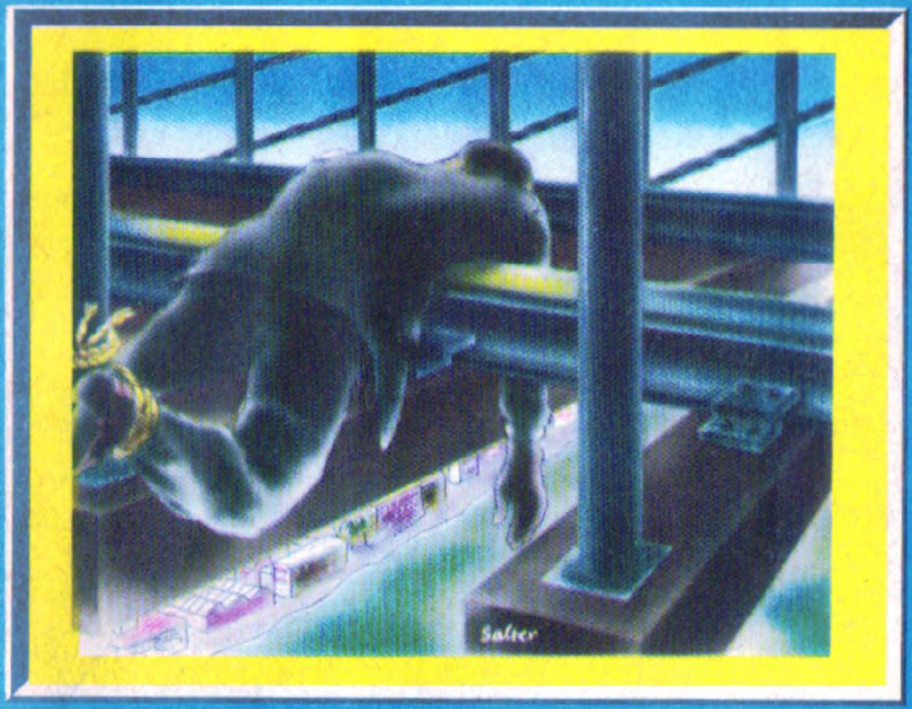
ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE



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An Inner Sanctum Mystery

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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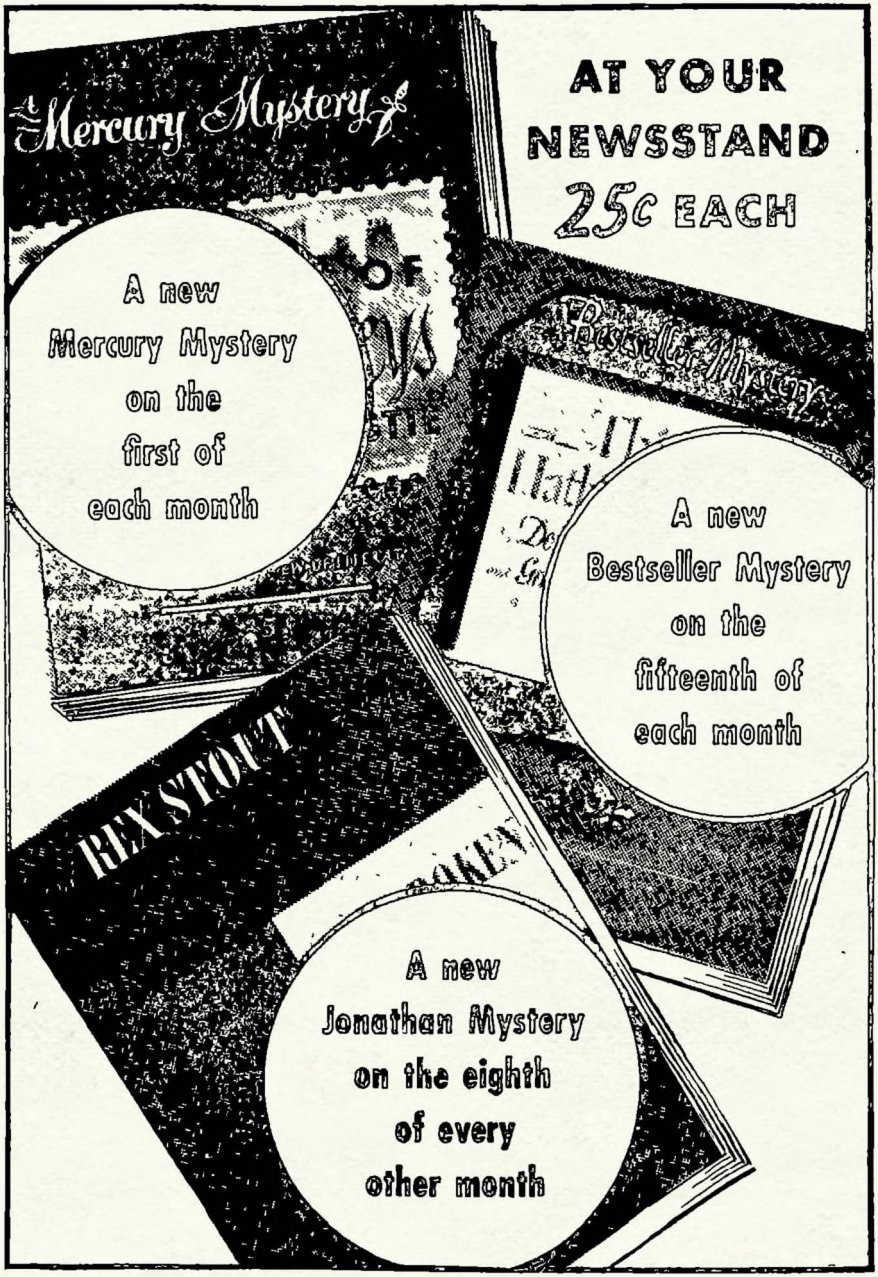
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The pressure of outside forces to shorten stories is curiously illustrated among certain American magazines. A new literary form has been widely popularized — the so-called one-shot, or Complete-Novel-in-One-Issue. From personal experience your Editor knows how a 100,000-word Ellery Queen novel can be cut down to 50,000 words; how the 50,000-word version can be given an even stronger dose of sodium dinitrophenol, reducing the original full-length novel to the skin-and-bones of a 25,000-word novelette. If we agree that the Law-of-Diminishing-Returns is not the proverbial immovable body and further, that the Law-of-Approaching-Zero-as-a-Limit is not an irresistible force, there is no logical reason to disbelieve that a 25,000-word novelette can't be cut in half once more, thus transforming a full-blooded novel to an anemic short story. From that point the condensation to a short-short is merely another cut-throating by that fearsome weapon, the blue pencil.

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This is the last of the Colonel March stories not previously published in the United States. We make this statement with regret and hope — regret that we can bring you no more "new" stories about The Department of Queer Complaints, and hope that Mr. Carr will find time to write further adventures of Colonel March, and more important, remember his promise to your Editor that their first American appearance will occur between the covers of EQMM.

THE EMPTY FLAT

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

THERE it was, the confounded radio going again.

Chase put down his pen. For some minutes he had had a vague idea that there was a disturbance going on somewhere, and suddenly it broke into his thoughts with intolerable loudness from the flat below. A Study of the Royal Exchequer and its Custodians from 1660 to 1688 may not be a popular subject on which to be writing a thesis, but it requires concentration.

Douglas Chase, Ph.D., F.R. Hist.S., poked his head out of a maze of books like a dazed turtle.

The simile is not altogether deserved. Douglas Chase was neither turtle nor worm, but an eminently serious-minded young man who had a job of work to do. This thesis — if he won the prize — meant a great deal to him. It meant a full professorship at an American university, and a salary amounting to nearly two thousand pounds a year. To an English scholar such a salary seemed incredible, and Chase wondered hazily what he would do with it if he got it; but there it was.

"I think your chances are very good," a colleague had told him that afternoon. "All the same, I wish we knew a bit more about K. G. Mills."

For the only serious competition seemed to come from a man named K. G. Mills. Chase had never met K. G. Mills, about whom, in fact, there was some element of mystery. But his attainments looked formidable; and among Chase's friends the very name of Mills had become a huge and legendary symbol of villainy. Now that concentration was most necessary to beat Mills, the tenant of the flat below had decided to let his radio run mad.

First of all Chase cursed the construction of modern flats. His own was a modest two-room affair on the first floor of a new block near Primrose Hill: a hive of raw red brick and white paint. Tenants had filled it like flies, for the rents were modest and Chase found modern conveniences very suitable to one who chronically forgot to light fires or put shillings in an electric meter. But the thinness of the walls was remarkable. Through those walls you could hear clocks strike and the pointed comments of your neighbour's wife when her husband came home late. And now it was radios, at an hour approaching midnight.

A fair-minded man, Chase tried to shut his ears against the noise. But the tenant of the ground-floor flat seemed to have a partiality for the shrillest dance bands that home or continental stations could provide, switched on at full volume. When at length he had read the same page three times without understanding a word, he decided that something would have to be done.

He got up, ran his hands through his hair with a vague idea of tidying himself, and started for the door. He was out in the corridor when the chilliness of the air reminded him that he had forgotten his coat. So he pulled on a sweater, and padded downstairs in his slippers.

Except for that radio, the whole building seemed unusually quiet. As a rule it was a shell of echoes, throwing back each gritty-sounding footstep or hum of the lift. He met nobody. Going down concrete stairs, where a faint mist had got into the bleakly lighted corridors, he turned into the passage which led to flat 10, directly below his own. And the passage was in darkness.

Trouble with the lights again, he supposed. He struck a match and groped his way down the passage. Flats 10 and 11, set side by side, occu-

pied the end of the wing; and the music on the radio had now become a loud, confused mumble. Wondering who occupied number 10, he held the flame of the match up to the visiting-card stuck in its slot on the green-painted door. Then Douglas Chase struck another match in a hurry, and stared.

The card read: *K. G. Mills.*

Chase studied it incredulously. The thing was a coincidence, no doubt. It was impossible that this should be the formidable K. G. Mills of legend. But it gave him a start to meet the name both on duty and off, and he almost turned away from the door. But the radio decided him. He rang the bell.

"Yes, yes, yes!" called a female voice — and he was conscious of a sudden suspicion. "Just a moment, please!"

The door was dragged open, and in the little green-painted entrance hall he faced a woman who could not be more than twenty-three or twenty-four, a woman with a flurried manner and ink-stained fingers. The fact that her hair was drawn back into a bun did not lessen the attractiveness of a white complexion, a full-lipped but prim-looking mouth, and a pair of extraordinarily merry blue eyes. But they were not merry now. Irresolutely she drew the back of her hand across her forehead, leaving ink-smudges there.

"Yes, yes, yes?" she inquired.

"Oh, Lord," muttered Chase. He added, on a last hope, "May I speak to Mr. Mills?"

The girl's manner changed.

"I am Mr. Mills," she said with cold dignity. "That is, I mean," she frowned and drew herself up, "to speak with academic accuracy, my name is Kathleen Gerrard Mills and I am the only Mills present at the moment. Oh, you know what I mean; but I have some terribly important research work to do, and I have been driven to such annoyance by an insufferable radio in the flat above me, that I am hardly able to say what I do mean."

Chase could hardly believe his ears.

"Madam," he said, "*I* am the tenant of the flat above. And I do not own a radio. In fact, I came down here to protest about yours."

Kathleen Mills's eyes, rather bemused with study, now woke up.

"But I don't own one either," she

She was wearing, he noticed, a grey skirt and a tight-fitting grey jumper which outlined a small, sturdy figure. She folded her arms gravely, frowned, and assumed the argumentative posture known to all dons. In one so young and attractive it might have provoked amusement if she had not been so desperately in earnest.

"This is extraordinary," she declared. "That detestable cacophony is obviously coming from somewhere. Assuming the truth of your statement, Mr. — er ——

"Chase," he said half-guiltily. "Dr. Chase. That is, University College, you know."

"Oh, my *hat!*" said the girl, shocked

into naturalness.

They stood and stared at each other. Then Kathleen Mills, her colour higher, spoke with great dignity.

"How do you do?" she said formally. "While I am very pleased to make your acquaintance, Dr. Chase, I am afraid that in fairness I must take this opportunity of saying to you that I believe your views on Episcopacy in Scotland to be the merest rubbish. Indeed, as I pointed out in the *Quarterly Survey*, you hardly even appear to have heard of Nottingham's Comprehension Bill." She added, half annoyed, "And where is your beard? I thought you would have a beard."

"I must disagree with you," said Chase. "I do not refer to the beard, but to the earlier part of your remarks. And if you would do me the honour of joining me in a coffee — or beer," he added doubtfully. "You drink beer?"

"Of course I drink beer," said the girl. "And I should love to. But I was thinking about this intolerable noise. As I say, it must come from somewhere."

It did. They heard it all about them, more muffled but very insistent. In the quiet of the big building at past midnight it had an effect that verged on the eerie. And behind Kathleen Mills's manner Chase sensed some other emotion, something far from being at ease. His eyes wandered to the dark door of number 11 beside them.

"What about the flat next door?"

"I had thought of that," she admitted, rather too quickly. "My first idea was that it came from there. But that — well, it's an empty flat: the only empty flat in the building. And it seems unlikely that anybody would be operating a radio in an empty flat."

A stir of uncertainty touched Chase: the vision of a radio playing in a dark and empty flat was what he would have called an irrational one. The girl went on speaking.

"Superstition attaching to mere dead walls and plaster is foolish. We're rational beings, Dr. Chase; at least, I hope we are. Suppose a deed of violence is done in a certain house. Well! The house is torn down to make room for another — say a block of flats. Even suppose you do believe in emanations or influences, as I do not. Is there any reason why those influences should be present in a certain one flat on the ground floor, and not in any of the flats above? It is absurd."

"Look here," Chase asked quietly. "What are you talking about?"

"Well — that flat next door. It appears that dozens of people have looked at it, and all of them have refused to take it. I'm sure I can't imagine why. There is nothing wrong with it. It's just the same as twenty others: Mr. Hemphill, the letting-agent, swears it is. But an absurd rumour has gone round that something horrible moves into it at night, and doesn't leave until morning. I told my trustee. That's Arnot Wilson, the barrister, you know; he's looked after things for me since my father died;

and he was very much interested. He ridiculously tried to make jokes and frighten me about it. But after all, you know, I do sleep on the other side of the wall."

Though she smiled, the whites of her eyes had acquired an odd kind of luminousness, and she spoke with a greater rapidity. Beside the door in the angle of the wall was the tiny door of the service-hatch — dumb-waiter — to flat 11. Chase pulled it open. The inner door of the box-like hatch was also open. And now there could be no doubt.

"Yes, the radio is in there," he said. "Hear it?"

"And — and what is to be done about it?"

"Why, I'll crawl though the service-hatch and shut it off," Chase said simply.

Being long and lean, he could just manage to worm through. It was not a dignified business, stuck there with legs in the air, but he did not concern himself with that. Before he dived through the service-hatch he had accidentally touched Kathleen Mills's hand; and the hand was cold.

The entrance hall of flat 11 was dark. It smelt of mist and raw paint, and it even felt unused. He was coming closer to the core of noise, the enigmatic wireless mumbling in the dark. It appeared to be in the living-room ahead. This was an ordinary flat like his own, though he wondered what had happened to the ground where he stood. The gritty floor creaked more than it should; and the farther he moved away from the door the more he felt like a man paying out a guide-line in a cave, uncertain of his footing.

A grey window moved out at him, then a glass-panelled door. He opened the door of the living-room, meeting the noise full-blast.

An edge of a street-lamp touched two misted windows. Down in the corner by the fireplace he saw a dim shape and a tiny glowing light. For such a volume of noise it was quite a small radio, one of those convenient affairs which can be carried about by hand. It was connected to a base-plug in the wall. He switched it off; and silence descended like an extinguisher-cap.

Afterwards there was nothing. No person, no movement, no sound beyond the creak of the floor when his heel pressed it — until a fierce ringing at the outer doorbell made him jump. Until then Douglas Chase did not realize how much the hide was off his nerves, or how deep into the nerves a sudden noise could strike. He hurried to the door, turned a knob of the spring-lock, and met Kathleen.

"You seemed to be gone a long time," she told him. "Well?"

"I've turned it off," he said. "There is a radio in there, and nobody to play it or listen to it. There doesn't seem any rhyme or reason why it should be there. But there's nobody here now."

He was wrong.

It was perhaps just as well that they did not know it then. In the dim light of seven o'clock next morning, work-

men constructing a boundary wall round the building passed the windows of flat number 11 on the ground floor. Through the living-room windows they saw nothing to interest them. But through the bedroom windows they saw a man huddled back into a corner as though he were trying to push himself through the wall. In appearance he was a short, stout, well-fed man, wearing an overcoat and a bowler hat. But he was dead; and they did not care to get too close to the expression on his face. James R. Hemphill, letting-agent of the flats, identified him as Mr. Arnot Wilson, barrister, of 56 Harrow Avenue, N.W.3, and the doctor in attendance said that he had died of cardiac and nervous shock caused by fright.

Two days later, when the doctor's verdict was confirmed at a post-mortem by the Home Office Analyst, certain persons gathered in a room at New Scotland Yard.

The death of Mr. Arnot Wilson had caused a minor stir. In strictly limited circles Arnot Wilson was famous: as a "character," a persuasive lawyer, a rich after-dinner speaker, almost a public entertainer. His gentle wit had a scratch rather than a sting. He liked to collect walking-sticks and match-boxes once used by royalty. It could be said that he bounced through life. His round, guileless face; his spats and cravats; his brushed coat and glossy head; all this made a kind of india-rubber dandyism which carried him everywhere.

He lived alone, except for a cook and a man-servant, in a tall Victorian house in Harrow Avenue — not far from the block of flats where he was found dead. This house he kept too warm, with electric heaters blazing all day even in passages and in bathrooms; and almost too clean, for he was relentless to servants. Which made it all the more curious that he should be found dead of fright in an empty flat.

His body was found on Saturday morning. On Monday, Kathleen Mills and Douglas Chase were summoned to Scotland Yard. In a firelit room overlooking the Embankment they were met by a large, bland man with a speckled face, an amiable eye, and a cropped moustache. He introduced himself as Colonel March.

Colonel March's courtesy was as huge as himself.

"This," he said, "must be the dozenth time you have been troubled. But, as you understand, I must do it because my department is new to the case. I hope it does not upset you too much, Miss Mills?"

Kathleen bridled, as she always did at any hint of feminine weakness.

"I am not upset at all," she told him. "Mr. Wilson was one of my trustees. He managed the money my father left, what little there was of it. But I scarcely knew him. And ——"

"You didn't like him?"

"I don't know," she replied, with an obvious struggle for honesty. "I've never been sure. All I know is that from the time I first knew him he never left off being facetious at my

expense."

Suddenly she coloured, sensing an atmosphere, and broke out with violence:

"Oh, I'm being a prig and a fool! And you know it, don't you? But that's true. It was nothing but jokes, jokes, jokes; jokes about me, careers for women, our little scholar who has no boy-friends, never a pause, never a let-down in jokes. He was so tireless in it that sometimes he hardly seemed human."

Colonel March nodded gravely. Chase had not hitherto heard her speak with such frankness.

"Anyhow," she went on with a slight gesture, "there are some questions we — Dr. Chase and I — must get answered. You [illegible] tioned us for two days, and yet still we don't know anything. Chief Inspector — what's his name? — Chief Inspector Ames was too evasive. Will you answer four straight questions?"

"If I can," said Colonel March.

"Thank you. Well, here they are. What time did Mr. Wilson die? Did he really die of fright? Why was that radio playing? And what on earth was he doing there anyway? I happen to know he was horribly frightened of the dark."

Colonel March sat down behind a broad desk, lowering his seventeen stone with some difficulty. He looked at the desk, at the windows, at the fire, at Inspector Roberts, his second-in-command. Then he seemed to come to a decision.

"To your first two questions," he answered, clearing his throat, "I can reply. Mr. Wilson died round about eleven o'clock on Friday. And it seems that he did die of fright."

Chase could not understand the brief look of uncertainty, almost of terror, on Kathleen's face. But she spoke.

"So he was actually in the bedroom, dead, when Dr. Chase and I were in that flat?"

"He was."

"And is it — well, is it medically correct to speak of death from fright?"

"It is," said Colonel March with abrupt vehemence. "You've hit it, Miss Mills. That is why it has been given over to me, to what we call here [illegible] of Queer Complaints. There never was a complaint queerer than this, for there are almost no precedents in law. Let's make a supposition. Let's suppose that this is murder."

It was a new and unpleasant word. Chase stirred, but Colonel March's eyes remained bland.

"I only say, let's suppose it. Suppose I find a way to frighten someone so that his heart and nervous-system are shattered as though by a blow from a gigantic hammer: that, in non-technical language, is what the medical report means. I do not kill an invalid or a man with a weak heart, mind you. I choose a victim whose heart and nerves are sound, like Mr. Wilson. I do not touch him. But I expose to him, as though on a photographic plate, a mere sight so terrify-

ing that his system cracks, and he dies."

Colonel March paused.

"Well, theoretically," he went on, "I am guilty of murder. That is the law. But could you get a jury to convict? I doubt it. I should say it would be impossible even to get a manslaughter verdict. Find a way to kill someone by fright, and you can commit murder almost with impunity."

Chase did not like this, because of its effect on Kathleen.

"As an interesting theory," he interposed, "it's all very well. But is there any suggestion of murder?"

"What's our alternative?" inquired Colonel March, spreading out his hands. "That the empty flat is haunted? That we are beset by ghouls and hobgoblins? That a man dare not sleep at night for literal fear of his reason or his life? I can't believe it, my friend. The only other possibility ——" He stopped, breathing rather heavily. Then he went on in his normal tone. "Miss Mills, Dr. Chase, it's only fair that you should hear the evidence. Inspector, will you ask Mr. Hemphill to come in?"

They waited. James Hemphill, the letting-agent, was not slow at coming in. He was a young, affable, harassed man who seemed to regard the affair less as a death than as a further bedevilment among all the complaints. Carefully dressed, with white hands and a black line of eyebrows, he sat down gingerly in the chair Colonel March indicated.

