke through the layers of fur in my mouth. "Huh? What is it?"

She was scared; her nails were digging into my arms. I pushed her away and sat up.

"David, a woman in the next house screamed. It was terrible!"

I was awake now, enough to be sore. "What do you want me to do, scream back?"

But she was trembling, so I put my arms around her. "What's the matter, darling?"

"David, she was being killed, I know it."

I took my arms away again, quick. That's just like Squeakie. Give her an inch . . . Before I could recover she took more territory and I hardly had room to stand up in. I was lying in bed, of course, but you see what I mean.

She said, "David, call Gregory!"

I'd better stop here for a minute. Gregory Sawyer is a good friend of ours and in addition he's a police lieutenant on New York's Homicide Squad. He likes Squeakie too.

I glanced at the clock. "Darling," I said. My voice was full of what I hoped was convincing authority and disapproval. "If you hear a scream in New York at twelve midnight, even in a nice early-to-bed neighborhood like this, you don't call a lieutenant of the Homicide Squad. At the most you call the local precinct and report it. Get into bed, you'll catch cold."

Not Squeakie. She couldn't do anything that simple. She shook all over until her teeth chattered. "It's raining," she moaned, "listen!"

I listened obligingly. After all that was easy. It was pouring outside, nasty chill March rain. You could hear it splashing and plopping in the courtyard between the two houses.

We live in a very quiet street in that part of Manhattan which just stops being the village and starts to be Chelsea. Contrary to all you've read and heard, we're quiet, nice, working people. The long-haired Bohemian is a vanishing race. They paint camouflage these days, I suppose, and get paid for it.

I sat up higher in bed and tried to see 313, the house across the court, but the angle was wrong, and anyway it was pitch black outside.

We live in 315, its companion house, and the court runs in from the street giving us light, air and street noises. However the kids can't get in and play there, thank the Lord. We

have a high board fence, nicely painted battleship gray, spanning the space between the two houses and shielding us from the public eye when we take sunbaths in summer.

The door in the fence can't be entered from the outside, but you can always get out from the inside — a sort of latch arrangement. Small shrubs and fancy fire escapes, New Orleans wrought iron style, leading down to our glorified playpen, take the curse off concrete and raise the rent. But iron balustrades are too stagy for us; we use the basement door to enter the court.

Do you follow me? For the sake of the story I had to make it clear about the houses.

Now back to Squeakie. She fidgeted while I listened to the rain. Then she went to the window.

"The second floor across the court has a light on," she said. "Oh, it's gone out. David, it was a horrible scream. Please call Gregory."

"If you are worried," I pointed out, "why don't *you* call the police station? You're a citizen too."

To make a long story short I found myself dialling Gregory's number. His phone rang twice. "There," I said, "he's not in. I'll just . . ."

Before I could slam down the receiver Squeakie stayed my hand. "Give him time," she said, a cold glitter in her eye.

I gave him time.

"Hullo, what is it?" he said.

Just my luck! This had to be the night he went to bed early. He sounded fuzzy, and I felt like a fool.

"Squeakie wanted me to call you," I said weakly.

I waited for the sound and fury at his end, but he just said, "Oh, it's you." Very unencouraging.

I tried again. "Squeakie heard a scream."

"Really?"

"Oh, hell!" I said. "You don't think I wanted to call you, do you?"

"I wouldn't know."

Squeakie glared at me and snatched the phone. She had intended to do the talking all along, and we both knew it.

I was glad to see she wasn't doing any too well. The horrendous tale failed to impress. She hung up sadly. "He told me to go back to bed."

"Good," I said. "That's fine. Let's get some sleep."

"No," she said, tight-lipped. "I'm going to get dressed and make some coffee. We'll probably need it."

"Squeakie, darling!" I wailed. "There's no murder. There's no fire. No tired minions of the law will troop in here for refreshment. Why do you want to make coffee?"

"Don't scream at me, David. How do you know?"

"How do I know what?"

"That there hasn't been a murder?"

She had donned her air raid warden slacks and a sweater. She's prepared, all right.

"How do you know there has?" I asked.

She looked at me somberly. "By the prickling of my thumb."

I thought she was swearing. "By the what?"

"By the prickling of my thumb. That's how I know. It's from Macbeth. The witch says it. Well, are you getting up?"

"I am not."

She marched out to the kitchen. I could hear the rattle of pots as she went about making coffee.

The phone rang.

I picked up the receiver with fear in my heart. It was Gregory.

"Apologize to your wife."

"My God, no!"

"Yes. Two of your neighbors heard the scream and phoned the police. A man went over and broke down a door. Found a woman murdered. I'm coming right down. Looks like an all-night job. Tell Squeakie to put the coffee on, will you?"

I said dully, "She has," and hung up.

Squeakie came in self-consciously trying not to look smug. "There, I was right, wasn't I? Oh, darling, isn't it dreadful?" She suddenly looked frightened and pitifully incapable of dealing with this harsh world. But you can't fool one of the people all of the time. I just looked at her little pink thumb. Then I said, "You ought to keep that out of other people's business."

Even that was too much. She gave me a lecture on my moral duties as a citizen.

I was very meek while we waited for Gregory. There was something I wanted to do, but I wanted to do it alone. Squeakie was sitting over the coffee pot, looking like a super-efficient "Angel of Mercy."

"How was she killed, David?"

"I don't know. Gregory didn't say."

"Well, anyway, she wasn't shot."

I stared at her. "Did your thumb tell you that?"