Colonel March seemed puzzled. "Mr. Hemphill, I should like to take you over certain points in the statement you've already given to the police. Now tell me. You knew that Mr. Arnot Wilson meant to spend several hours in flat number eleven on Friday night?"

(Chase felt rather than saw Kathleen sit up.)

"Yes, I did," said Hemphill, after clearing his throat several times like a nervous orator.

"In fact, you supplied him with the key he used to get in?"

"Yes, I did."

"And you saw to it that the light in the passage was extinguished so that he would not be seen when he did go in?"

"Yes, I did."

"Why did he want to spend some hours in that flat?"

Hemphill's bristly eyebrows seemed to stand out like antennae. "Oh, it was this crazy story about number eleven being — you know, something wrong with it. He was interested. He said he'd always wanted to see a ghost."

"Had he any other reason, Mr. Hemphill?"

"Well," repeated Hemphill, after a swift, brief look at Kathleen, "he seemed to have some idea that Miss Mills was — you know, leading a double life. He thought it was very funny; he went on and on about it. He said if he listened for a few hours in the next flat on Friday night, he could catch her red-handed with her — you know, her boy-friend." Hemphill's face seemed to swell with apol-

ogy. "Look here, Miss Mills, I'm dashed sorry, and it was a rotten trick; but I didn't see any actual harm in it. That's why he didn't tell you he was there."

The very face and presence of the dead man seemed to peer into the room. Arnot Wilson had often said that he was "just interested" in things.

"Oh, no. No actual harm," said Kathleen through her teeth. "It's so absolutely characteristic of him that I'm not at all surprised."

"Then there it is," explained Hemphill, with white-faced relief. "He took that radio along with him. You see, those flat-walls aren't very thick. He was afraid someone in one of the other flats might hear him walking about, and might call the police. His idea was that the noise of the radio would cover him. It's very difficult to locate the direction of sound, as you probably know; and he thought that when the other tenants heard the radio they would never connect it with an empty flat."

"He was right," observed Douglas Chase. "And if for once I might violate the rule of *de mortuis*, I might add that he was a damned old he-gossip who deserved what he got."

"One moment," interrupted Colonel March, whose eyes never left the letting-agent. "Admitting that he brought the radio, can you explain why he put it on with such shattering loudness that it might have roused the whole building instead of concealing his movements?"

"No, I can't explain it."

"When did you last see him alive, Mr. Hemphill?"

"About eight o'clock on Friday night. He came round and fitted up the radio in the living-room. He got rather grubby doing it, and I asked him whether he would like to wash. He said no, he would go home and wash; then he would have some sandwiches and port there, and come back about eleven. Then he left at about eight-thirty."

Colonel March walked his fingers along the edge of the desk. He seemed even more heavily disturbed.

"Eight o'clock. Yes. It was dark then; and I think there are no lights in the flat?"

"No, there aren't any lights. But I had an electric torch."

"How did Mr. Wilson relish the prospect of a vigil in the flat alone?"

After a sort of internal struggle, as though he did not know whether to grin or stammer, Hemphill blurted it out.

"I think he was as scared as blazes, if you want the truth. He tried to hide it; it was all ha-ha, my lad, and pigeon-breasted walk; but he didn't like it one little bit. I *told* him there was nothing wrong with that flat! There isn't." Then the agent's grievances came pouring out. "My company say to me, 'Why did you let him do it?' I did it to show there was nothing wrong with that flat. Who's the loser by all this? I'll tell you: I am. I shall lose my job, just notice that. But I maintain I did my duty."

"And a man died. Thank you,

Mr. Hemphill; that will be all for the moment. But don't go. — There is just one more witness," Colonel March added to the others, "whom you ought to hear. Inspector, will you bring in Mr. Delafield, Maurice Delafield? Delafield has been Mr. Wilson's manservant for fifteen years."

Delafield looked it, Chase decided. He was a lean, powerful, large-knuckled man whose bodily vigour contrasted with a kind of shabbiness and tiredness in his face. His greyish hair was carefully brushed and parted. A stoop took away some of his height; and, more from a late physical illness than from fear, the large-knuckled hands had a tendency to twitch and shake.

Colonel March spoke to him almost gently.

"You were with Mr. Wilson a long time, I understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"You liked him?"

"Yes, sir," said Delafield. His voice had acquired a sort of thunderous hoarseness; for one bad moment Chase was afraid he would break down and weep. But he stared steadily back at Colonel March.

"Now, we have just heard from Mr. Hemphill that Mr. Wilson left him at about eight-thirty on Friday night, with the intention of going home. Did he go home?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did he do there?"

"You see, sir, he hadn't had any dinner, he was so excited about this ghost-hunting — if you see what I mean. He had a plate of sandwiches and three glasses of port. Then he had got himself mucked up in the dirt at the empty flat, so he said he would have a bath and change his clothes. He was always very particular about that. He" — the pinkish tinge had come back to Delafield's eyelids; his voice was hoarse again — "he had his bath. Then he read the evening papers, all jumpy-like, and about ten-thirty he told me to fetch round the car. He drove away alone; and that's the last I saw of him alive."

"Tell me: you laid out the suit of clothes he wore that night?"

"Yes, sir. I laid it out."

Selecting a paper from a pile on his desk, the colonel handed it across.

"Here we are. Here's a list of all the things found in Mr. Wilson's pockets when the body was discovered: or in the flat itself, for that matter. 'Address-book. Fountain-pen. Key-ring, six keys. Separate key to flat number eleven. Watch and chain. Notecase with eight pounds in notes. Ten and ninepence in silver and coppers.' Will you check this over carefully and tell me whether it is everything he took with him?"

Though Delafield tried hard, his dry fingers rustled and shook on the paper. It slipped through his fingers, and he gave it a curious despairing look, like an angler who has lost a fish.

He said desperately:

"I'm very sorry, sir. I'm not scared. Honestly, I'm not. But I haven't been well. Mr. Wilson wouldn't even let me shave him recently; he would say,

over and over, over and over, 'You will be cutting my throat one of these days; and then they will hang you, because I have remembered you in my will.' "

Delafield sat down again, after picking up the paper, holding it in two hands, and putting it on Colonel March's desk. He continued to talk in the same vein until Kathleen cut him short gently.

"Does anybody doubt, please," she said, "the sort of man my esteemed Mr. Arnot Wilson really was? Or, as Dr. Chase says, whether he deserved what he got?"

"That's not true, miss! It's not!"

"True or not, it is hardly our point," interrupted Colonel March, in a tone he very seldom used. They all looked at him; his sandy eyebrows were drawn down, and his eyes were as fixed as though he were trying to draw the witness under hypnosis. "I have asked you a question, Mr. Delafield. Is that list correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're positive he took nothing else?"

"Positive, sir."

"I see. Then I am glad to inform you," observed Colonel March, "that this is not a supernatural crime nor a supernatural death."

There was a change in the atmosphere as palpable as a chilling or darkening of the room. Colonel March alone seemed unaffected by it. On the contrary, the blood had come back into his face and he was tuned up to a ferocious geniality. For the first time he picked up a fat-bowled pipe from his desk.

"It was murder," he went on, rapping the pipe on the edge of an ash-tray. "The victim did not die of fright. He died from a cause commoner and better known. I said a while ago that there was another possibility. It remains to be seen whether I can prove this. We discarded the other possibility after the post-mortem, because circumstances seemed to rule it out. And yet there is just one other way in which a man can be killed with no other symptoms, external or internal, than that terrific hammer-blow to the heart and nervous system."

Hemphill spoke in a high voice. "If there aren't any symptoms, I don't see how you can prove it, though I hope to heaven you can. But how would you kill a man like that?"

"By passing a current of electricity through his bath-water," said Colonel March. He turned to Delafield. "Would you care to tell us how you killed him, or shall I?"

Inspector Roberts rose to his feet at the other side of the room, but it was not necessary. Delafield sat with his large-knuckled hands pressed together, nodding. Otherwise he did not move: but it was as though the shabbiness of his face increased.

"I'll tell you," he said simply. "If only you'll honest-to-God believe it was an accident."

"One moment," urged Colonel March. He hesitated; and his forehead

was clouded. "I want you to understand that you are not obliged to answer ——"

"Oh, that's all right," said Delafield, making an off-handed gesture. "I want these gentlemen and this lady to bear me out. I didn't mean to tell you unless you guessed it. But *I* didn't mean him any harm."

With the same air of toiling lucidity he unclasped his hands and held them up.

"These did it," he explained. "Maybe you know, sir, how warm Mr. Wilson liked to have the house? And how he had portable electric fires going everywhere all day, even in the passages and in the bathrooms?"

"Yes," said Colonel March quietly.

Delafield nodded. "I dropped one of the electric heaters into the bath," he said. "That's all. That's how bad and simple it all was. Mr. Wilson told me I might do it. Over and over he kept telling me how I might do it, not meaning to. It was a kind of nightmare with me, thinking I might do it with these hands; and then he joggled my arm ——

"You see, sir, Mr. Wilson read in the paper long ago how several people had got killed like that. At Bristol, I think it was. Accidents. It was a cold day, and they had propped them fires up on ledges by the bath. You wouldn't think people would be foolish enough to do that, but that's what they did. Mr. Wilson didn't do that, of course. But he liked lots of heat, and he liked to have the fire standing close to the bath.

"He was frightened of things like that. Over and over he said to me, 'Don't you do that to me, or they'll hang you for murder.' Like the shaving, you see, sir. It got so I couldn't look at an electric fire in the bathroom without being nervous. And he read up on the symptoms of being electrocuted like that, in a book called *Taylor's Medical Jurisprudence*, I think it was; him being a lawyer and all; and he was surprised at what the symptoms were.

"I expect I was off-guard on Friday night, with him talking so much about ghosts. He got into the bath. Then without thinking he called to me to move the heater closer to the bath. I picked it up in my hand, not thinking either. All of a sudden he shouted out to me, and said, 'Put it down, you damned doddering old fool!' and made a grab for my hand."

Again Delafield examined his hands. It was very quiet in the room. Kathleen had got up and put her own hand on his shoulder.

"It fell," he added.

"Afterwards I was afraid they would hang me, just like Mr. Wilson said, if they knew how it happened. I thought if I could pretend it happened some other way they wouldn't find out. It said in the book that the symptoms for this kind of electrocution were the same as the symptoms of death from fright; and poor Mr. Wilson had always been frightened of ghosts and the dark.

"So I moved him. First I dressed him: which wasn't hard, because that's

what I've been doing for years. I carried him downstairs. That wasn't hard either, because I'm a pretty hefty specimen, as you can see; and he wasn't what you could call big. The car was at the door. I wasn't much afraid of being seen moving him, because the night was so misty.

"I had his key to the flat, and I knew what he was going to do. I knew the light would be out in the hall leading to the flat; and the service-door was near that. I put him down in the bedroom of the flat about eleven o'clock. Then I turned on the wireless and left. I put it on loud and strong so that somebody *should* find him soon; I didn't want him lying there all that time alone.

"That's all. Maybe he was difficult, but I've served him for fifteen years, and you sort of get used to people. He didn't die hard; just a kind of a cry, and he fell back. All the same, I can't forget it, so I've been wanting to tell you. I suppose they'll hang me, but I swear I didn't mean any harm."

Kathleen tightened her grip on his shoulder. Chase, drawn by currents of sympathy as strong as electric currents, faced Colonel March.

"Sir," Chase said, "they surely won't ——"

Colonel March shook his head. He studied Delafield with a long, thoughtful look.

"If he is telling the truth," said the head of Department D-3, "they assuredly won't. I question whether anything will be done to him at all. And somehow I suspect he is telling the truth. I shall turn in my report to that effect."

Kathleen blinked a little, and the more so when Chase's fingers closed round her hand.

"May I — er — apologize for what I was thinking of you?" she said to Colonel March. "Perhaps Arnot Wilson was right after all; perhaps I do think I know too much. But will you kindly, kindly enlighten a scientific curiosity on just one point? How on earth did you know what had happened?"

"Oh, that?" grunted Colonel March, blinking and suddenly chuckling at the vehemence with which she assailed him. "That wasn't difficult. The Queer Complaints department had much more trouble with a doorbell-ringer at Hammersmith. It certainly wasn't difficult once you had grasped the crucial fact that Wilson had not died in the flat: he had been conveyed there after death.

"It seemed almost certain he had not walked there in life, because he had failed to take something he would never have gone there without. We did not find it either in his pockets or anywhere else in the flat. Everybody commented on Arnot Wilson's morbid fear of the dark. I could believe he might screw up enough courage to go there, particularly since he had the added incentive of spying on you. But I could not believe he would face the prospect of several hours alone in a supposedly haunted flat without taking along either an electric torch, a candle, or even a box of matches."

Cornell Woolrich has many strings to his detectival bow, and each of them produces an exceptional tone. Indeed, Mr. Woolrich is an accomplished virtuoso in nearly every type of the modern detective story: the psychological thriller;[1] the story of sheer suspense;[2] the tale of the hunted and the hunter;[3] the story of point-counter-point ingenuity;[2] the crime story tinged with horror;[3] and the straightforward police tale.[4]

If you have followed Mr. Woolrich's contributions to EQMM (see footnotes), you will have sampled each of these species and varieties. Now, in Mr. Woolrich's "Leg Man," we bring you still another type — perhaps the most difficult form in the entire genre — the detective story that successfully blends the two all-inclusive forms. "Leg Man" combines both the Sensational and the Intellectual approach: it is a half-and-half mixture of pure action and pure deduction. It will satisfy equally those who prefer thrills and excitement and those who insist on a pure deductive thread plus scrupulous fairness-to-the-reader.

In a single short story, who could ask for anything more?

LEG MAN

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

HE HAD it all lined up ahead of him, like a flight of steps. First step would be a by-line over his piece. Over all his pieces. "By Clint Burgess." Maybe in a year. Maybe even in six months. Next, a feature of his own, with a little boxed photo of him at the top. By the time he was in his thirties. Next, the city desk, where Herrick hung out now. By the time he was in his forties. Then managing editor. And then the top step — owner of the whole rag. He'd be old by then, fifty, but he wouldn't raise a belly like the present old man, and he wouldn't make a fool of himself on the links, and he'd treat his staff human, and —

"Burgess!"

He bounced all the way down the steps, owner, managing editor, city desk, feature, by-line — and there he was down at the bottom again. Just a leg man. A guy that dug 'em up and phoned 'em in, didn't even write his own stories.

Herrick said dryly when he came over to the desk: "Yeah, I know you're not appreciated, and I know you could do much better in this chair than I'm doing — saw you looking wistfully over at it just now — but in the meantime let's keep it to ourselves just a mite longer." The big sea-lion actually went coy on him, laid a finger across his lips and went: "*Sh!* And while we're getting ready to turn over the paper to you, and while

[1] *Dime a Dance*, issue of Fall 1941.
[2] *After-Dinner Story*, issue of September 1943.
[3] *The Fingernail*, issue of September 1944.
[4] *The Mathematics of Murder*, issue of March 1945.

they're painting your name on the old man's door in there, suppose you haul your moss-grown behind outa here and earn the thirty-five bucks blackmail you're shaking us down for every Saturday!"

The last couple of couplets boomed out like something over a loud-speaker. A copy-boy snorted somewhere in the background.

Burgess said: "All right! All right! If a guy busted an arm covering an assignment for you, he'd still be a lazy bum 'cause he didn't bust both arms."

"Naw," said Herrick dryly, "he'd just be damn careless, that's all. Now, to be more specific, chase over to a place called Mike's Tavern, I think it's somewhere along Blake Street. A tip just came into the office a few minutes ago that there's been somebody killed over there. Find out what there is to be found out. Nothing fancy. Just facts, I want, facts. Get 'em straight and keep 'em straight. It's probably just another dime-a-dozen bar hold-up and killing, so it's worth maybe a paragraph on the second page, if nothing better turns up. It just happened, so lift your feet. In fact, if you were any kind of a leg man at all, you would have been over there already before it happened and not have to be sent around after it's over by your hard-working editor."

"Gee, what is a guy supposed to be, a mind-reader?" grumbled Burgess as he closed the door after him, to the accompaniment of another snicker from the copy-boy.

Herrick buckled his arm threateningly at the latter. "He's a better newspaperman than you'll ever be, brat. He's got it in him. The only guys I insult around here are the guys I like." Then he added threateningly: "You go back and tell him that and I'll break your neck!"

"Chee!" said the kid, ducking out, "I guess you must like me too."

Burgess, meanwhile, was stemming his way to his assignment, muttering to himself every once in awhile: "Just facts he wants. All right, just facts he'll get."

Mike's Tavern, at nine-thirty in the morning, wasn't very convivial-looking. In fact, it wouldn't have been very inviting even apart from the fact that a murder had just taken place in it. There was a detective squad car in front of it, and the unmistakable and slightly repellent shape of a morgue ambulance drawn up alongside that, with a stretcher partly protruding from it like an avaricious tongue. There was a very thin crowd, not large at all, with a single harness cop to keep it divided in two with a wide swath through it from curb to doorway. At that, its interest was only half-hearted. Even as he arrived it was already beginning to melt away. People had to work at that hour.

A second cop stopped him just inside the tavern entrance. Burgess showed his press card and the cop still kept on stopping him. "How's chances?" Burgess wheedled.

"I'll see what he says," the cop condescended.

He dipped his head and one shoulder inside, pulled them out again. "He says all right," he said.

Burgess went inside. It looked as dim and depressing as only the inside of such a place can look at such an hour. There were plenty of men there, but they weren't drinking and their presence did nothing to liven it up any. Small leaded panes of colored glass, red, blue, and green, made the bright morning outside seem like twilight. They had a pair of high-powered lights rigged up now, but without them it would have been impossible to look in from the street and see anything. A large clock high on the wall over the bar said 9:32. A small tab sticking up in the indicator of the cash-register said "20¢". A detective said: "All right, stand back and let him take those glasses now!"

There were two glasses standing in lonely abandonment on the bar, on the customers' side of it and fairly close together, as though the vanished drinkers had stood elbow to elbow. There was also a man groveling bodily atop the bar, like a monkey, on his knees and forearms, sighting some sort of a camera apparatus down into the narrow well between counter and wall. A bright blue flash went off, and then he turned around and jumped down, on the outside. He sighted at the glasses next, dipping down so that he'd be on a level with them. Another blue flash went off. Then he straightened up and departed.

Two men came in with a morgue basket between them. They went around behind the bar, through a little opening at the far end, where it joined the wall. After that, you could only see them from about the ribs up. They had a hard time doing whatever it was they were doing. The first one rose a little, then went down again, as though he had scissored his legs widely to step over something. Then he turned and faced the other way, back toward his stretcher-mate. Then they both looked down and scratched their heads, as though faced with a problem in hydraulics.

"Put it down on top of him and then turn 'em both over together — that's the only way to get him in," one remarked to the other.

They both dipped down below the bar and stayed out of sight for several moments.

When they bobbed up again, they were both roundshouldered, as though borne down by considerable weight.

They maneuvered their way around the end of the bar out into the open again and proceeded rapidly to the street, carrying something covered-over between them, that was rounded in the middle like a shaky plate of jelly. A pair of shoe-tips stuck up at one end. Burgess didn't try to uncover it and look as it went by. He was willing to take their word for it the man was dead.

"How much did they take the place for?" he asked the detective in-charge of the case, whom he'd overheard them calling Lyons.

"It wasn't a cash-killing," the latter said, relighting a cigar that he'd al-

lowed to expire under pressure of his duties. "There's no take in a bar-till at this hour of the day. We figure it for a grudge-killing. They knew his habits, knew they could get him alone in the place right after he opened up."

"Any idea —?"

"Nobody saw them come, nobody saw them go. The barman came in and found him lying there like that, still warm, with a slug in his back, around behind the bar where he couldn't be seen from the street."

"I thought he was the barman — who was he?"

"Naw, he was the owner. Mike Oliver. Used to come in and open up himself every day. That's the barman standing over there."

Burgess went to work on him next. He'd taken him to be a third-grade detective breaking in at his first murder-case, until now. He'd had that air of trying to be helpful but not knowing exactly what to do that such a novice would have had.

Burgess used an old one that had never yet failed to work, human nature being what it is. "I don't suppose you mind if I mention you," he said deferentially. "This is for the papers."

The barman thawed. In fact he even turned into a gushing stream of garrulity.

"What sort of a guy was he?" Burgess suggested.

The barman glanced around toward the now-vacant aisle behind the bar, screened the side of his mouth with the flat of his hand, as though his late employer was still somewhere around likely to overhear him. "He was a very unpopular guy. Hardly anybody got along with him at all. He had these ways, y'know, that don't take with customers. He wouldn't carry anyone on the cuff. He was tight like this." He packed a close fist and showed it to Burgess. "Any time I tried to pass out a round on the house, he'd give me a dirty look that would take all the good spirit out of it. Customers are quick to notice a thing like that, y'know. And worst of all, he had a very bad habit of collecting for the drinks right as he put them down, instead of waiting until after. He'd stand there with his hand out, and if they didn't shell out, he'd mention the amount and make sure they did before they had a chance to hoist them."

"A guy like that must have made plenty of enemies," Burgess acquiesced.

His informant nodded vigorously. "I remember one night, only about a month ago, he had a terrible row with a guy in here, that only started about some little thing like that. No first-time stranger, either, but a good steady customer that had been coming in here regular for years past. The guy handed him a ten-dollar bill. There was a big rush on that night, they were lined up three deep, and in his hurry the boss didn't look at it close enough. He only gave him back change for a five. The guy kicked, and the boss called him a liar to his face. I saw what was going to happen, and I tried to take him aside and reason

with him. I said: 'He's been coming in steady for years. Even if he's wrong about it, his trade's worth more than five dollars to you, boss. Give it to him.' But he wouldn't listen to me. The guy called him a crook, so the boss jumped over the counter then and there and threw him out. He was a big, husky guy, you know. The guy picked himself up off the street and came back as far as the door and hollered in: 'I'm going to get you for this! I'm going to get you if it's the last thing I do!' Everyone in the place heard him. Then he went off. I thought sure he was coming back with the cops any minute, but he never showed up again.

"So then when he didn't, the boss says to me with a knowing grin: 'That proves he was lying, and he knows it himself! If he was really gypped out of five dollars, he would have been back here with a cop.' I said to him: 'I'm not so sure about that.' "

Burgess looked thoughtful. "I'm not so sure about it either," he murmured. "There are other ways."