"Oh David, you don't think!" (*I* don't think!) "If I heard a scream I'd have heard a shot, wouldn't I?"

I flattered her by looking wonder and admiration — hard. Then I put on my act.

"Good Lord!" I exclaim. "I'd almost forgotten that I'm a newspaper man. I think I'll just step over and find out who it is, etc.. so that I can phone the paper. I'll be back soon."

Squeakie pours a cup of coffee and hands it to me. "Good idea, I think I'll come along."

"Swell," I say heartily, "put on

your raincoat." But I don't let her get that far. "Darn it!" I add pulling a long face, "We're forgetting, Squeakie. You can't leave the apartment." I imply that she shoulders a great responsibility. "Gregory will be here any minute."

Believe it or not, she really thinks Gregory will fly to her before he even peeps at the corpse. To consult the oracle of her thumb, I have no doubt. After that she folds up, forlorn as a wet umbrella, and I am free to do a little quiet snooping.

There were cars parked outside 313. Doc Evans and his little black bag were upstairs, and so was Haley with a couple of the boys. Gregory was probably still on his way.

I studied the names and the apartment numbers displayed in the mail boxes. This was the arrangement:

First floor: 1A Vera Grey
1B Leonard S. Cobalt
Second floor: 2A Jonathan West
2B Mary Ellen Meredith
Third floor: 3A Vacant
3B Judytha Perry
Fourth floor: 4A Aristodemus Kordis
4B John Slater

Then I peeked into the hallway through the thinly curtained glass panel of the door.

Standing near the open door of apartment 1B was a middle-aged couple. They looked worried and at the isn't-it-dreadful-you-never-know stage. I tapped on the glass and showed my police card. Reluctantly Papa Cobalt opened the door.

"It's all right," I told him. "I live next door. David Meadow. I'm a reporter. *Herald.* My wife heard the scream. What happened?"

Mrs. Cobalt answered for him. Now that I come to think of it, I never did hear her husband's voice, but then there are women like that. "She's been murdered. Miss Perry's been murdered!" She whispered the word.

"Miss Perry?" I said. "Oh, you mean the one in apartment 3B. Did you know her? What did she do?"

Mrs. Cobalt shook her head. "I don't know, but she was a friend of Miss Grey across the hall and you know who *she* is."

I disclaimed all knowledge.

Mrs. Cobalt warmed to the task. "She's an actress. In that new hit play at the Village Little Theatre. You know the one about ghosts; been in the papers a lot lately. *Dark World.* Miss Grey plays the dead wife."

"But look here," I protested. "Vivian Gaylord plays that zombie."

Mrs. Cobalt smiled. "That's her stage name. She's really Vera Grey. Lucky girl!" She glanced with benevolent interest at the door marked 1A.

Lucky girl was right. The Little Theatre had struggled on tiny subsidies for years and then out of a clear sky some striving Villager had written a hit for them. Vivian Gaylord! No one had ever heard of her till she was discovered in one of its eerie roles, not the lead but still . . .

I moved over to 1A.

"She's not there," Mrs. Cobalt offered. "She's telling the policeman what happened."

Someone was coming down the stairs. I looked up and saw a slender young woman with a white, set face looking down and through us. She was wearing one of those new hats that have a brim and then yards of stuff hanging around the face and swathing the chin.

"Miss Gaylord," I said. But Mama Cobalt was too quick for me.

"Poor child," she said, and advanced to take the actress to her bosom.

Grey, alias Gaylord, was not tall, but she looked really tiny sobbing on the Cobalt bust.

Again there was a step on the stairs, and this time a heavy one. Sergeant Haley lumbered down to us. He offered me his hand and spoke to Mrs. Cobalt.

"She's had a nasty shock," he said, glancing at the draped head under Mrs. Cobalt's chin. "Take her in and give her a cup of tea. Don't let her go to bed yet; the Lieutenant will want to talk to her again."

The Cobalts, looking heavily cooperative, withdrew into 1B and closed the door.

Tim Haley, otherwise known as "the Comet," gave me the eye. "You reporters waste more good time," he said, gently reproving me. "Whyn't you come up and ask me?"

I agreed with him and tried to follow his suggestion.

He shook his head. "Wait'll the Lieutenant gets here. I don't wanna tell it twice."

"Well, tell me how she was killed," I said as we were going upstairs.

"She was lying in bed. Her skull was beaten in with the base of a marble statue. Diana the huntress."

"Diana the huntress?"

"Sure. Don't you know your mythology? The lady with the bow. It's a copy of the one in the Metropolitan."

Haley is occasionally quite surprising. Now when and why would he have ever been in a museum? But we were at the door of 3B. He remarked that Doc Evans was inside.

"Well," said I, "it can't have been premeditated."

His hand on the door knob, Haley looked at me.

"Because of the weapon," I added.

"That doesn't always follow," he said, and opened the door.

The layout of the apartment was like ours, but in reverse. We crossed the hall to the large bedroom, the one with windows on the court fire escape. But before we went in, the hall door opened behind us and there was Gregory. Squeakie says with emphasis that he's "very attractive." He's the rugged but well-washed-behind-the-ears type. The boys under him think he's swell. I do and I don't. I mean you can appreciate a guy and still not be blind to his faults.

Haley was just drawing himself up and getting ready to make his report when there was a loud thump at the door. I had dire forebodings, and alas, my instincts were right.

When Gregory opened the door there stood Squeakie. From somewhere about her person, which was well hung with flashlights, first aid kits, spare parts and divers other things to help us beat the enemy, she produced a stenographer's notebook and pencil.

"I thought you might like nice transcribed reports of your investigation," she chirped at him.

Haley looked pleased, he hates to take down anything. But Gregory played hard to get.

"Now, Squeakie, you can't fool around with this. It's a murder case."

She opened her big blue eyes very wide and registered shocked surprise. "Why, Gregory! You know how serious I am about things like this. You'll have to question people. Can't I be your secretary? I won't say a word."

I flagged him behind her back and shook my head till it rattled. But in a few seconds she had him neatly tied up. No rescue was possible.

"I'm going to phone the paper," I said, and left.

When I returned Squeakie was sitting in the apartment hallway. The door to the bedroom was closed.

"Where are Gregory and the Comet?" I asked.

She shivered. "In there with the . . ."

"Corpse?" I said. "Squeakie, you are a sweet little ghoul." Which struck home. For the next five minutes she stared past me at a spot on the wall behind my left ear.

Gregory came out of the bedroom. "Go sit in the living room, Squeakie." He pointed to the front of the house. "We're going to bring out the body."

She fled down the hall.

Doc Evans came out and said hello, and I went in. I saw the face before it was covered up. The head was badly battered. The face I had seen before, casually now and then, on the street. It was long and very white, but the mouth which on the street was usually a hard crimson gash was now revealed thin, tight

and bloodless. The eyes were long and oval with pale lashes which hardly showed without the mascara. The hair was a greenish bronze and spilled out in a kind of tangled blood-stained mass on the pillow. It was a strong handsome face, but it was not a kind face. I looked around the bedroom as they carried her out.

It was identical with ours in size and shape but was very pretentiously decorated. There was a lot of green around mingled with hot blues and reds. It was well done yet definitely theatrical, a setting.

The fire escape window was open and the curtain blew hard. The rain was slanting into the room and the rug was wet.

I noted the ornate desk and dressing table and a heavy walnut Spanish-type chest. A straight two-edged sword, shining and unsheathed, hung from a crimson cord on the wall above the chest. I tried the lid. It was open. Inside were packets of letters. Each marked with a name which was followed by a series of figures. What the fair Perry had done was no longer a mystery. The packets were tumbled about a bit as if somebody had looked for something hurriedly. I let the lid fall.

Haley pointed to something lying beside the bed. "Exhibit A," he said.

It was a heavy-based marble statue of Diana. There was a purplish stain on one corner of the pedestal.

It was pretty clear to the three of us that Judytha Perry was a clever girl. The apartment furnishings had cost her plenty. She had done well for herself, she and her little collection of letters.

Haley showed us that somebody had left the apartment via the fire escape. Though the "fresh scrapings" he pointed out did not impress me as conclusive evidence, they seemed to satisfy Gregory. Especially after he had discovered that those marks in the damp rug were footprints — large and masculine.

Squeakie burst in on us.

"Look, David, she had a copy of the book I'm studying." She waved a too, too familiar volume under my nose, *Medieval Witchcraft in Modern Practice*. "I found it in her bookcase; she has a wonderful collection . . . !"

"Squeakie!" I thundered. She subsided with a contrite little "oh."

Haley made his report then. He'd been trying to ever since Gregory arrived. Squeakie wandered about the bedroom poking in drawers and looking in closets while he talked.

I sum up Haley's report: People in the two houses on the court had been startled or awakened, as the case may be, by a scream at a few minutes after midnight. Calls from the Cobalts, who had been playing gin rummy, and from Greerson, on the

top floor of our house, had started the investigation. Miss Grey had been returning from the theatre and was about to open her apartment door when she heard the scream. She thought she recognized her friend's voice and ran up the stairs. But there was no answer and she couldn't get into the apartment. She started upstairs for Mr. Slater, remembered he was working nights in defense and went downstairs to get help. She met the Cobalts coming up.

Miss Meredith on the second floor stuck her head out the door as they passed. She said she had been awakened by what she thought was a scream. She had not connected it with the apartment above her because as she raised her head from the pillow she had been attracted by a movement on the second-floor fire escape of the house across the court (our house, 315). Her fears had been dissipated (the phraseology is Haley's) when she saw that it was only the curtain of the open window blowing out in the rain. She would have gone back to sleep but the sound of running feet (the Cobalts and Miss Grey) aroused her curiosity. She was sitting below in her apartment and would be glad to answer any questions, but she didn't know what she could possibly add.

Suddenly we all looked up startled. Squeakie was speaking.

"I wonder where her cold cream is?" She was tapping her lips and staring at an array of vermilion-capped bottles and jars on the dressing table. "Look, she had everything — astringent, mask, grits, lotion, foundation cream — but no cleansing cream and no cold cream. She must have had a jar."

Haley stared at me and I stared at Haley. But Gregory went over and with infinite patience . . .

"Of course she had some, Squeakie. She just used it more often than the other things, and she used it all up." He turned back to us. But he didn't know Squeakie like I knew Squeakie.

"Well," said she, "if she used it up where's the jar? The Government says we ought to keep them for refills. Conservation, you know."

I raised my eyebrows and shrugged my shoulders trying vainly to indicate that I was in no way responsible for the behavior of my wife. She went on rooting around in things. The sword seemed to fascinate her.

"It has a copper hilt!" she announced as if confiding to us something of great significance.

Haley went over to her. Deliberately ignoring the dramatic wall decoration he stared down at Squeakie. She fluttered a bit and was still.