"So the punch-line on it is this," the barman went ahead. "That night when we tallied up, we found we were five dollars ahead of the register. There was an extra five in the till that wasn't accounted for. The boss didn't give a rap. All he did was shrug and say to me: 'If he shows up again, give it back to him.' But he never did. He's never been near here again from that night on."

"Did you tell them that?" Burgess asked, dropping his voice a little and hitching his head toward the detectives in the background.

"I had to," the bartender said uncomfortably. "You can't keep anything back from them guys when they start asking you things. I had to tell them his name too. We'd gotten to know him by name, he'd been coming in here so long. Chuck Hastings was his name. I had to tell them that and what he looked like." He drew a deep breath. "They wanted to know."

Burgess saw him down at headquarters later on the same day. They were just bringing him fresh out of Lyons' office but he looked pretty wilted. He was a very badly frightened guy. Burgess couldn't help feeling a little sorry for him. He looked as though he'd been severely mauled and even more severely grilled. He was question-drunk. Somebody'd already passed the word to Burgess who he was, that was how he knew him.

A minute or two later the door opened again and Mike's bartender came out. Evidently an identification had taken place in there. He went by without recognizing Burgess and the latter didn't tip himself off to him.

Lyons let him come in after that, while he was catching his breath between more important things he had to do.

"I see you've got yourself a suspect already," Burgess began.

"Nope." Lyons crumpled a paper cup and threw it away under the water-cooler. He shook his head de-

cisively. "We've got the culprit. Solid. He's cooked, washed and bottled. His prints were taken and they match those on the death-glass left on the bar. And that, I might add, was practically tapestried with them."

Burgess put a pencil to the back of an envelope, which was just a mannerism with him. He didn't jot anything. "Has he got any kind of an alibi?" he asked.

"Don't they all? Only his is deaf and dumb, can't even talk up for him. His bed. Claims he was in it all morning. He was still letting on like he was asleep in it when we went for him."

"Who was behind the second glass?"

Lyons smiled bleakly. "You can't expect him to admit he knows that, when he's denying he himself was behind the first. At least not right off. But we'll get that out of him. If we don't today, we will tomorrow. If we don't tomorrow, we will Thursday." He picked up an unsigned confession lying on his desk, flourished it, dropped it again. "He'll change his mind about signing this too, before we're through. We got a lot of time. We're not in any hurry. But those are just odds and ends left over. The case is closed. He goes up before the Grand Jury end of next week." He tipped from his eyebrow to Burgess. "Be seeing you, reporter."

Burgess opened the door, and then hung around it.

Lyons looked up from the desk at which he'd sat down and busied himself once more. "What's the matter, the hinges need oiling?" he suggested pointedly.

"Don't you think it's funny about the second glass not having any prints on it at all? It was standing there emptied out, so somebody must have lifted it. It's all right about the second guy having gloves, but then Mike Oliver's own fingerprints would have still been left on it. He must have set it down on the bar, it didn't fly down by itself. If it didn't have any prints on it at all, then it looks as if it must have been wiped clean on purpose. Well, then, if one of the death-glasses was wiped clean, why wasn't that done to the other too?"

"One of the two guys had more presence of mind than the other. One remembered to, one forgot — showing which of the two it was who fired the shot. The guy who forgot to. Now close the door."

A cop stepped over and did it for him, swinging it so that it ended up an inch from Burgess' face.

"Well, if he said you can see the pictures, you can see them," the custodian of the police photographic files said wearily. "I'll just get his O.K. on it." He reached for the phone.

"No, don't bother him about it now," Burgess said hastily. "He's busy, that's why he sent me around to you myself. I was just in his office, I only left it this minute. Not the body, you understand. Just the background shots, the bar itself."

The attendant wearily took down a large folder, opened it. "You was in

the place yourself this morning, what d'you want to look at pictures of it for? Why don't you just go back there and take another look at it instead?"

"I want to see it like it was, not like it is now. I thought I saw something then, and I want to see if I was right, and it's still on the pictures the way I thought I saw it at the time."

The custodian watched him bend down close to the prints, poring over them with his face an inch away as if he were near-sighted. "Well, are you? Is it?" he demanded at last.

"Yeah," Burgess said excitedly, straightening up. "I am! It is!"

"Well, what is it?" the man in charge asked, letting curiosity get the better of him for a minute.

"Thanks a lot," Burgess called back, and let the door swing closed after him.

He used one of the public telephones in the corridor of the headquarters building to call his office.

Herrick was wroth. "It's about time!" he barked. "You've only been out all morning and half the afternoon! I could have written the history of Rome in that time. What d'you think we're doing down here, piece-work? Half the working day for every two lines that gets tucked in where a column winds up short!"

"Yeah, but it's not over yet."

"All right, four words takes care of that. 'An arrest is expected.' You don't have to stay out and wait for it to happen!"

"The arrest has been made already," Burgess faltered. "They made it at eleven this morning, but —"

"Well, is it the guy that did it?"

"They say it is, but —"

Herrick rumbled like a volcano. "Well, do *they* say it's over?"

"Yeah, but —"

"Then who says it isn't over?"

Burgess swallowed hard. "I do."

He could hear Herrick leave his creaky swivel-chair and then hit it again. It took him a minute to get his larynx hooked up again. "Why? Because he hasn't been executed and buried yet? We're running a daily newspaper, not an annual. Listen, I didn't send you out to solve detective cases, I sent you out to get facts. If the police say he did it, then it's over! I'll give you ten minutes to get back here and get to work!"

"But listen, boss, if you'll only give me time to explain what I noticed, something I've found out that I think they missed seeing themselves, you'll understand why I think they're holding the wrong guy —"

A feminine voice cut in at this point. "Ti-yum is up. Deposit another nickel, pal-lease."

Burgess began to grub desperately at the linings of his various pockets with one hand, hanging onto the receiver with the other. Pennies turned up, quarters turned up, even a half-dollar turned up, but no nickel. "Hey, wait, don't cut —" he pleaded.

Herrick's voice was fading away like distant, rolling thunder. "Remember, ten minutes, or you don't need to come back at all!" Something

went *clunk* and the connection was cut.

Burgess hung up and used both hands to go over himself this time. He stepped outside the booth, where there was more elbow-room. Suddenly it turned up, the lone Jefferson-head that he'd known he had somewhere or other all along.

He tossed it up and down in his hand a couple of times, pondering. Then he shook his head, put it back again where he'd just found it. "I better act like I didn't have one anyway," he muttered to himself. "If I call him again he'll only tell me to come back, and I can't — not just yet, not till this thing is over."

He went back to Mike's Tavern. It was still open for business, surprisingly enough, either going along under sheer momentum or because it would take a few weeks to dispose of the lease and the stock on hand. But it wasn't doing well, no one was in the place. People evidently didn't feel at ease hanging around premises where there had been a violent death so recently.

"Gimme two fingers," Burgess said.

"You're the newspaper guy from this morning," the barman recalled. "I thought I seen you before."

Burgess held up his glass as though he were scanning the drink. As a matter of fact, he wasn't, he was scrutinizing what held it in. "Do you keep count of how many glasses like this you have in stock?" he asked idly.

"Oh, sure. I got it right at the end of my fingertips. You have to in this business. We got in three dozen of 'em only a couple weeks ago."

"Lost any through breakage since then?"

"No, I'm pretty careful. You have to be, working for a guy like Mike."

"Then you ought to have thirty-five, not counting that one the police impounded, that right?"

"Thirty-five, and eighteen that we were down to before we reordered, that makes it fifty-three."

Burgess reached into his pocket. "I'm not one of these betting guys," he said, "but I got nothing to do right now, and you got nothing. Here's a dollar bill says you haven't got fifty-three in stock right now. Fade me."

"That's an easy way to double my money," the barman said scornfully. He put down one of his own. He picked up a flat stick used to scrape the head off beer. "I'll hit 'em so they sing out, you can keep count with me as I go along. They're all lined up here even, except that one in front of you."

The stick started to sound off flute-like little musical notes, *ting*, *ting*, *ting*, while Burgess kept score out loud. "Fifty-one." *Ting*. "Fifty-two." *Ting*. "Fifty-three."

There was a pause. Then the stick went *ting* one last time.

They both said it together. "Fifty-four!"

The barman straightened up. He scratched his head. "There's one over. I musta miscounted."

"No, you didn't miscount," Burgess said, without explaining further.

He split the kitty up again. "Keep your dollar, I don't want it." He pocketed his own. "Let's talk about something else."

"Sure," said the barman, relieved at not having to forfeit his share of the ante. "What'll it be?"

Burgess groped around, eyes vacant, as if in search of a topic. "I suppose you knew the ins and outs of your boss's personal affairs pretty much."

"Better than my own. I been working for him for fifteen years."

"Everybody makes enemies. Who hated him pretty much?"

"Who didn't?" was the succinct answer.

"Pretty long list, huh? Well, now this is just rambling talk, but who out of the many would you say hated him enough to kill him?"

The barman scraped his chin. "First off, this guy Chuck Hastings, I'd say."

That, Burgess knew, was auto-suggestion pure and simple. Hastings was already being held for the murder, therefore his name was the first to occur to the Solon of the lager schooners. "Who else, after him?" he encouraged. He poised pencil to one to his reliable envelope-backs. "Let's see if we can't rig up a sort of list, between the two of us. Something like this: if Hastings hadn't been the one to kill him, who would have been the one likeliest after him to do it?"

"This is good," the barman chuckled. "It's kind of like a crossword puzzle."

"Kind of like," Burgess assented.

It took time. Time and patience and dexterity. But when he came out of there, six drinks, two gift-cigars, and ninety minutes later, he had this list on the back of his envelope (he hadn't bothered transcribing motives, just names):

1. Hastings
2. Big Tim Leary
3. Cosentino
4. Edge
5. Poletti

Herrick had been just on the point of leaving the office on his way home. Burgess could tell that by the length of time it took him to come back to his desk and answer the phone. He was usually sitting right beside it.

"Listen, boss," Burgess began ebulliently. "I've found out there's one glass too many at the tavern where the shooting —"

That was as far as he got. Herrick could be surgically cutting when he wanted to be. He was now. "Who're you?" he asked, puzzled.

"Aw, boss, don't. This is Burgess, you know who —"

"There's no one by that name on the staff now."

"At least give me a rewrite man, if you won't listen to me yourself," Burgess pleaded.

Herrick was regretfully polite. "Only guys on the payroll are entitled to rewrite men. I can't give strangers rewrite men."

"But boss, I've got a list of five possible suspects, and one of them —"

"I thought the police already had the guy that did it, and that it was

finished."

"Naw, because he didn't do it."

"Sorry, but it's never been our policy to accept tips from outsiders. And you were fired, as of two hours and twenty minutes ago," said Herrick with unimpeachable logic.

There never was a newspaperman yet, who when fired, didn't take it out in drink. And Burgess immediately set about running true to form. He went from the telephone straight out into the opening stages of what had all the earmarks of being a progressive, night-long binge. But the similarity ended there. The average person will stay in one place until he gets a good edge on. Burgess, on the contrary, didn't even give himself a chance to get warmed up in any one place. He kept moving from bar to bar, at a ratio of one short drink to a spot. Furthermore, he hardly took more than a sip of each individual drink. He just dipped his gums once each time and called it a slug. He seemed to have a sort of geographic formula for getting high, as though he were following a roadmap. He drank his way down the left side of Sycamore Avenue. Then back along the right side. Then he moved over one block, and drank his way down the left side of Central Avenue. Then back along the right. Then he moved over one block, and did the same thing on the next thoroughfare.

In each place he'd ask a question. Just one. "Was a jigger like this taken from your bar within the last few nights?" He kept getting no's and shakes of the head, shrugs and stares. "Who would take a thing like that? Are you kidding, mister?" He'd turn around and walk out again without pursuing the subject any further. He had a lot of ground to cover and only a limited time at his disposal.

At about the third place on the right side of the third avenue, with time running close to midnight and his mouth flaming from the dry cleaning it was getting, there was a sudden variation in the result. He got a double-take from the bartender, after he'd already got the usual no and had started over toward the door on his way out. "Hey, wait, mister, what was that you just asked me?"

He repeated. "I said was one of these jiggers swiped from your bar here within the last couple of nights?"

The barman nodded. Slow at first, then faster. "Yeah. Come to think of it, one was." Then the man's mouth opened into an oval of mystification, stayed that way. "But how did you know that? Who told you?"

Burgess closed in again, avidly. "Got any idea who took it?"

"I don't know who he was, if that's what you mean."

"But you did see him?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I did."

Burgess went up on his toes a little, palms to bar-edge. "What did he look like? Gimme an idea, quick."

"He was medium height, on the slender side. Let's see now. Dark hair, and skin a little bit sunburned, he was peeling up around the forehead."

"A cast in one eye?"

"Yeah, one eye a little squinty, like there was something the matter with it."

Burgess had sunk back to dead floor-level even before he'd heard the answer. His shoulders slumped over frustratedly. The description was that of Chuck Hastings, whom they had for the murder anyway.

"You didn't see him take it, actually, though, did you?" he asked dispiritedly.

"No, I didn't. But it was his jigger, so he must have. When he walked out, I went over to where he'd been standing, to clean up, and there was no glass there to put back. His chaser-glass was still there big as life, but no jigger. I couldn't figure it. I even leaned over and looked down on the outside to see if it had tumbled off, but there was nothing on the floor, either broken or whole. I couldn't get over it. It's a thing that never happens, you know. They're not worth a dime, them little things."

They're not worth anything in money, Burgess reflected without answering, but they can cost a life.

Lyons looked at him as though he thought he was crazy. "Why should I let you go in and talk to him? What do you think this is, Old Home Week in the detention cells? The guy's being held on murder charges. People can't just walk in and visit with him."

"I only want to get a little of his background, for a human interest story I've been commissioned to write. How can that hurt any?"

"Well, go get your background out in front of the building someplace."

"What, are you afraid if I talk to him a couple minutes I'm liable to find out the guy's innocent and you're holding the wrong party? You must have a pretty shaky case."

"Why, you—!" Lyons half-rose from his desk, shot his sleeves back as though he meditated taking a swing at him. "I ought to . . ." Then he changed his mind, sank down again. "I suppose if I don't, you'll write it up your own way, make us out like heels," he growled. "I know you guys." He called someone in. "Take Pencil-Happy back and give him five minutes with Hastings. He wants to hold hands with him or something. Vacuum him good first."

"I had a hard time getting in here," Burgess began without preamble as soon as the grating had clashed closed on the three of them.

"I didn't," Hastings said gloomily, without looking up from the bunk.

"And they're not giving me much time, so I've got to talk to you fast." He speared his thumb at the cop glaring down watchfully at the two of them with his back to the grating. "Never mind him, I'm not going to ask you anything that it can hurt for them to hear. Only, please answer me straight, will you? That's the only way I can help you."

"What d'ya want to know?" Hastings answered surlily.

"Who'd you shake hands with last night?"

Hastings straightened up a little on

his elbow, looked at him askance. "What are you, a little dippy or something?"

"Who'd you shake hands with last night? That's what I said. Who'd you shake hands with in a bar, the night before you were arrested for the killing?"

Hastings brushed his hand thoughtfully across his mouth, eyed him vacantly. "I don't — I didn't meet anyone I knew, any friend, all that night. I was by myself the whole time."

"Wait a minute. You were in a place called Sullivan's, on Union Avenue. That much is right, isn't it?"

Hastings nodded. "Yeah. But I went in alone, and I come out alone. I wasn't in there over ten, fifteen minutes at the most."

"You didn't shake hands with anyone while you were in there? Think, man, will you?"

Hastings came perfectly erect at last. "Wait a minute. I didn't shake hands with anyone of my own accord. But somebody did grab my mitt and pump it at one time, I remember that now. There was one of these souses next to me. You know the kind — the whole world was his long-lost brother. The kind you can't get rid of, once they fasten on you. First he apologized for slopping over against me. Then he wanted to buy me a drink. I told him no thanks, I was checking out as soon as I finished the one I had in front of me. Then he said, 'No hard feelings,' and reached down and pumped my hand about sixteen times. After that, he didn't pester me any more. That what you wanted?"

Burgess gave a grim duck of his head to show it was. "Did you notice your hands when you got home last night?"

"What d'you mean?" Hastings said impatiently. "They were still with me, I didn't leave 'em nowhere."

"No, no, I mean did you wash them before you turned in, did you happen to look them over? Was there anything on them?"

Hastings stopped short, took a hitch in his breathing. "What are you, psychic? There was something! There was a couple of spots of grease on them. On one, the right. Axle-grease or something, stuff that was hard to get off. That lush I told you about must've been working around a car or in a machine-shop."

Burgess suddenly slammed him hard across the chest with the back of his hand. "I'm on the right track!" he exclaimed jubilantly.

He leaned forward intently. "Was he anyone you ever saw before?"

"Naw, I never saw him before in my life. He was a big, hulky guy, from what I can remember. I didn't look at him very close. I think he had on dungarees and an oiler's cap, but I'm not sure. He was just some stray lush."

"He wasn't stray and he was no lush, but never mind about that now." He got out his old standby, the envelope and pencil. "Hastings, who hates you pretty much?"

"The whole world, the way it looks tonight."

"I don't, and I'm asking you. What do I get out of it? I'm only trying to help you. Who hates you enough to frame you for a murder?"

"How you going to tell about that?" was the disgruntled answer. "Sometimes you don't know it when they do."

"You usually have a pretty fair idea."

When he left him he had this list:

1. Harlan
2. Strickland
3. Edge
4. Al Vogel

He sat down on a bench on his way back to Lyons' office, took out the other one, the list he'd obtained from the bartender at Mike's Tavern, and held the two side by side. Then he took his pencil and drew a line through each name that appeared only once on the two.

When he got through, he had this, on both:

4. & 3. Edge.

"Throw the guy out," Lyons said wearily. "You give these newspaper guys an inch and they take thirty-six miles."

Burgess ducked in under the arm of the cop as the latter turned his way to throw him out.

"Look, I admit I'm not a detective and I'm not trying to be," he said, straining forward while the cop tried to drag him out by the back of the collar and the slack of the coat. "I'm just trying to get the facts in this case. I've got who did it."

"Let him alone, O'Keefe," Lyons said contemptuously. "I want to hear this. It ought to do me good. I haven't laughed all week."

He made a steeple of his hands, leaned comfortably back in his chair. "Well, where is he?" he asked, pretending to scan the hallway in back of Burgess.

"I don't know where he is, I haven't got him with me! But I do know who he is. He's a guy named Edge. He's in the wholesale liquor business. But that's just a front for what amounts to a big ring putting on the squeeze-play pretty much as the old bootleg rings did in the prohibition days. The only difference is that they can distribute openly now, it's not against the law. But the squeeze is pretty much the same. If the retailer gets tired of paying what they soak him, and tries to switch to some other distributor — well, it's just too bad for him. And according to Mike Oliver's barman, Mike cancelled his orders several months back and refused to continue letting Edge's outfit supply him."

"Very interesting," said Lyons sarcastically. "What does he look like?"

"I don't know. I've never seen him in my life."

Lyons addressed the cop. "He doesn't know where he is, he's never even seen him, but he's sure he killed Oliver. That's what I call a strong circumstantial case."

"You're convicting Hastings just on the strength of that one glass, aren't

you?"

"Yeah, and you're trying to get us to convict Edge just by pulling his name out of a hat. We got fingerprints on the glass at least. You got nothing."

Burgess rushed on: "There's also a revenge-motive there, I mean on Edge's part against Hastings. Edge used to operate a speakeasy in the prohibition days, and Hastings was an employe of his at that time, worked for him. They were raided and federally tried. A lot of inside evidence turned up mysteriously from somewhere, that helped convict Edge, as though somebody had ratted, made an arrangement with the authorities. He was never able to find out where it came from, but there was one thing noticeable when the trial ended. He got a stiff sentence, and Hastings, for some peculiar reason, got off with a remarkably light one."

"Prohibition ended in 1933," Lyons said dryly, "and he waits until 1943 to get even with him." He hiccoughed scornfully. "Good snappy work."

"Motives are one thing that never grow stale."

"You've got from nothing," Lyons told him. "All you've got is a couple of say-so's, second-hand. A guy that's already under arrest himself — and you know how they'll grab at any straw — remembers a guy that didn't like him ten years ago. And a barman, who admits his boss was unpopular with everyone in general, remembers someone who didn't like *him*. So that's enough for you. You've got the guy who did it, right away. Bertillon wasted his time inventing the system of fingerprints." And he cinched it with what on the face of it was an insuperable argument. "Just let me point out something. I don't like you, at this minute. In fact, I dislike you so intensely that I am yearning to throttle you with my own bare hands. But that don't mean I'm going to murder you. Far from it. See the difference?"

Burgess scrubbed the back of his neck in exasperation. "What do I have to do to convince you?" he asked.

"Get the guy to break down and confess out of his own mouth," Lyons jeered. "Then maybe I'll pay some attention."

"I don't even know where to reach him," Burgess murmured in a helpless undertone.

"Go ahead, O'Keefe, you can finish throwing him out now," Lyons said. "That was funny enough to last me the rest of the week."

Burgess took the furled directory from the bar into the phone-booth with him, keeping his finger on the name he'd found, to make sure of not losing his place again. He dropped a nickel in and asked for the number. A man's voice answered. "I want to speak to Joseph Edge," Burgess said.

"Who is it and what about?" the voice said inhospitably.

"He doesn't know me, and it's strictly personal."

Another voice got on, a little suaver than the first.

Burgess said: "Is this the Joseph Edge who is in the liquor distributing

business?" He'd already tried two who weren't.

"This is Joe Edge, and that's my ra — my occupation. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing. I figured maybe there was something I could do for you." He waited a minute. "You were in Mike's Tavern early this morning, around nine, nine-fifteen," he said flatly.

The voice showed no dismay. Only bland interest. "Mike's Tavern? Where's that?"

"That's where the shooting was. Where you were when the shooting took place."

The voice was silken, unruffled. "I don't get you."

"I'll explain. I was the first customer in there this morning. I went in a minute or two after the place was opened up, almost at the heels of the owner. I went back to the men's washroom, right after I entered. I was in there when you came in. I saw the whole thing through the crack of the door. You didn't think to look in there. That was your mistake."