As she turned away from him she stumbled awkwardly. Then she

stooped and picked something from the floor. "Look!" she held it up. "A little doll!"

"Doll me eye," Haley growled. He snatched it out of her hand. "It's not a doll, Mrs. Meadow. It's a pin cushion."

He held the miniature female figure out and we all saw the pins sticking in the head. Squeakie gasped as he placed it with a careful eye for position on the dressing table.

"It's a real cute one, too. They think up all sorts of crazy things like that to sell for ladies' boudoirs," he instructed her.

"Cute! I think it's ugly," Squeakie said.

"Well, I'll be . . . !" Gregory jumped on Haley. "Are we playing house here, Sergeant?"

"The Comet" answered stolidly, "No, sir."

"All right, let's go down and interview Miss Grey. I suppose we'd better say Miss Gaylord. Squeakie, if you can't be seen and not heard, please don't come."

We called at the Cobalts and found Miss Gaylord waiting for us. She led us across the hall to her apartment and Gregory questioned her. As she took off her hat with its draped blinkers I noticed she looked pale and washed-out. She sat, her head propped on her hand, her elbow resting on the table.

Squeakie was very attentive and conspicuously quiet, which was very nice for all of us.

Gaylord's story only repeated in detail what she had told Haley. I select the important points. The play was an unusually long one, but Gaylord did not appear in the last act. However, she rarely left the theatre immediately. One had to remove one's make-up. She smiled apologetically for mentioning it. I remembered then, and Squeakie who had seen the play was obviously on pins and needles to say so, that Gaylord as the dead wife wore a striking phosphorescent make-up that glowed like ectoplasm on a dimmed stage. She explained that it took only a few seconds to remove it, but that she loafed around in her dressing room. It was her habit to leave the theatre at about 11:40 and walk home. She arrived as she had done tonight, around midnight. She doubted whether anyone at the theatre had seen her leave; they were all on stage at the time.

Doorman? We evidently had no idea of the size of the Little Theatre. They didn't have a doorman.

Gregory nodded and Squeakie's fingers flew. That she's as fast as a court stenographer has always amazed me.

Then Gregory hit something.

He asked the routine questions

about knowing anyone who knew the victim and if she could help them in any way.

She hesitated and seemed ill at ease. "Why, no," she said, "I guess not." Then, "Oh, I don't know." She twisted her fingers and peered at us in an agony of uncertainty.

Gregory said, "Miss Gaylord, there is no compulsion on you to speak at this moment. But I do advise you that nothing is too slight to tell us, especially if you are in doubt." He leaned forward and spoke earnestly. "I don't need to remind you that your friend has been murdered. Murder rules out all minor considerations. Nothing you can say will harm anyone who is innocent."

She answered him reluctantly and in a whisper. "I knew someone who knew her well a few years ago, still knows her, I suppose . . . but . . ."

Gregory waited.

Her voice grew firmer and she went on. "His name is Bob Morgan. He used to be quite fond of Judy. I think a few years ago they were — well — they went around together a lot." She hesitated again. "I wish you'd talk to him. I don't like to say anything further, especially as I'm not very sure."

"Do you know where he lives?"

She raised her head and looked straight at Gregory, yet I had the impression that she was looking beyond him. It was a concentrated vagueness that I couldn't explain.

"Yes. He lives next door in 315."

We all stiffened like hounds on a live scent. It was too much for Squeakie. She forgot all about not being heard.

"You don't mean that nice-looking young man who has the apartment below us!" she exclaimed.

Haley coughed warningly. Miss Gaylord ignored her. Only Gregory spoke.

He said, "Under you, Squeakie?" He glanced at Haley who nodded.

"That's right, Lieutenant. That's the apartment Miss Meredith saw, with the fire escape window open."

"Is there anything else, Miss Gaylord? Anything you think would be of use to us?" He rose and Gaylord looked up at him.

"No," she said quickly. "I really have a dreadful headache. I'd like to lie down if I may."

"Do," he said. Then he spoke rather diffidently. I could see what Squeakie meant when she said he has charm. "I had intended to ask you more about Miss Perry, her past life, and the usual things that policemen have to ask, but I think I'll try Mr. Morgan who seems to have been an old friend too. If I don't get what I want, I wonder — I know it's an imposition at this hour — but may I

call back to see you again."

She smiled wanly, but nodded her head as if she didn't much care.

"Oh, just one thing more, Miss Gaylord." He stopped halfway to the door. "How does it happen that Miss Perry and Mr. Morgan lived so close to one another? It wasn't chance, I take it?"

Her face was haggard under the pale gold hair. "No," she said very softly, "it wasn't chance. Judytha and I shared an apartment when we moved here. She insisted that we move. She said she wanted to keep an eye on Bob. I took a separate apartment later when the show did so well. Judytha was nervous and wanted to be alone."

She spoke in such a frightened tone that I was sure she was holding something back.

At the apartment door Squeakie turned and said gently, "You suffer with headaches, Miss Gaylord?"

Gaylord narrowed her eyes as if making an effort to see Squeakie. "Yes," she said. "Well, not really, just sometimes."

"It's your eyes," said Squeakie, paying no attention to Gregory, who was waiting impatiently at the door.

Gaylord gave a scared bleat. "No, it isn't. It can't be my eyes!" Her hands were shaking.

Squeakie went on. "I don't think it's serious. But you are frightfully nearsighted. You'll have to wear glasses some day. You'd relieve yourself if you'd do it now."

Gaylord went white. She turned on Gregory. "Take her out of here," she said huskily. "She gets on my nerves." Then to Squeakie, "For God's sake leave me alone. Is the police department short manpower?"

Outside, Gregory gave Squeakie a piece of his mind. She took it without a murmur. "Squeakie, you tactless, scatter-brained little . . ." I certainly enjoyed it.

When he had finished, Squeakie said, "Well, it's silly to suffer like that because you're too vain to wear glasses."

I butted in. "Look, darling, lots of actresses should and don't wear glasses. It's more than vanity; they're afraid."

The rain was letting up and the air was fresh and somehow one smelled spring in the air. Squeakie tucked her arm through mine and we followed Haley, who was following Gregory into 315.

"We can have coffee in our place," I said, "whenever you like," and Gregory nodded absently.

We rang Bob Morgan's bell a few times and Gregory made Haley thump on the door. At last we heard a door open somewhere inside and a lot of uncertain shuffling and groping.

When he opened the door and

stood teetering, staring out vaguely, we all recoiled as if slapped. The odor of whiskey filled the place and overflowed into the hall.

"What is it?" He spoke thickly and truculently.

"How long have you been at home?" asked Gregory.

The drunk looked helpless, and then he asked, "What time is it now?"

"About two o'clock," Haley told him looking at his watch.

Morgan counted on wavering fingers, "Twelve o'clock, one o'clock, two o'clock. Been here two hours." Then he added slyly. "Came home drunk, sleeping it off now." He held his fingers to his lips and winked solemnly.

Gregory said, "May we come in? We want to talk to you."

"Sure." He swung away from the door and I noticed that though he was fully dressed he was in his stocking feet. Then he turned back and growled at us. "Say, who are you? What do you want?"

"We are the police," Gregory told him a trifle inaccurately. "Did you hear a scream when you came home tonight?"

"Nope. What do you police want with me? Is she a police?" He pointed at Squeakie in her air-raid warden costume.

"She's a stenographer." Gregory was annoyed, but it was his own fault. "Did you know a Miss Perry living next door in apartment 3B?"

I thought the eyes in the doorway grew a little wary. "Sure, I know Judytha. What of it?"

Gregory pushed him inside as he spoke. "She's been murdered," he said quietly. "Would you know anything about that?"

"Oh, my God!" He jerked back as if he had been struck. He shivered and leaned against the wall; for a minute I thought he would be sick. Then his whole manner changed. "Come in," he said soberly and led us across a hall into his bedroom.

The room was warm and in disorder. The tightly closed window kept the air foul with the smell of liquor. A depression showed in the rumpled bedspread where someone had been lying. A pair of hastily discarded shoes, laces not untied, lay in the middle of the rug.

"Just a minute," he said thickly. He vanished into the bathroom and I could hear him snorting under the cold water. He came out slicking his wet hair back from his face. He was a good-looking kid in a rather worn sort of way.

He apologized sheepishly and asked us to go into the living room. But Gregory preferred the bedroom and I could see why.

Morgan threw the windows wide

open. "Sorry, but I came home pickled. I didn't open the window. Must have been in a state. I guess I passed out."

This was going to be pretty easy, I thought. He wasn't acting any too smart.

Haley saw it, too. The curtains of the window that hadn't been opened were wet! He went round the room making a perfunctory tour of inspection, then he peered out of the window and waited.

Still Gregory didn't speak, and after an awkward silence Morgan said, "How was she killed? When?" His voice was dry. He was dead sober now.

"She was lying in bed with her head bashed in. She screamed at midnight, was found a short time after. Where were you at that time, Mr. Morgan?"

"Still on the street drunk, I guess."

"Ah, well," Gregory dismissed it with a shrug and went on. "How well did you know Miss Perry?"

He answered frankly enough. "Very well indeed, at one time, — not lately."

"When did you last see her?"

"Two weeks ago."

Gregory leaned forward. "You don't seem sorry she's dead."

He considered that. "I'm shocked," he said, "naturally. I don't think I'm very sorry; she was such a malicious little . . ." He stopped short.

"Really? You resented her treatment of you, then?"

"I?" He raised his head. "No, I was thinking of Vera. Judytha was jealous of her work in the Theatre. You see, Judytha had stage ambitions, too. They met each other through theatre work. She used to hound poor Vera."

"What did Miss Perry mean when she said that she moved next door to keep an eye on you?"

I thought that had him, but he recovered and hurdled it easily enough. "Did she say that? Well, she may have been a bit jealous of me, but frankly I can't see her moving for that. She probably moved because she liked the apartment and then she said that to be mysterious. Mystery was her forte." He seemed to be puzzled. "I can't understand . . ."

"What?"

"Oh? The murder." But it was something else I thought that he couldn't understand.

Gregory's eyes roved the room.

And then Squeakie spoke. She said, and I jumped at the familiarity, "Bob, tell them the truth. You're making it worse for yourself."

I thought Haley would put her out the door. He made a move but Gregory held him back. I couldn't understand that.

"The curtains," Squeakie said, "they were seen blowing. They know your window wasn't closed. They want to trap you. Look!" she pointed to the window. "They're wet!"

Bob Morgan stared at Squeakie as if he couldn't believe what she was saying to him. It was as if they were alone in the room. I could have throttled her. Even in the light of subsequent events it gives me the creeps to think of it. Just shows you what some people will risk when they have complete confidence in their own rightness.

"The whiskey," Squeakie went on, "it was too fresh; you just spilled it around. And besides your eyes were too clear. The Lieutenant wasn't fooled." She looked at a photograph on the dresser. "Is that the girl you want to marry? She looks sweet."