"Don't waste my time. Tell it to the cops."

"The only drawback is, they don't pay you."

"Oh, a shake, is that it?" The voice was amused.

"I haven't got any job or anything. I'm pretty well broke. Matter of fact, I been saving this for a rainy day. Well, it's pouring cats and dogs right now."

The voice laughed heartily, very sure of itself. "Hate to disappoint you, but it's dry and sunny at this end."

"You don't believe I was in there, do you? I'll draw you a picture. There was another guy with you, two of you came in. You stood up against the bar on the right-hand side, as you come in. He stood on the left. After the shooting, one glass was wiped off clean. The other . . ." He dropped his voice a little, spoke close to the phone. "*Now* is it clouding up a little at your end?"

There was a pause at the other end. Burgess knew what the cause of it was. It wasn't due to fear, nor loss of presence of mind. It was due to a momentary muffling of the phone, while an order was being given in the background: "See where this is coming from."

The voice came back again. "Who's in on this with you?" it asked, almost affably. Burgess could tell it was playing for time. He didn't mind playing along with it; he was a willing dupe.

"Nobody. Just me by myself."

"Maybe you did see that. You sound convincing enough. But how do you know I'm the same person you saw in there?"

"I made it my business to find out. What d'you suppose I've been doing all day?"

There was another pause. The call had been traced. Probably a slip of paper had been thrust before the speaker, for him to read.

"So you're in this by yourself," the voice resumed. "Well, your proposition interests me. About how large an umbrella would it take to keep you

dry?"

"About a five hundred dollar one."

"That's a pretty large umbrella."

"This is a pretty heavy rainstorm."

"All right," the voice acquiesced. "No harm in getting together and talking it over. I usually get shaved the first thing in the morning at a barbershop called the Empire. It's on Central Avenue, you can't miss it. It has a pole out front, on the sidewalk. You be standing up alongside that, about nine o'clock. Have you got that, now?"

"I've got it," Burgess said. He didn't bother jotting it down. He knew it was an appointment that would never be kept. It couldn't be, for it was an appointment between the living and the dead. One party to it wouldn't be alive any more by that time.

He hung up. He consulted his watch, then he retrieved the directory, once more traced his finger down it until he had located Edge's number. This time it was the street-address given with it that interested him, though. "About ten minutes to get here," he murmured under his breath. He fished out one of his ubiquitous envelope-backs and jotted something on it. Then he folded it over small and stuck it back in his pocket.

He came out of the booth and moved back to the bar again.

"What time do you close up?" he asked the man behind the counter.

"Four o'clock, the usual time."

"About twenty minutes to go," Burgess murmured.

The place was emptying out by degrees. He stayed by himself at the far end of it. In ten minutes he looked at his watch again. Then he turned his head slowly and eyed the door. Nothing happened. No one came in. He packed a fist and swung it low toward the bar, under cover of his body, then pulled it short — as though his calculations had gone wrong, and he felt like taking it out on somebody.

The barman started putting out some of the lights. The last of the other customers had drifted out by now, there was no one at all in the place but Burgess. The barman came back toward him to give him the hint. "Care for a nightcap before I put the corks back in for the night?"

Burgess nodded. He took out a bill and put it into the barman's hand. "No change," he said.

"Gee, thanks," the barman beamed. Then he started to look down into his own palm.

"Don't look at it, just take it over to the register with you," Burgess said out of the corner of his mouth.

The barman went over to the register, stole a look of curiosity back toward him as he stood there before it.

Burgess got up and walked slowly toward the front entrance. He stood there a minute and buttoned up his coat tight. He shivered a little, as if he found it chilly-looking outside from where he was standing.

"Good-night," the barman called after him.

"Good-bye," Burgess answered. He had a feeling that that was the right

word to use. He pushed out into the eerie blackness of the street, pulled his hat down low, started to trudge away. It was now four o'clock in the morning. He wouldn't have taken even odds on his chances of seeing five roll around, like he'd given the barman at Mike's on the extra jigger.

Rubber whispered insidiously up alongside him before he'd moved half-a-dozen feet away, and a hooded car was there, slowly pacing him. A voice spoke from it. "Buddy, could we trouble you for a light?"

His breathing changed, but he didn't give any other sign of knowing what this was. He reached in his pocket, then turned aside and went over to it.

He still couldn't see anyone, it was like a coffin on wheels. They must have had the shades drawn. A hand reached out and took the matches, but they weren't used, the flare from inside never came.

"Say something, buddy," the voice urged.

"What d'you want me to say?"

"Just that, that'll do nicely." A second voice spoke from the depths of the car. "That's him. I know him by his voice. He's the one."

"Here's your matches back, buddy."

Burgess looked down at where the hand had come slightly forward through the door-gap again. "That's a gun you've got there," he remarked calmly.

"It says 'get in and make yourself comfortable.' "

A second door opened rearward to the first and he got in. Both doors closed tight and the wheels started to pick up pace.

It was pitch-black. He could feel someone on each side of him, but they were just formless masses of darkness, without faces or anything else. A voice spoke to his left. "You called up a certain party about a certain matter, a little earlier tonight, didn't you?"

"Every call is to a party, about a matter," Burgess parried.

"You don't have to be afraid, buddy. There's a nice umbrella in it for you. All we gotta do first is find out if you're a phony or on the up."

"Where we going to do that?" Burgess asked quietly.

"To a warehouse where they store liquor. Was you ever to a warehouse where they store liquor? It's very instructive."

"You'll frighten the guy," a voice on the other side of him remonstrated with mock solicitude.

"No, the guy isn't frightened," Burgess answered imperturbably. He had to quirk his neck to get the words out freely, but they didn't see that in the dark.

"Oh, the guy's brave, huh?" was the jeering reply.

Something white showed up in the blackness in front of him, and he instinctively shied away from it. "Just hold steady, buddy, this goes around your eyes." The nudge of a tubular gunmuzzle into the cleft between two of his ribs added a note of persuasion. A blindfold was pulled tight around him, fastened at the back of his head.

"What for? I can't see anything

even without it."

"Well, with it you can't see twice as good, that's what for."

The car ran up some sort of a trucking ramp, then gave off a hollow, echoing sound, as though it had entered some sort of a vast enclosed place. Then it stopped, the doors latched open, and he could hear them getting out.

"All right, buddy, end of the line. Down you come."

He missed the car-step, and flopped inertly against someone. He was shoved back, then steadied, gripped by both arms, and hustled forward, to the accompaniment of a small battery of other footfalls all around him, striking on wooden planking. "You stay out there with the car, Muggsy," a voice ordered. The rest kept going.

Presently it spoke again. "Are we all in? Turn on some lights." A thin line of yellow showed up along the bottom of Burgess' blindfold. "Take the blinkers off him."

The bandage was whipped off. He blinked helplessly a couple of times before he could get his eyes into focus. He was in some sort of a huge cavernous place, its ceiling so high it was completely out of sight in the gloom. A shaded light brooded down on the floor, and on the four men around him, none of whom he had ever seen before. There was a shadowy background of packing cases dimly discernible, with aisles left through them here and there.

Four pairs of eyes stared at him with flinty inflexibility. One of their owners spoke at last. "Now there's four of us here. You say you saw two guys come into Mike's Tavern and shoot him, yesterday morning. All right, pick out the two you say you saw."

He knew his life depended on the answer. "Give me a minute's time," he stalled. "Give my eyes a chance to get used to the light. I had a couple drinks back there, and I want to be sure what I'm doing."

"Yeah," the spokesman echoed mordantly. "You want to be sure."

Burgess stared hard at the first one, on his left. The man stared back at him, evil eyed and granite-faced. He passed on to the next, stared at him. The man tried to stare back. His jaw twitched a little. His eyes dropped momentarily, then he recovered, went ahead staring.

"Come on," somebody said. "Either you do know or you don't!"

"I do know. I want to figure out what it's best for me to say."

The fourth man took out a sheaf of bills, left them lying in front of him on a corner of the packing case, without saying a word. There must have been at least a thousand dollars' worth in the crumpled mass.

Burgess took a deep breath. "The two guys I saw come into Mike's Tavern and shoot Mike Oliver were you, the second guy, and you, the fourth," he said quietly.

Nothing happened for a minute. Then the man who had produced the money emitted a soft sigh of regret in the silence. He smiled a little with it. "That was the wrong answer."

"You two were the ones that were there, what's wrong about it?"

"Sure we were. And that's why it's the wrong answer. If you'd picked the wrong two, we'd have known you were guessing. You would have probably walked out of here alive. You picked the right two, so we know now you were really there. Too bad, but you'll have to take your five hundred in capsule form now."

A gun came up in his hand. "Move him out a little," he instructed. "It's liable to go into one of the cases, and that's my best four-star stock you've got him standing in front of."

Two of them grabbed Burgess each by an arm and started to swing him out further into the aisle.

"And put that down yourself," an authoritative voice suddenly bellowed from further back in the shadows, "or it's liable to go into something else besides that!"

Edge swung around to face in the new direction, and hitched the gun up to shoot. The crash, however, came from the other end of the target-line, and he went slapping back into one of the cases with a wooden thud.

Inspector Lyons came forward, wallowing through the haze of his own shot. "You should always do as you're told the first time," he said grimly, "when it's a police order." He plucked the gun out of his hand, and Edge went sidling down to the floor, leaving a thin red streak across the stenciled signs on the packing-cases that said: "Edge's Four-Star Bond."

There was a cop or detective standing at each of the four aisles converging on the open place where Burgess' execution had been slated to take place, blocking it off. The remaining three profited by the demonstration they had just been given. They obeyed the order the first time it was given, and showed their empty palms.

Lyons came over to where Burgess was hanging onto the edge of one of the cases by the backs of his elbows for support. "Are you O.K.?" he asked him.

"I'm all right," Burgess answered, mopping his forehead. "My legs are just kind of rubbery, that's all. Did you hear him? Were you close enough to hear him? You said if he convicted himself out of his own mouth —"

"I heard him, all right!" Lyons assured him. "And so did the whole squad I brought with me."

"Then that's all that matters. I guess I'll sit down now." Burgess let himself down to the floor, knees reared. "Give us a cigarette," he said limply. "I'm no hero."

"No?" answered the inspector dryly. "You just gave an imitation good enough to fool me."

Burgess struggled to his feet again. "I gambled heavy," he explained. "I didn't know if the bartender would take me seriously or not. I didn't want to phone you before anything happened, because I had a hunch you wouldn't pay any attention."

"Guess I wouldn't 've," Lyons admitted sheepishly.

"I couldn't talk to him across the bar, for all I knew they were watching me from outside. So I scribbled on the back of an envelope for him to call

you as soon as I left and tell you it was Edge, and that if I turned up croaked to blame it on him."

"He did better than that. He got so curious after reading what was on it that he followed you to the door and watched you go — with the lights out behind him, of course. He saw the car pick you up and he even got a look at its number. He phoned that in to me. I sent it right out on the radio and a prowl-car spotted it on the way and tailed it here. Then all we had to do later was come where they'd told us."

He went over and supervised the removal of Edge, prone on a stretcher, came back again.

"Is he dead?" Burgess asked.

"Naw. He'll live to cost the state money on its electric bill. He thinks he's dying, though, and he just admitted he did it, a second time over. Then in a couple days he'll go into the second stage they all pass through, retract it again. That's all right, we're used to that. Let's get back now; I want to sapolio the rest of these guys."

On the way over to headquarters he remarked: "Those must have been a tough few minutes there, when they put you to the test."

"Sure they were, but not in the way you think. The tough part was to guess the right 'wrong answer,' as he put it. I knew I could save my skin by guessing wrong, but that wasn't what I was after. I'd never seen any of the four of them before. What I was scared of was picking the two that hadn't been there, and getting let off instead of being given the works.

"You see how it was worked now, don't you?" he went on. "It was a case of two birds with one stone. Or I guess you should say, one bar-glass. Edge had a long-standing grudge against Hastings. And a more recent and even hotter one against Mike Oliver for daring to stand up to his liquor-distributing ring and refusing to be hijacked by it any more. So he figured one murder should be enough to take care of the both. He had one of his men, with grease on his hand, put on a souse-act and follow Hastings into a bar the night before. He shook hands with him, and Hastings printed his own tips all over the glass he was using, without knowing it. Then the would-be souse swiped it and brought it to Edge, probably wrapped up in a cloth or something. Edge took it in to Mike's with him, and switched glasses, left it behind there to frame Hastings, and carried his own out and threw it away. The guy with him wiped his own off clean before they left, but that one wasn't touched. The gun, I suppose, was taken apart and scattered all over the landscape. I tried to tell you about an extra glass turning up in the stock at the Tavern, but you wouldn't listen —"

Afterwards, back at his own office, the preliminary dry-cleaning of the suspects concluded for the time being, Lyons said to him: "The mechanics of the thing is clear enough, the switch of glasses and all that, but there's one thing I'd like to know. One thing that we missed up on and that you evidently didn't. What was it first started you off thinking the glass was

a plant, and there was something phony about the whole set-up? There must have been something you caught that we didn't."

"That was a small thing. I didn't even bother mentioning it to you, because I was sure you'd seen it for yourselves. Edge, as often happens in such cases, in spite of the fact that he's dealt in liquor all his life and made all his money out of it, is not a whiskey-drinker himself, never touches it. So he went in there and ordered. He made one little slip. He didn't think it mattered what that last order was, that death-order. He already had Hastings' glass in his pocket, ready to leave behind him there. And he was taking his own out with him, no one would ever see it. So he must have figured what difference did it make whether he ordered champagne or vodka or whatever it was? So habit reasserted itself, and he ordered beer. And the monkey with him, acting under the sort of auto-suggestion that often crops up at such times, seconded his order. But Mike Oliver had a peculiar habit of insisting on payment first, his own barman told me that, and he beat the bullets into the cash-register with the coins they'd given him. The evidence was still there when I came into the place, half an hour later. And to make sure I wasn't mistaken, I looked it up on your own police photographs and I saw it over again. There was a whiskey-jigger and a beer-glass standing on the counter, and yet the indicator over the cash-box said '20¢.' You can't break that down into a whiskey and a beer. There's no whiskey in town that sells for ten cents a slug. Even arguing that the beer was just a chaser for the whiskey — and it wasn't, because they were both on an even line at the edge of the bar, and two customers' width away from one another — the price for the cheapest brand that Oliver's place carried in stock would have been twenty-five cents for one shot."

Lyons drummed his fingers on his desk. "Do you know of a good optician?" he said. "There's a few of the men detailed to me I'm thinking of sending around to one. And it wouldn't hurt for me to go myself."

He had it all lined up ahead of him, like a flight of steps. He'd just been given a by-line over his piece, so that was one step accomplished. The rest were there waiting. Next a feature of his own. Then the city desk. Then managing ed —

"Burgess!"

He bounced all the way down the steps, and there he was at the bottom again.

"Suppose you haul your petrified person out of here and earn the fifty bucks blackmail you're shaking us down for every week! Now to be more specific, I understand there's a woman on a window-ledge over on Franklin Street, threatening to jump —"

Burgess slammed the door on the stentorian tirade. "Well, at least I got a fifteen-buck raise out of it," he grumbled.

Why should an old recluse of a man, seventy-seven years of age, who has lived like a bishop all his life and who connotes incredibly decent and decaying clubs, suddenly start sneaking out of his house like an adolescent and trot off to music-halls, all up and down England, watching performance after performance of a beautiful Egyptian hip-waggler? The simple and obvious explanation was that Dr. Tiffin had fallen head over heels in love with a vaudeville dancer . . .

In "The Meaning of the Act" you will meet as strange an assortment of characters as Margery Allingham has ever put together in a short story: a famous Egyptologist; a designer of stage sets; an Exotic Terpsichore of the Desert; a whizz-boy (i.e., pickpocket); a charming damsel of bone and brain; a Captain Smith whose name obviously was not Smith; and Mr. Albert Campion who might be called a criminological catalyst, although Superintendent Oates preferred to call him Mr. Smarty.

THE MEANING OF THE ACT

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

TRIVIAL, vulgar, pettifogging, puerile, footling. At times even dirty," said Lance Feering, taking up his glass. "I don't want to be hypercritical, old boy, but that's how I see this life of yours. It repels me. My stomach turns at it. I gag. . . . You see what I mean?"

"The light is filtering through," agreed Mr. Albert Campion affably, as he flattened himself against the ornate tiles behind him. "Criminology does not appeal to you tonight."

They were in the famous bar of the Pantheon Hall of Varieties, more affectionately known as the Old Sobriety, in Rupert Street. It was almost the last of the great music-halls and, as usual, the small circular room with its wide window giving on to the auditorium was crowded. Lance was in form. He was demanding a considerable favor from his old friend and, since such was his temperament, the experience was making him truculent.

"Of course you batten on it, I know," he continued vigorously. "It's a mania with you. It's got into your blood like a bacillus. That's why I asked you to come along tonight to this ungodly hole." He paused. "I thought you'd like it," he added, glancing anxiously under his thick brows at the tall thin figure beside him.

"Quite," murmured Mr. Campion, bending forward to look through the window across the dark stalls to the boxes beyond. "He's still sitting up there."

"So I should hope. There's still a turn to go before the lady comes on, isn't there?" Lance set down his glass hastily and took a look himself.

"Good lord, we don't want to lose him. Shall we go back?"

"No, I don't think so." His companion surveyed the small bent figure in the second tier box. "He's all right. He seems to be enjoying himself."

"That's what I mean. That's why the whole thing is so repellent." Lance sounded querulous. "Why shouldn't he have a night or two on the tiles if he wants to? I shouldn't have dreamed of stalking the poor old badger if Marguerite hadn't been so insistent and so frightened. You haven't met Marguerite, have you?"

"His daughter?"

"Yes." Lance was unusually laconic. He sighed. "A beautiful woman frightened out of her wits can be very demoralising. She's got bone, Campion, exquisite bone."

"I thought you designed stage sets?" remarked Mr. Campion unsympathetically. "Still, we won't go into that. Why is this poor bony female afraid?"

"Well, he's a distinguished bird, you know. He's a recluse, a famous man, an Egyptologist of world renown; he's lived like a bishop all his life, and now he's started sneaking out of the house like an adolescent and trotting off to music-halls alone, all up and down the country, performance after performance. She thinks he's either up to something or nuts. And I said 'bone,' not 'bony.' It's a question of design.

"Dr. Clement Tiffin," murmured Campion. "He's everything you say, and yet why should that name make me think of crossword puzzles?"

"It shouldn't." Lance was irritated. "It should make you think of pyramids, incredibly decent and decaying clubs, and the pavilion at Lord's. Anyway, don't go deducing *who* he is; we know that. I've got you along here to help me find out what he's up to. I mean, does the poor girl call in an alienist, or resign herself to the fact that the poor old boy at the age of seventy-seven has fallen for a beautiful Egyptian hip-waggler?"

Mr. Campion eyed him over the rim of his glasses.

"Is that your only problem?" he said. "Because, believe me, if you've had the impudence to get me out here simply for that . . ."

"Well, not quite," Lance admitted hastily. "Marguerite certainly isn't a fool, and she's got something pretty serious on her mind. I couldn't get much out of her, but she seems to think that the old man is in some sort of danger."

"Spiritual or bang-on-the-head?"

"Oh, physical. No dream stuff. I told you Marguerite's got brains."

"Brains and bone," said Campion. "Dear me, and a very fine seat on a horse, too, I shouldn't be surprised."

"I rather resent that, old boy." Lance was not smiling, and Campion, who knew him so well that his mercurial temperament was not the mystery it might well have been, suddenly perceived the situation. Lance was indulging in a phase of "utter decency" and, since he invariably took color from the people who happened to be

interesting him at the moment, it followed as the night the day, that the Tiffins were of a very definite class and type.

"Marguerite is not the sort of girl who'd come roaring round after Papa herself?" he suggested.

"Good heavens, no!" said Lance, scandalized.

"Ah," murmured Campion.

Lance was silent for a moment or so and finally decided to unbend.

"If you only knew old Tiffin, you'd see how remarkable it all is," he said. "He's so very much the — er — the top drawer, if you'll forgive the phrase. He's got a great brain, too. The idea of him sneaking out to see this blessed woman dance time after time in the most revolting little halls all over the place is incredible. He's not that sort of chap."

He looked round the pleasant dirty little bar as if he had never seen it before, and Campion watched him with his eyes dancing behind his spectacles.

"'Ullo, Bert."

The salutation rang out across the room and, as soon as he heard the familiar cracked Cockney, Campion became aware of an impending social crisis.

"Cassy," he said.

"Wot O! Cor, this is a bit of all right. 'Ow are yer, chum?"

The crowd heaved and billowed, and a figure emerged from it. He landed squarely before them, his small rodent's face alight with bonhomie and gin. He was a little man, narrow-chested and narrow-faced, with slit eyes and a long, slender nose with a twitch to it. Sartorially he was quite remarkable, for he wore a vivid blue suit. His mind seemed to be running on clothes also, for he flicked Campion's shirt front with a grubby thumbnail.

"Washington's come 'ome, I see," he said. "Come and 'ave one. 'Oo's yer pal?"

Campion performed the introduction with misgiving.

"Lance, this is Mr. Cassy Wild, a very old friend of mine," he said. "Cassy, this is Mr. Lancelot Feering, a celebrity."

If the final description was intended as a warning, Cassy was in no mood to take it.

"Sir Lancelot. 'Strewth, that's a moniker to go to bed with," he said cheerfully. "Named after an 'orse, mate? No offense meant and none took, I 'ope. What is 'e, Bert? A dick?"

Lance was eyeing him coldly. "I'm afraid I don't follow you," he said with the half apologetic smile which contains the deadliest insult.

"And that is lucky," cut in Campion, with haste and emphasis, as he trod delicately on one of Mr. Wild's long narrow shoes.

"Oh, I see." The newcomer cocked an intelligent eye at his friend and a long and meaning look was exchanged between them.

"How's business?" inquired Campion.

A row of abominable teeth appeared for an instant across the pallid waste of Mr. Wild's ignoble face.

"Not so bad," he said. "I caught a shice and did a carpet in the spring. Had to come to town without a coal. But a denar here and a denar there soon mounts up, you know, and I'm in clover. By the way, this is my monkery, so who's your party?"

"Myself, my friend, and our punter is an elderly and distinguished finger in Box B," replied Campion without hesitation.

"Okay, Bert." Mr. Wild shook hands effusively. "See you some other time. So long. It's a nice show. The palone in the Didikye turn is a knock-out. Wot 'o."

Lance conducted Campion back to their seats in silence.

"That was rather an extraordinary thing to do, wasn't it?" he muttered as they sat down. "Surely there was no need to mention Dr. Tiffin to your repulsive friend, was there?"

"Didn't you take to Cassy?" Campion seemed surprised. "He's a dear chap. As a matter of fact, that was most considerate of him. This is his district, as he told us, and he did not want to embarrass any friend of mine with his professional attentions. Very thoughtful. Cassy has gentlemanly instincts, if they are not sartorially expressed."

"Professional . . . ?" Lance twisted round in his seat. "D'you mean to say that fellow was a thief?"

"A whizz-boy," said Campion modestly, "i.e., pickpocket. The most skilful practitioner in the country. Don't raise your voice, old man. Listen to the pretty accordion player."

"Yes, but I say, Campion . . ." Lance was positively blushing. "You do know some most amazing people. Good lord!"

"Marguerite wouldn't like him?" suggested Campion, and Lance did not deign to reply. He sat glowering, ill at ease and apprehensive, while every now and again he glanced up at the dark box above them where the bent figure of a little old man sat alone, watching the glittering stage with idle introspective eyes.

Campion lit a match to look at his programme.

"Charmian, Exotic Dancer of the Desert," he read softly. "She's due any minute now. Cassy said she was a knock-out, although he thought she was a gypsy. Still, he's no connoisseur. I wonder. . . . Why *does* that name Tiffin remind me of crosswords?"

"It doesn't. Don't keep saying that. You're getting on my nerves." Lance stirred uneasily in his chair. "Thank heaven this chap's finishing. Here we are; number eight at last."

The dusty red curtain had descended with a sweep of tarnished tassel and fringe, and the accordion player was taking his call. The old man in the box drew back a little and raised his white head expectantly. The orchestra played a fanfare and the curtain rose again, disclosing a semidarkened stage.

Gradually the light grew stronger, and Campion, who had expected the usual pseudo-Eastern eurythmics, sat up. The dancer was standing in the center of the stage, her arms at her

sides. She was dressed in a long white tunic and an Egyptian headdress and collar. She was not particularly beautiful, and the profile, outlined against the dark hangings behind her, was strong rather than lovely. He glanced up at the box.

Dr. Tiffin had moved forward and the light from the stage caught his face. There was something unexpected in his expression, a sternness, almost a dislike, and Campion, seeing it, suddenly remembered why his name had reminded him so strongly of crossword puzzles. His eyebrows rose and his lips pursed to a soundless whistle as he turned back to the stage.

The girl who was billed as "Charmian" was no ordinary dancer. There was even something of the old-fashioned contortionist in her performance, yet she contrived to make her slow, unnatural movements peculiarly graceful, and, what was far more extraordinary, peculiarly Egyptian, or, more specifically, ancient Egyptian.

Campion sat with his eyes fixed upon her, and again and again the rows of painted figures on the mummy cases in the British Museum leapt to his mind. The dance continued to slow music, and Charmian held her audience. The strange thing about her was her lack of facial movement. Throughout her turn she might have been wearing a mask, yet her powers of expression were amazing. She danced with an urgency of meaning which was unmistakable, and it seemed to be this dumb striving towards communication which reached out over the footlights and forced attention.

The clientele of the Old Sobriety was an exacting audience, and it could scarcely be called highbrow, yet it sat up and watched, fascinated.

Lance appeared to be spellbound. He did not stir throughout the turn, but remained rigid, his dark eyes round and surprised.

"Good lord," he said, when at length the curtain descended upon her. "Good lord, how incredible! She's like a blessed papyrus. Hallo, what's the matter with you?"

Campion said nothing, but there was a startled expression on his face, and his eyes were raised to Box B. Lance followed his glance and an exclamation escaped him.

"Gone," he said disgustedly. "Slipped round the back, I suppose, while we were gaping at his girl friend. Well, I don't altogether blame him for his enthusiasm. She's an experience to watch."

"Be quiet." Campion was on his feet. "Come on," he murmured, and there was so much anxiety in his voice that the painter rose and followed him without a word.

Lance did not catch up with him as he hurried through the auditorium, and only reached his side as he sprinted down the dusty corridor behind the circle.

"I say, you can't butt in on him," he protested in a flurry. "He's not that kind of old boy. We can't, Campion. Marguerite would never forgive me."

Campion flung off his restraining hand and opened the door of the box.

Dr. Tiffin lay on the floor beside the chair from which he had fallen. He had crumpled up and slipped forward, and there was a thin dark streak among his white hairs.

They got him out of the theatre and into a taxi. It was not altogether a simple matter, for the old man was still unconscious, but Lance was convinced that the absence of any scandal was of paramount importance, and Campion, for entirely different reasons, was disposed to agree.

"We'll get him home first and then find his own doctor," he said. "He's all right, I think. His heart is sound, and there's no fracture. He'll be all right in a day or so."

"I don't understand it." Lance was white with apprehension. "When Marguerite said 'danger' I thought she was exaggerating. This is fantastic. He's only a fan of the dancer's, as far as I know. No one can mind him looking at her, surely, however attentive he is."

Campion glanced up from his patient, whom he was supporting in the back of the cab.

"That rather depends," he said slowly. "Look here, Lance, I fancy we're on dangerous ground. I think you may just have to wipe this incident clean out of your mind. Forget it. Pretend it didn't happen."

"What do you mean?"

Campion did not reply. Dr. Tiffin had begun to stir, and his voice, thick and slurred, startled them both. At first the muttered words were indistinguishable, but as they leaned forward anxiously a single phrase came out clearly in the darkness.

"*Thine uncle bears thee gifts*," said the Egyptologist distinctly. He repeated it again, and the extraordinary words ceased to be ludicrous in that thin pedantic voice. "*Thine uncle bears thee gifts.*"

"What?" Lance was shocked into the question. "What did you say, sir? What gifts?"

The old man did not answer. His head had fallen forward and he went off into incoherent mutterings once more.

"Did you hear that, Campion?" Lance's own voice rose to a squeak. "It's turned his brain. What an extraordinary thing to say. 'Thine uncle . . .'"

"Hush," said Campion gently. "Hush, old boy. Forget it. Here we are. Help me get him into the house."

Miss Marguerite Tiffin turned out to be a pleasant surprise to Campion. Lance's reactions had led him to expect, if not the worst, something very near it, but he found, instead of the academic snob he had envisaged, a very sensible and charming young woman with a snub nose and a quick, shy smile. Moreover, for a girl who was not used to having her Papa brought home on a shutter, she was remarkably cool and quick on the uptake. It was only when the old man was safely in bed with his doctor in attendance that she betrayed any sign of strain.

"I'm tremendously grateful to you, Lance," she said, "but you do see now

that I was right to interfere?"

"Good lord, yes." Lance was holding her hand far too long, and Campion was inclined to sympathize with him. "All the same I'm still in the dark. The whole thing bewilders me. It seems to me to be an entirely meaningless attack on an inoffensive old gentleman who wasn't doing anyone any harm."

Marguerite hesitated. She had round grey eyes, and at the moment they were intensely serious.

"Lance," she said slowly, "do you think you could go on thinking that, and then — then forget the whole thing utterly? Never mention it to daddy or to anyone else. I can rely on you to do that, can't I, Mr. Campion?"

"Yes," said Campion gravely. "Yes, I think you can."

Lance came away unwillingly after lengthy farewells.

"I do wish you wouldn't be so darned mysterious," he grumbled, as they walked out of Bedford Square together. "I'll do anything Marguerite asks me within reason, of course, but why the hush-hush? What's the matter with the old man? Has he got some well-known form of bats-in-the-belfry which I've not heard about? What was all that about his uncle? Damn it, are you or am I?"

Campion hailed a cab, but Lance drew back.

"Now where are we going?" he asked.

"Back to my flat."

"What for?"

"Drink," said Campion. "If you must know, drinks, ginger biscuits, and I should rather think a visitor."

By midnight Lance was beside himself with irritation.

"An impossible evening," he declared. "What infuriates me is your blessed calm. Hang it, I invited you to help me follow old Tiffin, and what happens? First you introduce me to a little sneak-thief who seems to regard you as some sort of favorite relative, then we find Tiffin biffed over the head and we take him home, where Marguerite behaves as though she was taking in the laundry and you back her up in treating the entire thing as nothing to write home about. Finally, we sit up here waiting for a caller. Whom do you expect?"

Campion pushed the decanter towards him.

"I haven't the faintest idea," he said truthfully.

"You're potty." The childish accusation seemed to relieve the artist and he refilled his glass. "You haven't invited anyone and you don't know who is coming, but you've just got a psychic feeling that a visitor is imminent. Well, if I've got to sit up all night I may as well make something out of it. I'll lay you a hundred to one in shillings . . ."

He broke off abruptly. Out in the hall the electric bell had begun to ring authoritatively. An instant later Campion's man admitted without ceremony Superintendent Stanislaus Oates and a companion, and closed the door after them.

The two men stood on the threshold

looking tall and official in the brightly lit room, and Campion rose to greet his old friend. The superintendent was cool. He was not hostile, but there was a formality in his manner which was not customary. After his first greeting he introduced the stranger with warning deference.

"This is Captain Smith, Mr. Campion," he said severely. "He'd like a few words with you and Mr. Feering about your activities tonight, if you don't mind. No, thank you, we won't drink."

The little company sat down stiffly. Captain Smith was a restraining influence. He was a lean, brown man with a dry precision of manner which enhanced the natural austerity of his personality. The one obvious fact about him was that his name was not Smith and that his rank was understated. Lance, who fancied himself as a student of faces, was startled by the impersonal penetration of his blue eyes. He glanced at Campion and was relieved to see that, although grave, he did not seem surprised.

"I rather expected a visit from the police," Campion remarked to Oates. "You've seen Dr. Tiffin, I suppose?"

"Yes." Captain Smith answered quietly, before the superintendent could speak. "Will you explain exactly why you went to the Pantheon Music-hall tonight, and why you were so peculiarly fortunate as to have been on the spot to render assistance as soon as it was needed?"

"Mr. Feering can explain that better than I can," Campion was beginning, when a second ring at the bell outside jolted everybody. No one spoke, and the two visitors turned slowly in their chairs to watch the door.

The manservant was some time in coming, and when at last he did appear he spoke dubiously.

"Mr. Cassy Wild to see you, sir," he said.

Lance stiffened. As an addition to this already somewhat sticky party the ebullient Cassy did not appeal to him. The same notion appeared to have occurred to Campion, he was relieved to see.

"Oh, ask him to wait," he said hastily. "Put him in the study."

"Very good, sir." As the man withdrew, Captain Smith swung round on Campion.

"A friend?"

"Yes. A very old one."

"That's all right, sir." The superintendent spoke deferentially. His grey face was impassive, but there was the hint of a twitch at the corners of his mouth. "I know him."

"I see. Then we'll go on. You were on the point of giving me an explanation, Mr. Feering."

Lance told his story frankly. He was a friend of Marguerite's, and she had confided to him that she was alarmed by her father's new habit of going off by himself after a lifetime of regular and studious habits. She had discovered that he had made a habit of watching every performance given by the dancer, Charmian, and that in order to do this he followed her all

round the country, sometimes to the most disreputable little halls. To satisfy Marguerite, Lance had gone to the Pantheon to see the dancer for himself and to watch the old man's reactions to her. Since he did not feel like going alone, he asked his friend Mr. Campion to accompany him.

Captain Smith listened to the recital with a perfectly impassive face, and when it was over he turned to Campion.

"Perhaps you would describe the incident as you saw it? Please don't omit anything."

Campion told the story of finding the old man half unconscious in the box, and Lance corroborated it.

"After the turn we looked up and could not see him in the box, so we went to investigate. We found he was hurt and did what we could," he repeated.

"You saw no one else in or near the box?"

"No."

"You're quite sure of that? No one at all?"

"No one," said Campion. "Nor," he continued firmly, "did I see him speak to anyone at all during the whole time that I was in the hall. He was entirely alone throughout the performance. Whoever attacked him must have opened the door of the box during Charmian's act, delivered the blow and left immediately. Nothing was touched. His pockets were not rifled. It was a personal attack. Someone meant to put him out and no one but him."

Captain Smith's heavy-lidded eyes flickered and he looked at Campion steadily.

"An attendant?" he suggested.

"No," said Campion decisively. "No, I don't think so. He was sitting up there in the box throughout the entire show, you see. Anyone could have noticed him. I don't see that it need have been an attendant. Anyone was at liberty to walk down that corridor. It might have been anyone in the entire audience."

"That's the devil of it," murmured Captain Smith, and for the first time a smile appeared upon his face. "Well, thank you very much for putting up with this intrusion. I shan't bother you either any more tonight, Superintendent."

"Very well, sir." Oates took the dismissal respectfully and rose as the younger man took his leave.

After he had gone the atmosphere seemed a little easier, and Campion had just persuaded Oates to take a nightcap when the manservant reappeared.

"It's that Mr. Wild, sir," he was beginning, but broke off abruptly when he saw Oates. "I beg your pardon, sir. I heard the door and I thought both the gentlemen had gone."

"In a moment," said the superintendent, who was thawing visibly. "I'll be gone in a moment. Let him cool his heels. I'm fond of you, Campion," he continued as the man went out, "and there's a lot I'd do for you, but some of your pals are beyond me. I just couldn't bring myself to take a

drink with Cassy Wild."

Campion shook his head. "You don't appreciate him," he said regretfully. "You're too conservative. You expect everyone to have the same virtues. Cassy has *unusual* virtues. They are quite as numerous, if not more so, than most people's, but they're different."

"Very likely," Oates observed without enthusiasm, "but I'd want my pockets sewed up and my shirt padlocked to my collar before I went for a walk with him. Still, I didn't come up here to talk about Cassy. It was a pity you couldn't give the captain what he was after. You might have made yourself really useful for once. However, if you saw no one you saw no one; that's all there is to it."

Lance frowned. "I seem to be out of this altogether," he said bitterly. "The entire business is getting more and more bewildering. Who was that chap Smith, anyway?"

The superintendent coughed. "He's a very important officer, sir. I don't think we'll discuss him, if you don't mind. Just keep the whole matter under your hat, if you will. It was a chance in a thousand and it got missed. That's the long and the short of it. It can't be helped."

He paused and glanced at Campion with a sly smile. No one spoke, and the superintendent's grin widened in spite of himself.

"I ought not to laugh," he said, "but I can't help it. It's not often Mr. Smarty gets himself into something that he doesn't understand. Right under his nose, it was, and he couldn't see it for looking."

Campion did not smile. He lay back in his chair, his eyes half closed behind his spectacles. Presently he took them off and sat blinking at the policeman.

"Smith's a newcomer in the Special Branch, isn't he?" he said.

Oates choked, and his thin face grew a dusky red.

"Who said anything about the Special Branch?" he protested. "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't understand you at all. It's time I went home. It must be one in the morning."

Campion let him rise without demur, but spoke again before he had reached his greatcoat.

"When I first heard Dr. Tiffin's name tonight it reminded me of crossword puzzles," he remarked. "I could not think of the connection until I happened to see his expression as he sat looking at that dancer. Then it came back to me. He was in Room 40 OB during the war, wasn't he?"

"What if he was?" Oates was flurried. "Campion, for goodness sake stay out of this. It's not your cup of tea. It's not mine either. As it happened, you couldn't help. Let it rest like that. I can't discuss it with you. I daren't. It's not our show."

"Quite so. All the same I find it interesting, and if I'm right I think I might be useful." Lance had never heard Campion so gently obstinate. "Sit down and listen to me. I'll tell you how my mind is working. I may

be shinning up a gum-tree, and if I am you can tell me so, politely and in official language. Now look here, this is how I see it. Dr. Tiffin happens to be a distinguished Egyptologist. His books on cuneiform and even earlier writings are famous. Also he was in Room 40 OB, the cipher decoding office, during the war. Those are two facts. Here are two more. Tonight I heard that he has suddenly started to visit every performance given by a certain dancer and during her turn this evening he was knocked out, presumably by someone who did not want him to see the whole of that dance. That gives me furiously to think."

"Don't." Oates' advice was brief but heartfelt. "Forget it." Campion sat up.

"I think I would," he said earnestly, "but I saw that girl dance, and I think Lance here said the most enlightening thing about her show. When it was over he turned to me and said, 'She's like a papyrus.' She wasn't, of course, but I saw what he meant. She *was* like some of that picture-writing on the mummy cases. Now do you see what I'm getting at? Suppose that long, slow procession of poses of hers was like writing, Oates? Suppose she danced some sort of limited message? It would have to be limited, of course, because it would be in a sign language, and sign languages are limited."

Oates was staring at him. Presently he swore softly.

"You're too bright," he said. "You'll blind yourself one of these days."

Campion laughed. "I thought so," he murmured. "It's fantastic, but not so fantastic that it couldn't be true . . . 'Thine uncle bears thee gifts.' "

The final words, uttered casually, had an astonishing effect on the superintendent. The blood receded from his face and his jaw dropped.

"Where the devil did you get hold of that?" he demanded.

"Overheard it. Nothing clever about that," Campion admitted modestly. "Dr. Tiffin was muttering it when we carried him home. That was the message, I suppose, or part of it. He must have been rather quicker on the uptake than his assailant expected. Quite an easy message, I should think. Most of the tombs have something of the sort among their lists of funeral offerings. The burning question, I take it, Oates, is . . . *whose* uncle?"

The superintendent did not reply. He seemed to be hovering on the verge of a confidence, and the soft knock on the door came as an unwelcome interruption. Campion sighed with exasperation.

"Oh, come in," he shouted.

The manservant entered with a dilapidated newspaper parcel on a silver tray.

"Mr. Wild has had to leave and wished me to give you this, sir," he said gravely. "I was to tell you he didn't mind waiting, but he took exception to the company you keep. I happened to let fall that the superintendent was here, sir."

"Blast his impudence!" said Oates,

laughing. "What's he sent you? The fried fish supper you were going to share?"

Campion took the parcel and laid it on the arm of his chair unopened.

"Isn't that the question?" he persisted, as the door closed. "Whose uncle?"

Oates shrugged his shoulders. "You know too much," he said. "You'll get yourself in the Tower. It's all right to muscle in on my job, but you get your fingers into the espionage machine and you'll get 'em bitten off."

"Espionage?" muttered Lance under his breath. "Spy hunting, by George!"

"Put it out of your mind, sir." Oates made the admonition firmly. "You can see exactly what's happened. That dancer has been under observation by our people for months. No one at all suspicious seemed to have access to her, and they could never get the link between her and an espionage system which must exist. Then it occurred to someone at Headquarters that she was transmitting instructions in this peculiar way through her dancing. Dr. Tiffin tried to decode the messages and I think he had been very successful, but the thing he couldn't tell, of course, was who else besides himself in each audience understood what she was saying, and that was the vital thing. That was what our people needed to know. Tonight there might have been a chance of finding out. No one thought the old gentleman might be attacked, although his interest in the lady must have looked highly suspicious to anybody in the know. If such a thing had been foreseen, he'd have been watched and we'd have found out something. Whoever attacked Dr. Tiffin is the key man, you see. He's probably living quietly over here under his own name like a respectable citizen."

"I still don't quite follow," said Lance frankly. "What would they do if they found him? Arrest him?"

"Arrest him?" Oates seemed scandalized. "Oh, no sir, foreign agents are never arrested. They're watched. They're even supplied with certain fancy information if they're mugs enough to take it. No, no, he'd have been followed. He would lead us to this 'uncle' who has the gifts, or the doings, whatever it is, and then *he* would be watched in his turn. Like that we'd uncover the entire network, you see. As I said, it was a chance in a thousand, but now it's gone. We'll never know who in all that audience was the other man who knew."

Campion nodded gloomily. "Yes," he said. "My hat, I wish I'd cottoned on to it a bit sooner." As he spoke he took up the newspaper packet and unwrapped it idly. An old brown leather wallet flopped on to his knees, and Oates laughed.

"Lumme," he said, "Cassy's brought you a bone! I'll have to pull you in one of these days, Campion. You'll get into trouble, mixing with scum like that. What *is* the explanation of that, may I ask? It looks darned fishy to me, I don't mind telling you."

"I haven't the faintest idea." Campion seemed surprised himself, and he bent down to retrieve a sheet of his own notepaper from the library desk which had fallen to the ground with the wrapping.

"Cassy's a dear chap, but he can't write," he observed as he glanced at the dreadful hieroglyphics spread out before him. " 'Strewth!"

The final word was forced from him and he sprang up, the wallet clasped in his hand.

"Oates," he said unsteadily, "read that."

Lance and the superintendent read the message together. Some of the slang was beyond the artist, but the general meaning was clear.

"Dear old sport," it ran. "Hoping this finds you as it leaves me, dry as a bone. I kept an eye on your punter in Box B partly because I wondered what you was up to I admit that. Well, I took sights of the finger who sloshed him. I did not interfere because I did not want to be mixt up in anything thank you, specially there, but I thought you'd like a memento of him so I took his number which I give you gratis. I have not took above ten bob from it, may I die if I lie, but the rest will give you the dope on him and where to find him. I wouldn't do this for anyone but an old pal, Bert, as you know, but you've always bin one to me. Give old Oates a wish on the kisser from me. Ta ta. You know who. C. Wild."

Oates read the note through twice without speaking. Words seemed to have failed him. Finally he took the wallet which Campion held out to him, and his hand shook a little as he opened it and spread out its contents upon the coffee table. Some minutes later he looked up, and his expression was wondering.

"His name and address on two envelopes, a prescription from his doctor, and his driving license," he said. "Cassy's word might not jail a man, but it'll get this one watched. He's in the bag. Campion, you frighten me. Something looks after you."

Campion took up Mr. Wild's note and put it carefully in his pocket.

"Care for my secret, Superintendent?" he inquired.

"I'd like your luck," said Oates. "Well, what is it? I'll buy it."

"Take a drink with anyone," said Mr. Campion, "and pick your pals where you find 'em."