Gregory saw that Squeakie was off on a tangent again. He took over.

"Well?" he said.

Morgan straightened his shoulders and faced us boldly, but there was a slight tremulous twitch in his lips that he couldn't control. "All right," he said flatly. "I was there. But I left before she screamed. I know you won't believe me, and I can't prove it. I'll tell you what I did, just as I did it."

He sat and stared at the wall and talked a noose around his neck.

"Judy and I had a love affair a long time ago. After it was over she found out that I wanted to marry someone else. She made me pay for some letters that would have wrecked my life. She had something on me and she'd been smart enough to get letters from me referring to it." A bitter smile twisted his mouth. "I was innocent but I couldn't have proved it. I suppose it's an old story to you. Do I have to say what it was?" He held his head proudly as he pleaded not to be humiliated.

Gregory shook his head. "You don't have to say anything unless you want to," he said. "Let it go. Time for details when you make an official statement."

I don't think Morgan realized what a sinister forbearance this was.

"Thanks," he said and went on. "It kept me poor paying for the letters and I couldn't get married. This last year I went through hell. I tried to run from her; I didn't care what happened. But she followed me. Moved next door. That's what she meant. I'd have committed suicide to get away from her, but I thought I'd make one more try."

Haley said softly, "Murder?"

The young man blanched. "No," he said, "not murder. I'd managed to get a key to the chest where I thought she kept the letters. I went over there tonight, down the fire

escape and up on her side. I went in the window. She was lying in bed asleep."

He reflected bitterly. "The only normal thing about Judytha was that she went to bed early; she thought it kept her young.

"I opened the chest and used a tiny blackout flashlight to get the letters. There were plenty of others I hadn't heard about there. I heard a key turning in the apartment door. I grabbed the key to the chest but didn't have time to lock it. Oh, I wore gloves — naturally. I went out the fire escape window, and I didn't wait to see who came into the apartment either. I wasn't particularly surprised that there should have been someone. After all . . . !" He shrugged and went on.

"I didn't think she'd go to the police, considering the circumstances, yet I couldn't be sure of anything. She was a poisonous person to cross. I went down the fire escape cautiously. When I was in the middle of the courtyard I heard the scream. I didn't know what trick she'd pull. I couldn't go back up my fire escape for fear of being seen. I didn't like to go through the basement and risk meeting the superintendent. So I went out into the street through the little door in the fence and came in through the front door of the house. I acted drunk in case I met anyone. Then I came in here and set the stage just in case she tried to frame me for something. I burned the letters in the living room fireplace."

Gregory shook his head slowly. "Clever," he said, "clever of you to keep it close to the truth. But it won't do. She woke up and you killed her, didn't you?"

The misery and terror in his eyes made me feel sick.

"No," he said over and over again, "I didn't. I didn't kill her, I tell you I didn't."

In a casual tone Gregory asked, "How did you get the key to the chest?"

Bob Morgan shook his head.

"Miss Gaylord took an impression for you, didn't she? You told her about the letters. She pitied you, and when the opportunity presented itself she took an impression of the key for you. That's why she was so frightened tonight. She thought you had gone letter-hunting and killed Judytha Perry. I'm going to arrest you for that murder, Mr. Morgan."

"Gregory, you can't!" It was Squeakie again.

I said, "Squeakie, shut up!"

But Gregory said, "Why can't I, Squeakie?"

"He didn't do it."

Gregory looked at her closely. I believe he thinks she's psychic. "Can you prove that?" he asked.

She almost cried with vexation. "You know I can't, Gregory — but I can prove who did."

Gregory said, "Can you, Squeakie?"

She backed down. "Not yet, Gregory, but let me try. He won't run away." I was afraid she'd think she was Portia and that at any moment she'd break into "The quality of mercy," but I underestimated her.

She stopped dead and said, "Let's all have a cup of coffee." That is what is called a strategic retreat. We, including Bob Morgan, prisoner, went up to the apartment and drank Squeakie's coffee.

"You know," she said, sitting cross-legged on the floor (she always lives up to slacks), "for an actress, Miss Gaylord hasn't much taste."

We all opened our eyes. "That home-made wimple," she went on. "Her face is all wrong for it; she shouldn't wear one. Besides, she's too short."

"Home-made wimple! My God!" said Gregory. "I didn't see anything like that; she looked all right to me."

"I mean the hat," Squeakie told him scornfully. "She draped it herself."

"Look," I said, "leave her wimple alone. She probably had her reasons."

Squeakie set down her cup so hard that I thought it would split. She stared at me for a long time. I began to feel uncomfortable.

Suddenly she moaned and jumped up. "Oh, Gregory, oh, Gregory!" She said it in a way that made my flesh creep. "I've got to go," she said. "Wait for me, I'll be back."

"Well . . ." I began.

Gregory said, "Shut up. I'll stay here with Morgan and Haley. Go after her. See what she's up to."

I caught up with her on the stairs of 313. She went up to the third floor. But she didn't go into 3B; she went into the vacant apartment across the hall.

I followed her into the kitchen of the empty apartment. She opened the cupboards, looked on the shelves, sighed and went out. In every room she looked in the empty closets.

"Darling, what are you looking for?" I inquired as sweetly as I could.

"Cold cream, David."

What could I do? I looked, too.

We found Judytha Perry's cold cream in the bathroom medicine chest. Squeakie unscrewed the vermilion lid of the jar. She turned out the light and I heard her say with definite satisfaction, "There, I knew he didn't do it!"

"Good Lord," I said.

"Here!" She pushed the jar into my hands. "Take this to Gregory. Tell him to look at it under the bed, way under. And don't gape at me, David. Do it right away. It's im-

portant."

I did it. What the hell! I couldn't read her mind. I didn't know.

Gregory raised one eyebrow when I told him. There's one thing I'll always resent. He went into the guest room and shut the door behind him. I never did know whether he crawled under the bed to look at a jar of cold cream. But I heard the light switch go on and off.

His face was rigid when he came out. "Come on," he said. "Quick! Why didn't you stay with her, you chump?"

When we got there Vera Grey alias Vivian Gaylord was having hysterics and Squeakie was throwing cold water on her. When we had her calmed down Gregory arrested her for the murder of Judytha Perry. Squeakie spent some time telling him how it was self-defense because the poor girl believed she was being made blind, and that probably she was just because she believed it.

I got it all out of Squeakie the hard way later.

It was just getting light outside and we were in bed again.

"Squeakie?"

"Hmmmm?"

"Darling, how did you know?"

"Well, first of all, he hadn't, so she must have."

I gathered she meant, must have committed the murder.

"Then there was Vera's psychology. Something like Macbeth, 'And that which rather thou dost fear to do than wishest should be undone.'"

"Oh, my God," I said prayerfully.

"Silly, that only means she had the murder all thought out without ever admitting to herself that she was really going to do it. Even when the murder plan was in operation she told herself up to the last minute that all she was going to do was frighten Judytha into releasing her from the spell. Visiting Judytha in her glowing make-up and staging a mystic scene or something was her way of justifying herself. She was giving Judytha her chance to raise the spell she had put on her."

"Spell?"

"Yes. It wasn't a pin cushion, you know. It was a doll which represented Vera. The pins were sticking in the eyes. Vera believed she was making her blind."

I said, "People don't believe that stuff."

"Oh, yes they do. And if they believe it hard enough it sometimes happens. Ask a doctor. Of course, she needed glasses anyway. That made it easier for Judytha; she was exploiting a fear that was already there."

She went on enlightening me. "You see there was the book, and the copper handled sword which is an

attribute of the magician. Judytha began her reign of terror for a lark, out of boredom. But when she saw how easy it was — Vera was a good subject — she went further. She was jealous of Vera's success and enjoyed making her suffer. It gave her a sense of power. She had no real understanding of the primitive fear she had aroused in Vera, nor how dangerous it was."

I said, "Tell me about the crime."

"Well, Vera thought of it first because of the opportunity she had of leaving the theatre unnoticed. Last night she started home earlier than she said, and she did not remove her make-up at the theatre. The wimple was draped to hide it, and remember she walked home in the rain through empty streets.

"It was her key that Bob heard. Judytha awakened just as she opened the door. They had a scene. Vera found the doll and begged her to do something about it. Judytha said some awful things to her. Vera wasn't very clear when she told me this part, but I think the plan in her mind was like a will that she had to obey. She killed her with the statue which she had seen as the weapon in her mind's eye. Diana isn't only the huntress, you know, she's the moon goddess. People used to think there was such a thing as moon-blindness. Perhaps Vera thought her a suitable goddess to administer justice.

"After she killed Judytha she went across the hall into the empty apartment and removed the make-up. If anyone had come through the halls she would have stayed there or gone down the back fire escape on that side of the house. But no one came so she walked down, met the Cobalts and told her story of hearing the scream and trying to get into the apartment."

I said, "Why did you want Gregory to look at the cold cream under the bed? Why didn't you tell him to look at it in the dark if you wanted him to see the traces of phosphorescent make-up in it?"

She blushed. "Well, it is dark under a bed," she said weakly. And then, "Oh, David, what do you think of it all?"

I chose my words carefully. "Well," I said, "I really think a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, darling."

"Oh, David, I'm so glad that you realize your limitations. That's the most important step." Her face was radiant. "Now if you want to enroll for some of my courses, I'll . . . Oh, darling, this is grand!"

She kissed me. Now really! Could I bring it up again? Could I say that I wanted her to abandon the fascinating study of medieval witchcraft? Could I? I kissed her little pink thumb and let it go at that.

Here's a "puzzle" by a man who can rattle off more statistics about the detective novel than you would think possible. If you like this innovation, ask for more!

GUESS WHO?

by TALBOT C. HATCH

He is a man of bulk, weighing a good two hundred pounds. His bald head surmounts a wooden face, often likened to that of Buddha or an Indian Chief. He has fishy eyes and a broad nose upon which he usually pulls down his tortoise-shell spectacles. Habitually the corners of his mouth are turned down as though he were smelling a bad breakfast egg.

He insists on wearing a top-hat, high and topheavy, worn by many years to a rusty, indeterminate hue, and a long coat with motheaten fur collar — these, at various times, being claimed as (1) a present from Queen Victoria, (2) a trophy of his winning the first Grand Prix automobile race in 1903, and (3) the property of the late Sir Henry Irving. He is addicted to white socks and appears frequently in public without his necktie. He always takes off his collar when in his office.

Know him? Maybe this will help:

His office is up five flights of stairs in an old rabbit-warren of a building back of Whitehall (the War Office). There is a little side door, close to the garden wall, which you are not supposed to know about, which leads to a little dark entry and up two flights of stairs past doors that show rooms full of typists, filing cabinets and harsh electric lights. The halls smell of stone, damp, and dead cigarettes and on the fourth flight you pass a barrier in the person of an old sergeant major, leaning out of his cubicle and smoking a forbidden pipe.