Your Editor works in a fifteen-foot square room completely lined with bookshelves that start at the floor and touch the ceiling. Most of the shelves are ram-jam-full; piles of books lean Pisa-like on the floor, tables are heaped high, and when a visitor arrives, even the chairs have to be cleared.

Through this sanctum sanctorum pass hundreds and hundreds of manuscripts, in a never-ending stream. Most of the manuscripts are read in a large, red-leather easy chair, flanked on one side by a commodious smoking stand which serves as the private cemetery for the innumerable corpses of cigars, cigarets, and pipe dottle; on the other side is a heterogeneous accumulation of old magazines — Strand, Golden Book, Black Cat, bygone pulps; and surrounding the chair, in every direction the eye can dart, are the precious first editions that contain the best detective short stories written in the last 104 years.

It is in this atmosphere of blood-and-smoke that your Editor seeks those two thrills which are the reward of eternal reading — the discovery of a fine story by a new writer and the meeting of an old friend in a new exploit.

The first thrill is akin to that of "some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken." The second thrill is but a lesser "peak in Darien." But when the old friend is one who made his or her début under the Ellery Queen banner, the thrill is keen indeed.

Such an old friend is H. H. Holmes's Sister Mary Ursula, O.M.B. (Ordo Marthæ Bethaniæ) — the only nun detective, so far as your Editor is aware, in the history of the genre. Three years ago the first Sister Ursula story, "Coffin Corner," reached your Editor's desk in manuscript form; it was promptly purchased, not for EQMM, but for inclusion in the world's only "feminology" — THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES. *When Sister Ursula proved an instantaneous favorite with the fans, we asked Mr. Holmes to write another Sister Ursula story, this time especially for the readers of EQMM.*

"The Stripper" was worth waiting for. This tale of a maniac killer, a modern Jack the Ripper who murdered only when he was stark naked, evokes something akin to frisson d'horreur — *partly because of its dark, schizoid theme but even more because Mr. Holmes employs a technique that permits each reader to peer into the madman's brain and follow his thoughts during those strange moments when the color of things began to change and the killer's lust stepped over the borderline of sanity.*

Drop into your Editor's study again, Mr. Holmes — especially when your thoughts are troubled and your mood is dark . . .

THE STRIPPER

by H. H. HOLMES

He was called Jack the Stripper because the only witness who had seen him and lived (J. F. Flugelbach, 1463 N. Edgemont) had described the glint of moonlight on bare skin. The nickname was inevitable.

Mr. Flugelbach had stumbled upon the fourth of the murders, the one in the grounds of City College. He had not seen enough to be of any help to the police; but at least he had furnished a name for the killer heretofore known by such routine cognomens as "butcher," "werewolf," and "vampire."

The murders in themselves were enough to make a newspaper's fortune. They were frequent, bloody, and pointless, since neither theft nor rape was attempted. The murderer was no specialist, like the original Jack, but rather an eclectic, like Kürten the Düsseldorf Monster, who struck when the mood was on him and disregarded age and sex. This indiscriminate taste made better copy; the menace threatened not merely a certain class of unfortunates but every reader.

It was the nudity, however, and the nickname evolved from it, that made the cause truly celebrated. Feature writers dug up all the legends of naked murderers — Courvoisier of London, Durrant of San Francisco, Wallace of Liverpool, Borden of Fall River — and printed them as sober fact, explaining at length the advantages of avoiding the evidence of bloodstains.

When he read this explanation, he always smiled. It was plausible, but irrelevant. The real reason for nakedness was simply that it felt better that way. When the color of things began to change, his first impulse was to get rid of his clothing. He supposed that psychoanalysts could find some atavistic reason for that.

He felt the cold air on his naked body. He had never noticed that before. Noiselessly he pushed the door open and tiptoed into the study. His hand did not waver as he raised the knife.

The Stripper case was Lieutenant Marshall's baby, and he was going nuts. His condition was not helped by the constant allusions of his colleagues to the fact that his wife had once been a stripper of a more pleasurable variety. Six murders in three months, without a single profitable lead, had reduced him to a state where a lesser man might have gibbered, and sometimes he thought it would be simpler to be a lesser man.

He barked into phones nowadays. He hardly apologized when he realized that his caller was Sister Ursula, that surprising nun who had once planned to be a policewoman and who had extricated him from several extraordi-

nary cases. But that was just it; those had been extraordinary, freak locked-room problems, while this was the horrible epitome of ordinary, clueless, plotless murder. There was no room in the Stripper case for the talents of Sister Ursula.

He was in a hurry and her sentences hardly penetrated his mind until he caught the word "Stripper." Then he said sharply, "So? Backtrack please, Sister. I'm afraid I wasn't listening."

"He says," her quiet voice repeated, "that he thinks he knows who the Stripper is, but he hasn't enough proof. He'd like to talk to the police about it; and since he knows I know you, he asked me to arrange it, so that you wouldn't think him just a crank."

"Which," said Marshall, "he probably is. But to please you, Sister . . . What did you say his name is?"

"Flecker. Harvey Flecker. Professor of Latin at the University."

Marshall caught his breath. "Coincidence," he said flatly. "I'm on my way to see him now."

"Oh. Then he did get in touch with you himself?"

"Not with me," said Marshall. "With the Stripper."

"God rest his soul . . ." Sister Ursula murmured.

"So. I'm on my way now. If you could meet me there and bring his letter — "

"Lieutenant, I know our order is a singularly liberal one, but still I doubt if Reverend Mother —"

"You're a material witness," Marshall said authoritatively. "I'll send a car for you. And don't forget the letter."

Sister Ursula hung up and sighed. She had liked Professor Flecker, both for his scholarly wit and for his quiet kindliness. He was the only man who could hold his agnostic own with Father Pearson in disputatious sophistry, and he was also the man who had helped keep the Order's soup-kitchen open at the depth of the depression.

She took up her breviary and began to read the office for the dead while she waited for the car.

"It is obvious," Professor Lowe enunciated, "that the Stripper is one of the three of us."

Hugo Ellis said "Speak for yourself." His voice cracked a little, and he seemed even younger than he looked.

Professor de' Cassis said nothing. His huge hunchbacked body crouched in the corner and he mourned his friend.

"So?" said Lieutenant Marshall. "Go on, Professor."

"It was by pure chance," Professor Lowe continued, his lean face alight with logical satisfaction, "that the back door was latched last night. We have been leaving it unfastened for Mrs. Carey since she lost her key; but Flecker must have forgotten that fact and inadvertently reverted to habit. Ingress by the front door was impossible, since it was not only secured by a spring lock but also bolted from within. None of the windows shows any sign of external tampering. The murderer presumably counted upon

the back door to make plausible the entrance of an intruder; but Flecker had accidentally secured it, and that accident," he concluded impressively, "will strap the Tripper."

Hugo Ellis laughed, and then looked ashamed of himself.

Marshall laughed too. "Setting aside the Spoonerism, Professor, your statement of the conditions is flawless. This house was locked tight as a drum. Yes, the Stripper is one of the three of you." It wasn't amusing when Marshall said it.

Professor de' Cassis raised his despondent head. "But why?" His voice was guttural. "Why?"

Hugo Ellis said, "Why? With a madman?"

Professor Lowe lifted one finger as though emphasizing a point in a lecture. "Ah, but is this a madman's crime? There is the point. When the Stripper kills a stranger, yes, he is mad. When he kills a man with whom he lives . . . may he not be applying the technique of his madness to the purpose of his sanity?"

"It's an idea," Marshall admitted. "I can see where there's going to be some advantage in having a psychologist among the witnesses. But there's another witness I'm even more anxious to —" His face lit up as Sergeant Raglan came in. "She's here, Rags?"

"Yeah," said Raglan. "It's the sister. Holy smoke, Loot, does this mean this is gonna be another screwy one?"

Marshall had said *she* and Raglan had said *the sister*. These facts may serve as sufficient characterization of Sister Felicitas, who had accompanied her. They were always a pair, yet always spoken of in the singular. Now Sister Felicitas dozed in the corner where the hunchback had crouched, and Marshall read and reread the letter which seemed like the posthumous utterance of the Stripper's latest victim:

My dear Sister:

I have reason to fear that someone close to me is Jack the Stripper.

You know me, I trust, too well to think me a sensationalist striving to be a star witness. I have grounds for what I say. This individual, whom I shall for the moment call "Quasimodo" for reasons that might particularly appeal to you, first betrayed himself when I noticed a fleck of blood behind his ear — a trifle, but suggestive. Since then I have religiously observed his comings and goings, and found curious coincidences between the absence of Quasimodo and the presence elsewhere of the Stripper.

I have not a conclusive body of evidence, but I believe that I do have sufficient to bring to the attention of the authorities. I have heard you mention a Lieutenant Marshall who is a close friend of yours. If you will recommend me to him as a man whose word is to be taken seriously, I shall be deeply obliged.

I may, of course, be making a fool of myself with my suspicions

of Quasimodo, which is why I refrain from giving you his real name. But every man must do what is possible to rid this city *a negotio perambulante in tenebris.*

Yours respectfully,
Harvey Flecker

"He didn't have much to go on, did he?" Marshall observed. "But he was right, God help him. And he may have known more than he cared to trust to a letter. He must have slipped somehow and let Quasimodo see his suspicions. . . . What does that last phrase mean?"

"Lieutenant! And you an Oxford man!" exclaimed Sister Ursula.

"I can translate it. But what's its connotation?"

"It's from St. Jerome's Vulgate of the ninetieth psalm. The Douay version translates it literally: *of the business that walketh about in the dark;* but that doesn't convey the full horror of that nameless prowling *negotium.* It's one of the most terrible phrases I know, and perfect for the Stripper."

"Flecker was a Catholic?"

"No, he was a resolute agnostic, though I have always had hopes that Thomist philosophy would lead him into the Church. I almost think he refrained because his conversion would have left nothing to argue with Father Pearson about. But he was an excellent Church Latinist and knew the liturgy better than most Catholics."

"Do you understand what he means by Quasimodo?"

"I don't know. Allusiveness was typical of Professor Flecker; he delighted in British crossword puzzles, if you see what I mean. But I think I could guess more readily if he had not said that it might particularly appeal to me . . ."

"So? I can see at least two possibilities —"

"But before we try to decode the Professor's message, Lieutenant, tell me what you have learned here. All I know is that the poor man is dead, may he rest in peace."

Marshall told her. Four university teachers lived in this ancient (for Southern California) two-story house near the Campus. Mrs. Carey came in every day to clean for them and prepare dinner. When she arrived this morning at nine, Lowe and de'Cassis were eating breakfast and Hugo Ellis, the youngest of the group, was out mowing the lawn. They were not concerned over Flecker's absence. He often worked in the study till all hours and sometimes fell asleep there.

Mrs. Carey went about her work. Today was Tuesday, the day for changing the beds and getting the laundry ready. When she had finished that task, she dusted the living room and went on to the study.

The police did not yet have her story of the discovery. Her scream had summoned the others, who had at once called the police and, sensibly, canceled their classes and waited. When the police arrived, Mrs. Carey was still hysterical. The doctor had quieted her with a hypodermic, from which she had not yet revived.

Professor Flecker had had his throat cut and (Marshall skipped over this hastily) suffered certain other butcheries characteristic of the Stripper. The knife, an ordinary kitchen-knife, had been left by the body as usual. He had died instantly, at approximately one in the morning, when each of the other three men claimed to be asleep.

More evidence than that of the locked doors proved that the Stripper was an inmate of the house. He had kept his feet clear of the blood which bespattered the study, but he had still left a trail of small drops which revealed themselves to the minute police inspection — blood which had bathed his body and dripped off as he left his crime.

This trail led upstairs and into the bathroom, where it stopped. There were traces of watered blood in the bathtub and on one of the towels — Flecker's own.

"Towel?" said Sister Ursula. "But you said Mrs. Carey had made up the laundry bundle."

"She sends out only sheets and such —does the towels herself."

"Oh." The nun sounded disappointed.

"I know how you feel, Sister. You'd welcome a discrepancy anywhere, even in the laundry list. But that's the sum of our evidence. Three suspects, all with opportunity, none with an alibi. Absolutely even distribution of suspicion, and our only guidepost is the word *Quasimodo*. Do you know any of these three men?"

"I have never met them, Lieutenant, but I feel as though I knew them rather well from Professor Flecker's descriptions."

"Good. Let's see what you can reconstruct. First, Ruggiero de' Cassis, professor of mathematics, formerly of the University of Turin, voluntary exile since the early days of Fascism."

Sister Ursula said slowly, "He admired de' Cassis, not only for this first-rate mind, but because he seemed to have adjusted himself so satisfactorily to life despite his deformity. I remember he said once, 'De' Cassis has never known a woman, yet every day he looks on Beauty bare.'"

"On Beauty . . . ? Oh yes. Millay. *Euclid alone*. . . All right. Now Marvin Lowe, professor of psychology, native of Ohio, and from what I've seen of him a prime pedant. According to Flecker . . . ?"

"I think Professor Lowe amused him. He used to tell us the latest Spoonerisms; he swore that flocks of students graduated from the University believing that modern psychology rested on the researches of two men named Frung and Jeud. Once Lowe said that his favorite book was Max Beerbohm's *Happy Hypocrite;* Professor Flecker insisted that was because it was the only one he could be sure of pronouncing correctly."

"But as a man?"

"He never said much about Lowe personally; I don't think they were intimate. But I do recall his saying, 'Lowe, like all psychologists, is the physician of Greek proverb.'"

."Who was told to heal himself? Makes sense. That speech mannerism certainly points to something a psychiatrist could have fun with. All right. How about Hugo Ellis, instructor in mathematics, native of Los Angeles?"

"Mr. Ellis was a child prodigy, you know. Extraordinary mathematical feats. But he outgrew them, I almost think deliberately. He made himself into a normal young man. Now he is, I gather, a reasonably good young instructor — just run of the mill. An adult with the brilliance which he had as a child might be a great man. Professor Flecker turned the French proverb around to fit him: 'If youth could, if age knew . . .'"

"So. There they are. And which," Marshall asked, "is Quasimodo?"

"Quasimodo . . ." Sister Ursula repeated the word, and other words seemed to follow it automatically. "*Quasimodo geniti infantes . . .*" She paused and shuddered.

"What's the matter?"

"I think," she said softly, "I know. But like Professor Flecker, I fear making a fool of myself — and worse, I fear damning an innocent man. . . . Lieutenant, may I look through this house with you?"

He sat there staring at the other two and at the policeman watching them. The body was no longer in the next room, but the blood was. He had never before revisited the scene of the crime; that notion was the nonsense of legend. For that matter he had never known his victim.

He let his mind go back to last night. Only recently had he been willing to do this. At first it was something that must be kept apart, divided from his normal personality. But he was intelligent enough to realize the danger of that. It could produce a seriously schizoid personality. He might go mad. Better to attain complete integration, and that could be accomplished only by frank self-recognition.

It must be terrible to be mad.

"Well, where to first?" asked Marshall.

"I want to see the bedrooms," said Sister Ursula. "I want to see if Mrs. Carey changed the sheets."

"You doubt her story? But she's completely out of the — All right. Come on."

Lieutenant Marshall identified each room for her as they entered it. Harvey Flecker's bedroom by no means consorted with the neatness of his mind. It was a welter of papers and notes and hefty German works on Latin philology and puzzle books by Torquemada and Caliban and early missals and codices from the University library. The bed had been changed and the clean upper sheet was turned back. Harvey Flecker would never soil it.

Professor de' Cassis's room was in sharp contrast — a chaste monastic cubicle. His books — chiefly professional works, with a sampling of Leopardi and Carducci and other Italian poets and an Italian translation of

Thomas à Kempis — were neatly stacked in a case, and his papers were out of sight. The only ornaments in the room were a crucifix and a framed picture of a family group, in clothes of 1920.

Hugo Ellis's room was defiantly, almost parodistically the room of a normal, healthy college man, even to the University banner over the bed. He had carefully avoided both Flecker's chaos and de' Cassis's austerity; there was a precisely calculated normal litter of pipes and letters and pulp magazines. The pin-up girls seemed to be carrying normality too far, and Sister Ursula averted her eyes.

Each room had a clean upper sheet.

Professor Lowe's room would have seemed as normal as Ellis's, if less spectacularly so, if it were not for the inordinate quantity of books. Shelves covered all wall space that was not taken by door, window, or bed. Psychology, psychiatry, and criminology predominated; but there was a selection of poetry, humor, fiction for any mood.

Marshall took down William Roughead's *Twelve Scots Trials* and said, "Lucky devil! I've never so much as seen a copy of this before." He smiled at the argumentative pencilings in the margins. Then as he went to replace it, he saw through the gap that there was a second row of books behind. Paperbacks. He took one out and put it back hastily. "You wouldn't want to see that, Sister. But it might fit into that case we were proposing about repressions and word-distortions."

Sister Ursula seemed not to heed him. She was standing by the bed and said, "Come here."

Marshall came and looked at the freshly made bed.

Sister Ursula passed her hand over the mended but clean lower sheet. "Do you see?"

"See what?"

"The answer," she said.

Marshall frowned. "Look, Sister —"

"Lieutenant, your wife is one of the most efficient housekeepers I've ever known. I thought she had, to some extent, indoctrinated you. Think. Try to think with Leona's mind."

Marshall thought. Then his eyes narrowed and he said, "So . . ."

"It is fortunate," Sister Ursula said, "that the Order of Martha of Bethany specializes in housework."

Marshall went out and called downstairs. "Raglan! See if the laundry's been picked up from the back porch."

The Sergeant's voice came back. "It's gone, Loot. I thought there wasn't no harm —"

"Then get on the phone quick and tell them to hold it."

"But what laundry, Loot?"

Marshall muttered. Then he turned to Sister Ursula. "The men won't know of course, but we'll find a bill somewhere. Anyway, we won't need that till the preliminary hearing. We've got enough now to settle Quasimodo."

He heard the Lieutenant's question and repressed a startled gesture. He had not thought of that. But even if they traced the laundry, it would be valueless

as evidence without Mrs. Carey's testimony . . .

He saw at once what had to be done.

They had taken Mrs. Carey to the guest room, that small downstairs bedroom near the kitchen which must have been a maid's room when this was a large family house. There were still police posted outside the house, but only Raglan and the Lieutenant inside.

It was so simple. His mind, he told himself, had never been functioning more clearly. No nonsense about stripping this time; this was not for pleasure. Just be careful to avoid those crimson jets. . . .

The Sergeant wanted to know where he thought he was going. He told him.

Raglan grinned. "You should've raised your hand. A teacher like you ought to know that."

He went to the back porch toilet, opened and closed its door without going in. Then he went to the kitchen and took the second best knife. The best had been used last night.

It would not take a minute. Then he would be safe and later when the body was found what could they prove? The others had been out of the room too.

But as he touched the knife it began to happen. Something came from the blade up his arm and into his head. He was in a hurry, there was no time — but holding the knife, the color of things began to change.

He was half naked when Marshall found him.

Sister Ursula leaned against the jamb of the kitchen door. She felt sick. Marshall and Raglan were both strong men, but they needed help to subdue him. His face was contorted into an unrecognizable mask like a demon from a Japanese tragedy. She clutched the crucifix of the rosary that hung at her waist and murmured a prayer to the Archangel Michael. For it was not the physical strength of the man that frightened her, nor the glint of his knife, but the pure quality of incarnate evil that radiated from him and made the doctrine of possession a real terror.

As she finished her prayer, Marshall's fist connected with his jaw and he crumpled. So did Sister Ursula.

"I don't know what you think of me," Sister Ursula said as Marshall drove her home. (Sister Felicitas was dozing in the back seat.) "I'm afraid I couldn't ever have been a policewoman after all."

"You'll do," Marshall said. "And if you feel better now, I'd like to run over it with you. I've got to get my brilliant deductions straight for the press."

"The fresh air feels good. Go ahead."

"I've got the sheet business down pat, I think. In ordinary middle-class households you don't change both sheets every week; Leona never does, I remembered. You put on a clean upper sheet, and the old upper becomes the lower. The other three bedrooms each had one clean sheet — the upper. His had two — upper and lower; therefore his upper sheet had

been stained in some unusual way and had to be changed. The hasty bath, probably in the dark, had been careless, and there was some blood left to stain the sheet. Mrs. Carey wouldn't have thought anything of it at the time because she hadn't found the body yet. Right?"

"Perfect, Lieutenant."

"So. But now about Quasimodo . . . I still don't get it. He's the one it *couldn't* apply to. Either of the others —"

"Yes?"

"Well, who is Quasimodo? He's the Hunchback of Notre Dame. So it could mean the deformed de' Cassis. Who wrote Quasimodo? Victor Hugo. So it could be Hugo Ellis. But it wasn't either; and how in heaven's name could it mean Professor Lowe?"

"Remember, Lieutenant: Professor Flecker said this was an allusion that might particularly appeal to me. Now I am hardly noted for my devotion to the anticlerical prejudices of Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*. What is the common meeting-ground of my interests and Professor Flecker's?"

"Church liturgy?" Marshall ventured.

"And why was your Quasimodo so named? Because he was born — or found or christened, I forget which — on the Sunday after Easter. Many Sundays, as you may know, are often referred to by the first word of their introits, the beginning of the proper of the Mass. As the fourth Sunday in Lent is called *Laetare* Sunday, or the third in Advent *Gaudete* Sunday. So the Sunday after Easter is known as *Quasimodo* Sunday, from its introit *Quasimodo geniti infantes* . . . 'As newborn babes.'"

"But I still don't see —"

"The Sunday after Easter," said Sister Ursula, "is more usually referred to as *Low* Sunday."

"Oh," said Marshall. After a moment he added reflectively, "*The Happy Hypocrite* . . ."

"You see that too? Beerbohm's story is about a man who assumes a mask of virtue to conceal his depravity. A schizoid allegory. I wonder if Professor Lowe dreamed that he might find the same happy ending."

Marshall drove on a bit in silence. Then he said, "He said a strange thing while you were out."

"I feel as though he were already dead," said Sister Ursula. "I want to say, 'God rest his soul.' We should have a special office for the souls of the mad."

"That cues into my story. The boys were taking him away and I said to Rags, 'Well, this is once the insanity plea justifies itself. He'll never see the gas chamber.' And he turned on me — he'd quieted down by then — and said, 'Nonsense, sir! Do you think I would cast doubt on my sanity merely to save my life?'"