The door to his office bears a severe nameplate above which is inscribed in enormous white letters: "BUSY!" "NO ADMITTANCE!!" "KEEP OUT!!!" And below: "THIS MEANS YOU!" Inside is a low-ceilinged room with two big windows overlooking a bleak strip of garden along Horse Guards Avenue, the Victoria Embankment, and the river. There is a broad flat desk on which is a goose-necked reading lamp, and scattered about are large leather chairs. A Mephistophelian portrait of Fouché can be seen over

the battered white marble mantelpiece, and on either side are smaller pictures of Charles Dickens and Mark Twain. The walls on either side of the fireplace are disorderly with crammed bookshelves and against one side stands a large iron safe. Although chiefly used for storing liquor and glasses, the door of the safe is inscribed (with primitive humor) in sprawling white letters: "IMPORTANT STATE DOCUMENTS! DO NOT TOUCH!!," the same legend being added beneath in German, French, Italian and (presumably) Russian.

Do you need more? So be it:

He twiddles his thumbs over his paunch. He stares owlishly at people. He squints down his nose. When amused he makes low, unmelodious strangled noises in his throat. He frequently sits with his eyes closed as though asleep and when accused of being so says: "I was cogitatin'." He is continually scratching his nose or his jaw and when listening to others blinks without change of expression. When he drinks he always says "Honk honk" with the utmost solemnity and drains his glass at a gulp. He never merely speaks; he wheezes and rumbles and grumbles and grouses. He addresses everyone as "son" and refers to prominent people as "Boko" and "Horseface." His favorite expressions are "Burn me!," "Fatheads!" and "Lord love a duck!"

You almost have it? Well —

He is married and he is a qualified barrister and physician. His baronetcy is two or three hundred years old and he is a fighting Socialist. He is extremely lazy, vastly conceited, garrulous, and has an inexhaustible fund of bawdy stories. He speaks the most slovenly grammar. His tongue is scurrilous and he shocks lady typists. His chief taste is for lurid reading matter. His favorite delusion is that he is being persecuted and that nobody appreciates him. He is appallingly devoid of dignity.

But at criminal investigation he is a good deal of a genius. Frequently he is called "the old man," and sometimes "Mycroft," both being synonymous for — *GUESS WHO?*

Of course you knew who it was all the time. None other than Sir Henry Merrivale, affectionately called "HM," one-time head of the British Counter-Espionage Service and now with the Military Intelligence Department. Brain child of Carter Dickson [John Dickson Carr] and the leading light of many of his well-known tales of mystery and detection.

(Continued from other side)

monplace as it is deadly. *And it leaves no trace.* Cut any one of his victims up — as they'll be cutting *me* in the next half hour — and you will find nothing. And by the way, Mr. Colt — *YOU are on his list!*"

Thus spoke Jeremy Taylor, in the death house, to Thatcher Colt, the man who sent him there.

Immediately after Taylor's execution, the hunt started for the mystery killer. Months went by. Then one day the warden burst into Colt's office, panting that he had found a clue — and then slumped dead at Colt's feet!

Like a pistol shot, two men hopped a cab to the address the warden had given. And shortly, in strutted an oily-looking charlatan in elegant white gloves — announcing that one of the detectives sent to fetch him had been strangely stricken in the cab on the way to Headquarters, and lay on a slab in Bellevue that very minute!

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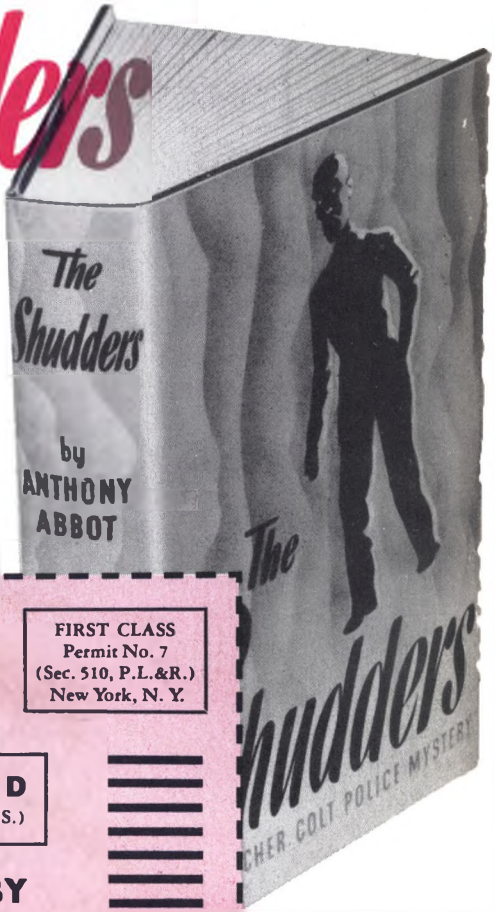

WHO WAS HE—
this fiend who killed for the sheer sport of killing?

"He stole Marcella Kingsley from me. She is in another man's arms *tonight*—and I only minutes from the electric chair!

"I want Marcella punished, Mr. Colt. I want revenge. For this man is much more a criminal than I am. His crimes are murder. Murder for sport. *Murder upon murder upon murder!*

"*This* man has a way of murdering that is new. He scorns knife or gun or poison . . . and no fancy death rays, either. Just a little trick, as com-

(Continued on other side)

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