"Mercy," said Sister Ursula. At first Marshall thought it was just an exclamation. Then he looked at her face and saw that she was not talking to him.

The ultimate test of a great story is merely this: How long does it remain in your memory? You may forget the names of the characters, or where you first read the story, or even the title and author's name: those are the superficial details. But if, years and years later, you still have a vivid recollection of the original impact; if the significance of the story, its point, or its subtle overtone, still sticks in a pigeon-hole of your mind, then surely the story has the quality of greatness.

MacKinlay Kantor's "Rogues' Gallery," for all its simplicity and brevity, is such a tale. For nearly ten years your Editor has had the imperishable memory of old Winky Meyer and how he wrought his last Crucifixion in the moist sand of Red Fox Creek. We don't think you'll ever forget it either . . .

ROGUES' GALLERY

by MacKINLAY KANTOR

Now once again Meyer crucified the Christ. He established the Crucifixion in moist sand on the banks of Red Fox Creek, thirty-one miles from Chicago.

If he had been aware that this was to be his final work of art, the pathetic culmination of a long life in which dreams and sculpture and whisky were inextricably confused, he could not have brought more tenderness and skill to the creation than he did bring.

He wrought well, did Meyer — with a rusty bucket and a sack of salt to harden the mixture, and makeshift sticks and paddles for delivering anguish and beauty out of a sand bank. He worked from dawn on into the late afternoon.

Meyer was building the attendant cherubs — life-size visages complete with wings and wonder — when the blue car stopped by the deserted sand-pit road, and the four young men got out with their golf bags.

There may have been blood upon their hands, but Meyer could not see it. He saw only that they were hard-faced and nervous, that they wore open shirts and sweaters and flannel slacks like those worn by golfers on the near-by course. The zippers whistled in their bright leather bags, and out came ugly short-barreled guns, and out came money.

Money did not interest Meyer. He worked on, silently as an earthworm.

"It was Borelli cleaned that first cage," said Augie Shertz.

"Like hell," whined Borelli. "It was Pete."

Pete nodded. "I got it in this bag. A good twenty grand."

They lifted out the masses of fluttering banknotes: some were wrapped, some were crumpled, some were twenties and some were hundreds. "You're the top!" Shertz snarled at Borelli. "Damn you, why'd you squirt at that old dame?"

"She started to run out the door."

"Never make a chair date when you don't have to. Some day you're gonna fry!"

"Come on, come on," Pete implored; "ain't it the same rap for everybody? Casey had already pushed over the teller and that old bank cop."

Shertz was estimating with shrewd, opaque gaze. "Looks like sixty or seventy grand. But we shouldn't have left the silver in that first car —"

"The heat'll be on," Borelli prophesied. "On us, too. Even changing cars three times, and changing to golf clothes."

"We'll bust apart, at the golf links," Shertz told them. "Go back to town, each guy by himself. What are you squawking about, Borelli? Nobody dropped a handkerchief off of his face. We wore gloves; it's airtight."

Then it was that Casey Wilchinski, who was lookout at the entrance of the old sand pit, drew his automatic and said things out of the corner of his mouth. The other men turned with ready guns, and they discovered Meyer. Also they discovered Da Vinci's Crucifixion — modeled life-size in the sunlit sand, with half-shaped cherubs lifting up their faces under the skillful turn of skillful fingers.

The men put their blue-steel muzzles to Meyer's head.

"Gonna lay quiet and then turn us in to the cops, wasn't you? Keep digging in the sand, and then sing."

"You haff trampled mein statue," cried Meyer.

"Let him have it, then sling him in the weeds," Casey suggested.

Borelli said, "Wait! We got a split to make. It'll take time. Wait till we go. . . ."

"In Rome I studied," Meyer informed them. "In Paris, in Milan, in many places —"

"Yeh," Shertz kicked a foot from the recumbent statue, and the sand flew. "Maybe you never studied in Asbury Park, you old heel! If you'd had sense to make this sand statue somewhere else than off here in the weeds, you would have lived longer."

Meyer explained: "The sand, it vas so clean, so bright . . . I make my great statue of Crucifixion! But nobody comes to see. I do not care." His thin shoulders quivered beneath the frayed, stained shirt.

"He's nuts," said Pete. "Look at that sign he's got stuck up: 'On this coat put nickel for a poor artist.' And there ain't nobody around here to put nickels on it, except snakes and things —"

Augie Shertz slid his gun back inside his waistband. "Sure, he's nuts. But just the same, he ain't gonna sing. We'll split the dough, and then —"

They split. It took a long while, but they watched with care, and not a car turned off the humming highway a half-mile beyond. Meyer crouched in his beloved sand, and watched, and worked. He was afraid of these men, but, more than that, he was angry because they had broken the foot of his statue, and had talked with no respect.

He touched up the foot, and remolded his choir of heavenly admirers. He hoped that these cruel young men would be punished for trampling the thing over which he had toiled, and which he knew to be beautiful.

After the money had been counted and divided (for none would trust the others to carry it to Chicago), the four young men abandoned their stolen car, tramped through the lonely weeds and woodland to mingle with the hordes of city-bound golfers who had spent a pleasant afternoon at the Red Fox Public Golf Course.

They killed Meyer before they left. They did it quickly, but he had been able to complete his task.

It was about one o'clock the next morning when three squads of detectives swooped down on the celebrants at the Chez Vienna restaurant, and gathered in Casey Wilchinski, Augie Shertz and Pete Skolnit. They would have gathered in Nick Borelli as well, but Borelli went haywire and reached for his gun, when somebody shoved a glistening badge under his nose. He had three slugs in him before he hit the floor.

The survivors howled and stammered as they were hauled into the squad cars. "Not a thing," they chanted. "You ain't got a thing on us! We'll be out in an hour."

"There was a bank stick-up on Milwaukee Avenue yesterday noon," said gray-haired old Sergeant Kahn. "Three people killed."

They screamed amid the sirens, "You can't hang that on us! You won't get a dime's worth on us. We're alibied!"

"There was an old tramp killed, yesterday afternoon," said Sergeant Kahn. "Some hikers found him, knocked on the head, away out by Red Fox Creek in the country. He was a queer old devil, kind of crazy. His name was Winky Meyer. And under the bridge by where Meyer was killed, there was paper ribbons and currency wrappers from the Milwaukee Avenue Householders' Savings Bank."

He told them, quietly, "Listen to this, rats! Old Winky Meyer made Crucifixions for a good many years. He was pretty good at it — even artists used to say so. And he made cherubs, always — four of them. . . . And this time, when the detectives saw his cherubs, they didn't look like any angels in heaven. They looked like you, Augie — and you, Casey and Pete — and like Borelli. They were your faces, and the old man had sculptured them in the sand before he died."

Herzl Fife is not a prolific writer. He was "discovered" in 1934 by "Story" magazine, but since that time little has been heard from him auctorially. A year and a half ago Mr. Fife submitted a detective story to EQMM through the mail. Your Editor did not accept the story, but he did write Mr. Fife a long letter of praise and encouragement. There followed three more stories, all about the same central character, and without exception they too went back; but in each instance your Editor wrote more praise and more encouragement.

Then one day the mail brought "Pattern for Murder" — and this time we felt that Mr. Fife had won his detectival spurs. A "new" writer had been born and a new detective had made his literary début.

Ben Spinosa is a lawyer detective. There are great lawyer sleuths already firmly entrenched in the literature of crime and detection — Melville Davisson Post's Randolph Mason, Arthur Train's Mr. Tutt, Erle Stanley Gardner's Perry Mason, Craig Rice's John J. Malone, Harry Klingsberg's John Doowinkle. But Mr. Fife's Ben Spinosa differs from all in one extremely interesting respect: Ben is a very young lawyer — in a sense he's not a full-fledged lawyer at all. In "Pattern for Murder" he is still a law student, with a long and brilliant career ahead of him.

Mr. Fife, we think, has a highly personalized way of expressing himself — the mark of a writer with genuine talent. There is a deliberate obscurity in his style that infuses his story with mood and mystery. Your Editor likes that brooding quality in Mr. Fife that makes him tick — an intangible something that gives Ben Spinosa a distinctive and compelling personality. We hope you want to see more of Ben.

PATTERN FOR MURDER

by HERZL FIFE

THE heavy, drawn drapes twitched nervously, like the old man in the bed. "I suppose you'll marry her as soon as I'm off," the dry voice persisted. "You might at least respect an old man's wishes, after he's left you each a fortune."

Silence lay thick as the rugs in the darkened rooms. The secretary glided about on soothing business, his face set and impassive. Amy Randall stared at him uneasily across her uncle's petulant blankets.

"I think he wants to tell you something," young Clement told her, studiously refilling a water glass. Amy Randall took her eyes off him, and bent toward her uncle. "You're worse than he is!" the old man barked suddenly; the girl fairly leaped back in her chair. "Let him have my money when I'm gone, I say! You don't deserve it." The big drapes muffled the disgraceful echoes, and rustled the room to silence.

"Then I'll have to marry him for his money," Amy said quietly, her lip quivering a little. William Clement measured drops out of a bottle, balancing the teaspoon neatly.

"The doctor thinks answers excite your uncle," he observed.

"I know damn well he excites me!" Amy Randall said. Her dark, serious eyes gradually grew a little calmer, as she watched the slow routine of the sickroom.

Clement held the spoon to the old man's mouth, and watched him lick off the last smears. The petulant lips puckered. "Awful stuff, sir," Bill Clement said sympathetically.

"It's new stuff!" the old man asserted. "Dr. Pilcher never ordered any new stuff for me. What is this?"

"These are the drops you've taken steadily for the last two weeks," William Clement said evenly. The old man stared sourly at him and pulled a cord twice. "Walters! Hey, Walters!" he yelled; an elderly reserved chap glided in. "Mr. Randall?" he asked, as though he hoped for an introduction.

"Hand me that medicine bottle!" Randall ordered. The butler ignored the astonishment on the two faces. He placed the medicine bottle precisely at the old man's hand, and stood aside as though everything were now quite right. Randall studied the label; he sniffed the cork; replaced it; shook the contents; tasted one last drop from the tip of a gingerly finger. "There's something in this medicine," he said at last, his voice deadly calm.

Amy's slender hands, of which she was so proud, were clenched into unpleasant knots of anger. She sat in silence.

"Exposure to air may alter the taste, sir," Clement remarked. His impassive glance had slipped down to sullenness.

"Get out, all of you!" Mr. Randall cried in a blast of fury. "Get out now! I don't want you here any longer — no more than you want me!"

The butler glided to the door, as though proceeding to further instructions. Bill Clement opened his mouth once, then bit it shut again. Amy was the last one out. "Oh-h-h; you — you —" she began; then turned from the old man and fled in anger or terror. There was no sound or motion from the bedclothes.

The law offices of Gilchrest and Gorman are eminent. They command a map's eye view of four New York boroughs; from their windows the East River and the Hudson look pure and silvery.

"Nonsense!" Gorman said. "Of course we'll do our best for William Clement. Guilt or innocence has nothing to do with it. Matter of professional ethics."

"Condemning your own client — on professional ethics," Ben Spinosa remarked softly. Gorman rotated two hundred pounds to glare at the young fellow. "What the devil do you know about the case?" Gorman demanded rudely. "— Or about professional ethics, for that matter? You're only a law student."

"This much anyhow," Ben answered evenly. "That I could never say much for any lawyer who condemns his own client without a trial — and on flimsy circumstantial evi-

dence."

There was a determined stir in the chair behind Gorman's. Gilchrest was moved; his wily grey old head was jerking about like a bird's. "Thought you had something new to offer Gorman in this case," he chirped. "Was why I brought you down here. No use having you poke at us now, is there? What can we go on except circumstantial evidence? Eye-witness? We haven't got one."

Gorman continued to stare at Ben Spinosa. "Magellan tells me you're sharper than a skewer," he said finally. "I don't see it. I've got this much. Clement inherits a wad of the old man's fortune. He knew it. As long as the old man was alive he couldn't marry the niece. He knew it. Old man complained about the taste of his medicine. Clement administered it. Arsenic all around the house. Clement knew it. Old man dies suddenly, and the P.M. finds him full of arsenic. Arsenic in his medicine bottle. Now what do you expect?"

"That's a fine case for the prosecution," Ben said. "You're supposed to defend him."

"With what? With what, young man?" Gorman asked in exasperation, at last turning his gaze away from his tormenter. Gilchrest brushed the impatience aside. "I don't know of any law firm in the country that could give William Clement a chance," he said. "If I did I'd engage 'em."

"But you'd want to remain attorney of record," Ben remarked.

"Naturally," said Gilchrest. "Credit for this case is no small matter."

"Then your advisers needn't be members of the bar, I take it."

"You take it," Gilchrest agreed. "We'd pay a detective."

"Very well then," Ben said. "I'll direct you in this case. And you'll be the attorneys of record who had Bill Clement acquitted."

"Whom were you planning to frame? Miss Amy Randall? She's paying us. Or their butler? Druggist? Dr. Pilcher, perhaps? He can't be found. Or did you have some idea of being an impresario? Put on a magic show? — confuse the jury? — not with our professional names, Mr. Law Student! Gilchrest, don't we have enough troubles in this office without bringing in college boys?"

"Well, now, Inspector Magellan tells me this fellow —"

Ben Spinosa cut across Gilchrest's explanation. "I came here thinking you were interested in the case of William Clement. But if it's merely a matter of collecting your fee and seeing him hanged without a trial, I'll go elsewhere. Nice to have met you, Gorman."

"What's your interest in the case, Spinosa?" Gilchrest demanded.

"Perhaps an experienced lawyer won't understand," Ben said diffidently. "It's justice. I believe that William Clement can be proved innocent — even in a court of law."

"Any grounds?" Gorman snapped.

"I've spoken to Miss Randall. Crime's out of character. And with proper investigation and handling, as

I can outline in a few minutes —"

"We know this is a lost case," Gilchrest said. "You have us there. We'd like to listen. But Gorman's afraid, of course, that we'll not only lose the case, but make fools of ourselves besides. Can't afford that. This gets publicity."

"Lawyers always look more competent to the public when they're winning a case," Ben observed. "You're no children. The first time I propose anything unprofessional, you can simply refuse; you're still in official charge."

Gorman and Gilchrest exchanged a brief look of understanding.

"You've got one foot in the door, son," said Gilchrest.

The proceedings had droned on for days. Witnesses for the prosecution had already proved, and the jury had no possible doubt whatever, that (a) the defunct Mr. Randall had strongly opposed any notion of his secretary's marrying his niece; (b) his niece and Mr. Clement had regarded themselves as engaged anyhow, and the old gentleman had repeatedly threatened to disinherit the girl; (c) that the will stood in favor chiefly of his secretary — his niece and assorted charities sharing a third; (d) that a change of this will had been expected daily; (e) that everyone concerned knew these facts; (f) that arsenic powder had been kept about the house; and (g) that Clement could easily have slipped it into the medicine where it was found. It was a neat little bundle, as Gilchrest remarked bitterly, and only required tying together.

A crisis came when the prosecutor was questioning Miss Amy Randall. Such mild questions they had asked till then: the tense line of her lips was just beginning to soften; her eyes were resting on the attorney's face, and just beginning to take in impressions. Then it came.

"Did Mr. Clement ever say to you that he desired or intended the death of your uncle?"

"Objection," drawled Gorman. "I observe that the learned prosecutor, leading the witness —"

"Overruled," snapped the judge.

Amy Randall went white; her eyes were filled with shock and tears. "No! No!" she cried. "He *didn't* do it! I know he didn't! He didn't kill my uncle!" Then she ran shrieking across the courtroom toward the closed doors. The judge declared a recess; and the jury received an indelible impression of Clement's guilt.

"That's what they were hoping for," Gilchrest said in dry resignation. "— something to tie Clement to the crime itself. The judge can warn from now till doomsday. Jury found a connection there."

"Better bring out our little item about the arsenic," Ben suggested mildly, darting his sharp grey eyes over the dismayed defense.

"May as well be hanged for a wolf as for a sheep," said Gilchrest.

"That's your client's department," Ben reminded him.

William Clement's frank eyes lost

their faraway stare and focused sharply on Gorman. "If things are as you say, I'm a fool to keep on sitting here. I ought to be working on a breakout."

Gorman uttered a moral cluck of disapproval. Gilchrest nodded ironically. "Fine! Fine! that'd be fine! You'd get as far as the door, and we'd all be holding the bag. Or the pall."

"You don't think we'd be accessories after the fact, do you?" Gorman demanded righteously.

Clement's smile was serene. "You're my defense," he said. "After what fact? It's just a question of the company you keep. You won't compound with the accused; but you're perfectly willing to connive with the law, and hang an innocent man in due form. That's safe. *Gorman & Gilchrest. Felonies Safely Compounded. All Due Forms Observed.*"

"Talk like that won't get you anywhere," said Gorman. The recess was over, and Amy Randall was returning to the stand. Gilchrest began listening intently; but Clement seemed to have lost interest in the proceedings. He kept whispering with Ben Spinosa, who nodded frequently, urged something, and seemed also to pay very little attention to the trial.

Under close hard questioning, Amy Randall testified that she and Bill Clement had been fond of playing a curious game of speculation: what would they do after her uncle died? Certainly, she admitted, she hated the old man; he'd been unnaturally cruel to her, and to her mother. And it was Amy who had started the speculations. Yes, both she and Clement had frequently devised ingenious methods of doing away with the old gentleman — naturally, only in fun. Yes; she supposed it was a grim kind of fun. Her uncle had been a grim old tyrant. Yes, she was well aware that the autopsy had disclosed arsenic in his system, administered over a period well over four months. Yes, she understood that Dr. Pilcher's certificate certifying heart failure as the cause of death had been seriously questioned at the inquest, and that the verdict there . . .

As the prosecution drew towards a triumphant close, Ben Spinosa began urging something on Gorman, who shook his head in vehement disapproval. Reluctantly the big fellow heaved to his feet and asked that his cross-examination be deferred until he had called another witness. Gilchrest kept shaking his head gloomily in full sight of the jury. The judge raised a patient eyebrow and the proceedings droned on.

A note was seen to pass from William Clement to Amy Randall who awaited further questioning. She was seen to change color noticeably and set her lips firmly; then, it was said, she looked straight at the ceiling and nodded twice. Ben Spinosa, who had written the note to her, relaxed slightly.

Amy Randall was recalled to the stand. At Gorman's first question, designed simply to put her at her

ease, she shrieked violently, and for the second time ran for the door. Prosecution rose to protest her tactics; Ben Spinosa rose, out of all order, and began shouting imprecations at the prosecution who was already purple; others rose, and tried to do other things. And Bill Clement, in the excitement, calmly rose and darted out of the courthouse.

It was as simple as that. The judge seemed stunned, and in a hushed courtroom, with the noise of scurrying feet outside, he demanded of the defense whether they had anything to say before their arrest as accomplices. Then Spinosa, his eyes snapping with cold amusement, made a remarkable speech.

The court itself, he stated crisply, was responsible for the display it had just witnessed — a display in which Gilchrest and Gorman had taken no conscious part. Spinosa rather hoped, however, that Gorman and Gilchrest would be jailed with him, since they had shared with the court the responsibility of obstructing justice, and were definitely committed to those inflexible rules and procedures by which an innocent man was to be condemned. Neither the court, nor the defense attorneys, nor the prosecution, said Spinosa, had attempted to produce Dr. Pilcher, who alone could state the facts that would solve the case of William Clement. And William Clement had been forced to leave the courtroom: not to escape trial, but to get Dr. Pilcher to testify — something no one else seemed to be interested in, or able to do.

The judge frowned frostily.

"You make a mistake in supposing that the court cannot obtain the relevant facts," he observed. "Or that William Clement will return voluntarily to stand trial."

"Do I?" asked Ben. "Now, Mr. Prosecuting Attorney — did you find out the facts in this case that are known to Dr. Pilcher?"

The District Attorney looked impatient. "We already know his facts, young man. Dr. Pilcher's certificate is on the record. We see no advantage to our case in calling him to court."

Ben turned his ironic glance upon the defense. "And did you gentlemen find it in your interest to summon Dr. Pilcher?"

"I hardly think Dr. Pilcher's testimony would be of any help to William Clement. We have too much of it already," said Gilchrest drily.

"And now, your Honor: what steps has the court taken to obtain the relevant facts from Dr. Pilcher?"

"Since the prosecution and the defense are agreed that his further testimony is immaterial, the court feels safe to assume that no steps are necessary," said the judge.

"The court is perfectly safe in so assuming," replied Spinosa. "It is William Clement who may lose his life on the assumption. Make your arrests now, and we can await the outcome, in prison."

His Honor caused Ben Spinosa and Amy Randall to be arrested, charged, and jailed. Arrangements were made

to charge Gilchrest and Gorman, and have them freed. The remarkable icy fury engendered in several persons may be passed over as immaterial.

"Now what would they want eel grass for, in the Judge's chambers?" thought Amy Randall, as she raised her eyes from the bare floor. By holding one hand over the other, she found, both could be kept from visibly trembling. The judge's face behind the big oak desk was set and solemn. "Looks like an angry floorwalker sitting behind an empty counter," she thought, pressing the unruly hands a little harder. They were cold. All the chairs were stiff and massive. They were ranged before the judge's counter, so that the district attorney, and Gorman and Gilchrest, and this young Ben Spinosa who had monked up the trial, could face the stern look with her. Oh, yes — and Dr. Pilcher. And William Clement: so tired, so wary, so sullen.

Naturally, the fact that Pilcher and Clement were wet up to the waist would make them look a bit odd there. Or the bits of mud and damp weeds clinging to their breeches might change their expressions. The judge was speaking.

"The court understands that the accused and Dr. Pilcher came straight here, avoiding police officers in order to prove voluntary surrender. You will understand that the court holds out no promises. But it has arranged this informal session in order to ascertain those facts which our young friend charges us with ignoring in our more orderly procedures. Now, Mr. Spinosa."

"Explain your actions," Ben told Clement casually.

Bill shook his head as though to clear it, and picked a bit of reed off his knee. "Dr. Pilcher and I have been friends for years," he began. "He got me my job with his patient, Mr. Randall. We used to spend our vacations together, duck-hunting — he has a shack up in — well, he has a shack. When the coroner's jury decided Randall might have been murdered in spite of Pilcher's certificate of heart failure, Tom Pilcher dropped out of sight. I knew things were bad then; because if Tom's testimony would have been of any help to Amy or me he'd have been here."

"Did you voice your suspicions to your attorneys?" the judge asked.

"I did, your Honor. Mr. Gorman was quite skeptical of Pilcher's value to us. He said we had the best of his testimony in his certificate; anything he said on the stand might weaken us. He —"

"If your Honor pleases —" cut in Gorman anxiously. The judge looked annoyed. "We will assume that you stated everything in proper form," he said brusquely. "Go on, Clement."

"Well, sir — your Honor — if Tom Pilcher wanted to hide for any reason good or bad I'd never smoke him out or tell others where to find him. I told that to Ben Spinosa. He thought I ought to get Pilcher somehow; and since the only way to do that was if I saw him myself, and sounded him

out, Spinosa advised me —"

The judge's dry voice cut across. "You're talking pretty freely. Do you want to implicate this young fellow in your jail break?"

Bill Clement seemed astonished. "Spinosa told me to explain very freely. He said I ought to hold back nothing at the hearing."

"Unusual tactics in counsel. I suppose it's youth. Now, Dr. Pilcher?"

"Court won't be interested in the details," said the physician. His dark, deep-set eyes stared at the judge, as though he tried to measure the confidence he might place there. His tangled shock of grey hair detracted nothing from the dignity of his bearing. "I figured Bill Clement went to some trouble and risk to get me here. If he thought it was that important, I'd come, even though I may do him more harm than good. You don't have any call to question my certificate. It's *bona fide*. Far as I could see, old Randall kicked the bucket just as I told him he would: thrombosis, with a mean cantankerous temper. Indigestion and the appetite of an ostrich was no help either. All signs pointed to heart failure. I wrote that. I still say it.

"Arsenic there was no surprise to me either. Of course, I had to write it down. Only thing surprises me is the notion any other physician might get that it killed him. Coroner claimed differently, I know. I'd like a talk with that coroner. Arsenic was in his system for months. It didn't kill him. It started with slow doses, and built up gradually to big ones. First a little, then a lot. See it in the dead tissues."

"Then you think the poisoning had been going on for some time, Dr. Pilcher," the district attorney stated.

"Never said he'd been poisoned. Died of heart failure, I said," the physician insisted. The prosecutor looked skeptical.

"Did your patient, Mr. Randall, ever question you about the effects of arsenic?" Ben demanded suddenly. Pilcher looked as though he'd been stabbed.

"The old fellow was crotchety. I paid no attention to what he said."

"Dr. Pilcher, you will please answer the question," said the judge. The physician glanced at Gilchrest, who had shut his eyes and was letting events run their course. Tom Pilcher spoke hesitantly.

"Yes. Randall complained loud and often. About everything. Said if he died suddenly I should look for signs of poisoning. Well, I did. And I still say —"

"The court already has your opinion, Doctor."

Ben looked at the judge a little oddly. "Does the court also have the coroner's statement, about a letter sent him some two months before Mr. Randall's death?"

"It has. If I recall correctly, Dr. Mann testifies he received a letter, advising him to look carefully into the matter if Mr. Randall should meet a sudden death. Virtually the same message Dr. Pilcher had. It was unsigned."

"Exactly," Ben said. "We had a

detective trace the typescript. We can present expert opinion showing that the letter came from the Randall home."

The district attorney looked up. "From the same machine that William Clement used in the Randall correspondence?" he asked.

"Yes," said Ben Spinosa. "And that is our case."

The prosecutor looked relieved. Gorman and Gilchrest were not amused. And everyone stirred restlessly till the judge broke the pause.

"I realize, young man," he said, "that it is a long time since I last went to law school. No doubt I have forgotten much. But I do feel that I still ought to see your point. Is there any new testimony in all this? Any evidence that would justify Clement's jailbreak — and, I might add, his return? A few puzzling facts have been brought out. It is unlikely that Clement warned the coroner of poison. Perhaps Mr. Randall did so. But I see no important connections made."

"I shall have to question you, your Honor," Ben said calmly.

"Shall I take the stand at the trial?" the judge asked grimly. Ben ignored the pleasantry.

"Have you ever looked long and steadily at square tiles, alternating black and white? Or at a drawing of many cubes, showing only their dark and light surfaces?"

"Do you mean those pictures whose patterns reverse suddenly as you stare at them?" asked the judge, interested.

"Yes. The background becomes foreground suddenly, and the eye no longer sees the old pattern. Well, this case seems to be like one of those pictures; we will have to stare fixedly at it for a moment."

"I think we may all honestly claim to have done so," said the judge drily. "Go on."

"Well, now, look at the reverse pattern. Suppose for a moment that *the victim is really the murderer;* that we are now trying the *real* victim."

"My God, Gilchrest, what did you bring in here?" Gorman exploded. The judge went on listening.

"Well. Regard Mr. Randall not as the victim of a poisoning, but as a spiteful old man, angry at Clement. Sick and old, he depends on Clement for the business details he can't manage himself; so he can't fire him. But Clement wants to marry Amy Randall; they're in love, and Randall won't allow it. What can he do? About six months ago Dr. Pilcher told him he had a heart condition, and would die suddenly. And about two months later he began work on a plan that would put Clement out after his death.

"First he inquired of Dr. Pilcher about the effects of arsenic — pretending to suspect poisoning; but really insuring his safety in taking it. Next, using Mithridates's old trick of graduated doses, he took enough arsenic to alarm a suspicious coroner. This done, he warned Dr. Pilcher to look for poison at his death, and put Dr. Mann, the coroner, on guard for it. He knew that the power of suggestion, the inclination most shrewd

men have to believe in hidden evil, and the presence of the actual arsenic itself, would induce one or both of the men to jump to conclusions. Dr. Mann did; Dr. Pilcher, apparently, looked harder before he leaped.

"Having set the stage for murder, Randall provided motive and opportunity. Why else should he leave his fortune the way he did — part to Clement, part to Amy Randall — and then Clement's share to her as successor? Don't you see? *He assumed they would never marry, that Clement would predecease Miss Randall.* What a large sum to leave to a man for whom he expressed dislike and distrust! Yet he took care to announce generally that Clement stood to gain by his death.

"Next — the arsenic. Does a poisoner leave it loose about the house? But Randall did — so that Clement might be charged with easy access to it. He never would take his medicine from his niece, whom he liked. No, only from his secretary, whom he disliked. Why, if not to cast suspicion on that secretary? He summons his butler to see his dark suspicions; he —

"Your faces show me that the pattern has reversed already. I'll not labor the points; we can prove the factual data in court. Mr. Prosecutor, we shall not have to prove which pattern is correct. The even chance acquits us. But when it comes to circumstantial evidences — they point much better to Randall as the villain, than to Clement. Letter to coroner . . . loose arsenic . . . strange will . . . they are inexplicable by the Prosecutor's theory. By ours —"

Abruptly, Ben stopped talking. A faint hum from the big electric clock on the wall became more and more audible. The room seemed filled with the sound. Faces altered; suspicion fell away; surprise and relief remained.

"Mr. Prosecutor, if the evidence proves sound do you intend to drop the charges?" the judge asked crisply.

"This is merely a matter of interpretation," said the prosecutor. "We have hardly had time to consider —"

"When the trial reopens," said the judge, "the defense no doubt will bring a motion for dismissal." The prosecutor looked grim; he stared calculatingly at the judge.

"The charges will be dropped, your Honor," he said. The judge cleared his throat and nodded sociably toward Ben Spinosa.

"Young man, you'll be coming up before the character committee of the Bar one of these days. Should there be any question about your arrest, I hope you will do me the honor of referring my name. I have reason to think my comments will carry weight there. Now I suppose the defendant, Mr. William Clement, understands what a remarkable service you have —"

But the judge's flight of praise halted suddenly as he looked at the defendant. Mr. William Clement was not listening; he was trying, apparently, in a kind of mawkish way, to smother Miss Amy Randall, chief witness for the prosecution.

Mrs. Henry Watkins hated her husband. Quietly, calmly, she planned the easiest way to kill him — while sitting in church!

An "immoral" tale of murder by the brilliant author of PRIVATE WORLDS *and* THE MORTAL STORM.

THE LIQUEUR GLASS

by PHYLLIS BOTTOME

MRS. HENRY WATKINS loved going to church. She could not have told you why she loved it. It had perhaps less to do with religious motives than most people's reason for attending divine service; and she took no interest in other people's clothes.

She gazed long and fixedly at the stained glass window in which St. Peter, in a loose magenta blouse, was ladling salmon-coloured sardines out of a grassgreen sea; but she did not really see St. Peter or notice his sleight-of-hand preoccupation with the fish. She was simply having a nice, quiet time.

She always sat where she could most easily escape seeing the back of Henry Watkins's head. She had never liked the back of his head and twenty years' married life had only deepened her distaste for it.

Hetty and Paul sat between her and their father, and once or twice it had occurred to Mrs. Watkins as strange that she should owe the life of these two beloved beings to the man she hated.

It was no use pretending at this time of the day that she didn't hate Henry Watkins. She hated him with all the slow, quiet force of a slow, quiet nature.

She had hated him for some time before she discovered that she no longer loved him.

Mrs. Watkins arrived slowly at the recognition of a new truth; she would go on provisionally for years with a worn-out platitude, but when she once dropped it, she never returned to pick it up again; and she acted upon her discoveries.

The choir began to sing "O God, Our Help in Ages Past." Mrs. Watkins disliked this hymn; and she had never found God much of a help. She thought the verse that compared men's lives to the flight of dreams was nonsense. Nobody could imagine Henry Watkins flying like a dream.

The first lesson was more attractive. Mrs. Watkins enjoyed Jael's reception of Sisera. "She brought him butter in a lordly dish," boomed the curate. Henry Watkins ate a lot of butter, though he insisted, from motives of economy, upon its being Danish. Sisera, worn out with battle, slumbered. Jael took up the nail and carried out

with efficiency and dispatch her inhospitable deed. Mrs. Watkins thought the nails in those days must have been larger than they are now and probably sharper at the end.

The curate cleared his throat a little over the story; it seemed to him to savour of brutality.

"Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" cried Sisera's mother.

Mrs. Watkins leaned back in her seat and smiled. Sisera was done for, his mother would never hear the sound of those returning chariot wheels.

Jael had permanently recouped herself for the butter.

A little later on the vicar swept out of his stall and up to the pulpit covered by the prolonged "Amen" of the accompanying hymn. Henry looked at his watch and shut it with a click. Then his hard blue eyes closed suddenly — he had no eyelashes. Mrs. Watkins folded her hands in her lap and fixed her attention upon St. Peter.

This was her nice, quiet time, and she spent it in considering how she could most easily kill Henry Watkins.

She was not in the least touched by the sight of her wedding ring. Her marriage had been an accident, one of those accidents that happened frequently twenty years ago, and which happen, though more seldom, now. An unhappy blunder of ignorance and family pressure.

She had liked making Henry Watkins jump, and her mother had explained to her that the tendency to jump on Henry's part was ardent, manly love, and that her own amused contemplation of the performance was deep womanly inclination.

It was then that Mrs. Watkins urged that she did not like the back of Henry's head. She had been told that it was immodest to notice it. His means were excellent and her own parents were poor. Twenty years ago Mrs. Watkins had known very little about life, and what she did know she was tempted to enjoy. She knew a good deal about it now, and she had long ago outgrown the temptation to enjoy it.

Still, that in itself wouldn't have given her any idea of killing her husband. She was a just woman and she knew that her husband had not invented the universe; if he had, she thought it would have been more unpleasant still.

Henry's idea of marriage was very direct; he knew that he had done his wife an enormous favour. She was penniless and he had the money; she was to come to him for every penny and all she had was his as a matter of course. She could do him no favours, she had no rights, and her preferences were silly.

It had occurred to Mrs. Watkins in one awful moment of early resentment that she would rather be bought by a great many men than by one. There would be more variety, and some of them, at least, wouldn't be like Henry.

Then her children came; she aged very rapidly. Nothing is so bad for the personal appearance as the complete

abrogation of self-respect. Henry continually threw her birthdays in her teeth. "A woman of your age," he would say with deep contempt.

He was a man of favourite phrases. Mrs. Watkins was not constitutionally averse to repetition, but the repetition of a phrase that means to hurt can be curiously unpleasant. Still, as her mother had pointed out to her long years ago, you can get used to the unpleasant.

She never complained, and her parents were gratefully conscious of how soon she had settled down.

But there was a strange fallacy that lingered deep in Mrs. Watkins's heart.

She had given up her rights as a woman, since presumably her marriage necessitated the sacrifice. But she believed that she would be allowed the rights of a mother. This, of course, was where she made her mistake.

Henry Watkins meant to be master in his own house. The house was his own, so was his wife, so were his children. There is no division of property where there is one master. This was a great religious truth to Henry, so that when his son displeased him he thrashed him, and when his daughter got in his way he bullied her.

Mrs. Watkins disputed this right not once but many times, till she found the results were worse for the children. Then she dropped her opposition. Henry Watkins saw that she had learnt her lesson. It taught the children a lesson, too; they saw that it made no difference what mother said to father.

Nothing happened to alter either her attitude or Henry's.

They went to the same church twice every Sunday, except when it rained; and ate roast beef afterwards.

In spite of Henry, Hetty had grown into a charming, slightly nervous young woman, and in spite of Henry, Paul had become a clever, highly strung, regrettably artistic young man.

But if Henry couldn't help their temperaments he could put his foot down about their future.

Paul should go into the bank and learn to be a man. (By learning to be a man, Henry meant learning to care more for money than for anything else); and Hetty should receive no assistance toward marrying an impecunious young architect to whom she had taken a fancy.

Hetty could do as she chose: she could marry Henry's old friend Baddeley, who had a decent income; or she could stay at home and pretend to be ill; but she certainly shouldn't throw herself away on a young fool who hadn't the means (rather fortunately, as it happened) to support her.

Henry looked at his watch; the sermon had already lasted twenty minutes.

Mrs. Watkins went over once more in her mind how she had better do it. "And now to God the Father," said the vicar. The sermon had lasted twenty-seven minutes, and Henry meant to point it out to the vicar in the vestry. "Oh, what the joy and the glory must be!" sang the choir.

"And if I am hanged," said Mrs. Watkins to herself, "they'll get the money just the same. I shall try not to be, because it would be so upsetting for them, poor young things; still it's wonderful what you can get over when you're young."

At lunch Henry made Hetty cry and ordered her from the room.

Paul flashed out in his sister's defence. "You're unbearable, sir — why can't you leave us alone?"

His mother strangely interposed.

"Never mind, Paul," she said. "Let father have his own way."

Paul looked at her in astonishment, and Henry was extremely annoyed. He was perfectly capable of taking his own way without his wife's interference, and he told her so.

It was the cook's evening out, and the house parlour-maid — a flighty creature — was upstairs in her room, trimming a new hat. There was no one downstairs in the kitchen after supper.

Paul went out to smoke in the garden, and Hetty had gone to finish her tears in her own room. That was something Mrs. Watkins hadn't got; but she needed no place for finishing her tears, because she had never yet begun them. She did not see the use of tears.

Mrs. Watkins stood and looked at her husband as he sprawled at his ease in the most comfortable chair.

"Henry," she said, "would you like some of that sloe gin your brother sent you? You haven't tried it yet."

"I don't mind trying a glass," said Henry good-naturedly.

His wife paused at the door. She came back a step or two. "You've not changed your mind," she asked, "about the children's futures?"

"No! Why should I change my mind?" said Henry. "Do I ever change my mind? They can make as much fuss as they like, but the man who pays the piper calls the tune!"

"I've heard you say that before," said his wife reflectively.

"I dare say you'll hear me say it again!" said Henry with a laugh.

Mrs. Watkins's hand went toward the handle of the door; she did not think she would ever hear Henry say this favourite maxim again; but still she lingered.

"Hurry up with that liqueur!" said her husband.

Mrs. Watkins went into the pantry and took out a liqueur-glass. She poured a little sloe gin into it, then she put down the bottle and left the pantry. She went into the children's darkroom — they were allowed that for their photography.

She still had the glass in her hand. There was a bottle on the highest shelf. She took it down and measured it carefully with her eye. The children's manual of photography and the medical dictionary in Henry's dressing-room had been a great help.

She poured out into the deep red of the sloe gin some of the contents of the bottle; it looked very white and harmless and hardly smelt at all. She wondered if it was enough, and she tipped up the bottle a little to make sure. She used a good deal more than the

medical dictionary said was necessary, but the medical dictionary might have underestimated Henry's constitution. She put the bottle back where she found it, and returned to the pantry. There she filled up the liqueur-glass with more sloe gin.

She saw Paul on a garden seat through the window. "I wish you'd come out, Mother," he said.

"I will in a minute, dear," she answered quietly. Then she went back to her husband. "Here it is, Henry."

"What a slow woman you are!" he grumbled. "Still I must say you have a steady hand."

She held the full glass toward him and watched him drink it in a gulp.

"It tastes damned odd," said Henry thoughtfully. "I don't think I shall take any more of it."

Mrs. Watkins did not answer; she took up the liqueur-glass and went back into the pantry.

She took out another glass, filled it with sloe gin, drank it, and put it on the pantry table.

The first glass she slipped up her long sleeve and went out into the garden.

"I thought you were never coming, Mother!" Paul exclaimed. "Oh, I do feel sick about everything! If this kind of thing goes on, I shall do something desperate! I sometimes think I should like to kill father."

Mrs. Watkins drew a long breath of relief. Once or twice lately it had occurred to her while she was thinking things over in church that Paul might get desperate and attack his father. He couldn't now.

"Don't talk like that dear," she said gently. "I sometimes think your father can't help himself. Besides, it's very natural he should want you and Hetty to have money; he values money."

"He doesn't want us to have it!" Paul exclaimed savagely. "He only wants to keep us in his power because we haven't got it, and can't get away! What money has he ever given you — or let us have for our own freedom?"

Mrs. Watkins looked up at the substantial house and around the well-stocked garden. Henry had gone in especially for cabbages. She looked as if she were listening for something.

"I don't like to hear you talk like that, Paul," she said at last. "I want you to go up to Hetty's room and bring her out into the garden. She ought to have some air. It'll be church time presently."

"But if I bring her down, won't *he* come out and upset her?" Paul demanded.

"I don't think he is coming out again," said Mrs. Watkins. She watched her son disappear into the house, and then walked on into the thick shrubbery at the end of the garden. She slipped the liqueur-glass out of her sleeve and broke it into fragments against the garden wall, then she covered the pieces with loose earth.

She had hardly finished before she heard a cry from the house. "Mother! Mother! Oh, Mother!"

"I've done the best I can," she said suddenly, between the kitchen garden and the house.

There was an inquest the following week, and Mrs. Watkins, dressed in decent black, gave her evidence with methodical carefulness.

Her husband had been quite well before dinner, she explained. At dinner he had been a little disturbed with one of the children, but nothing out of the ordinary at all. He had merely said a few sharp words. After dinner he had gone to sit in the drawing-room, and at his request she had brought him a glass of sloe gin sent him by his brother; when he had finished it she had carried the glass back into the pantry. She did not see him again. The maids were not downstairs at the time. The sloe gin was examined, the pantry was examined, the whole household was examined. The parlour-maid had hysterics, and the cook gave notice to the coroner for asking her if she kept her pans clean. The verdict was death through misadventure, though a medical officer declared that poison was evidently the cause.

It was considered possible that Henry had privately procured it and taken it himself.

It is true he had no motive for suicide, but there was still less motive for murder. Nobody wished ardently that Henry might live, but, on the other hand, nobody benefited by his interesting and mysterious death — that is to say, nobody but Henry's family; and it is not considered probable that well-dressed, respectable people benefit by a parent's death.

Mrs. Watkins was never tempted to confession; and she continued to gaze just as fixedly at St. Peter and the sardines every Sunday. She thought about quite different subjects now; but she still had a nice quiet time.

It was the day before Hetty's wedding to the young architect that Mrs. Watkins made her final approach to the question of her husband's death. She never referred to it afterwards.

"Do you know, Mummy darling," Hetty said, "I was sure there were a dozen liqueur-glasses in the cupboard. I always looked after them myself. Father was so particular about them; and they put back the horrid inquest one, I know, and yet I can only find eleven."

Mrs. Watkins looked at her daughter with a curious expression, then she asked abruptly, "Are you very happy, child?" Hetty assented radiantly. Her mother nodded. "And Paul," said Mrs. Watkins thoughtfully, "he seems very contented in his painting. He wants me to go with him to Paris."

"Paul can't be as happy as I am," Hetty triumphantly assured her, "because he hasn't got Dick — but it does seem as if both our wildest dreams had come true in the most extraordinary way, doesn't it, Mummy?"

Mrs. Watkins did not answer her daughter at once. She turned toward the cupboard. She seemed to be counting the broken set over again.

"Well, I don't think it matters about that liqueur-glass," she said finally. "I'm not as particular as your father."

What famous detective in fiction rose to great heights after his supposed *death? That's an easy one: Sherlock Holmes, of course. But what famous detective in fiction rose to his greatest heights after his* actual *death? That is the key clue to Mr. Hatch's new "Guess Who?"*

GUESS WHO?

by TALBOT C. HATCH

HERE is the psychological sleuth *par excellence* — a man given to theoretic analysis and enjoyment of the abstract problem. The fact that he was occasionally prone to error in no way lessens his feats of deduction for, as he himself admitted, all reasoning is a series of trials and errors.

There are few physical clues to his being; at most we can only say that he was a smallish dark-eyed gentleman of a certain academic appearance. In the realm of his psychological gropings, however, we see the true picture of our man and gain that perspective of his traits and character that enables us to see him as genius personified.

As witness the tireless energy with which he approached his post-graduate work in criminal psychology, wherein he conducted a long series of experiments involving the tabulation of the number of cigar puffs per minute taken by brokers selling oil stocks, aviation stocks, and investment shares. From these he deduced the law, since known by his name, which has been both quoted and used by Roger Babson in his statistical reports. *The length of an ash on a broker's cigar produced in landing a given prospect on a marginal account varies by inverse squares with the length of time before said prospect will be asked to put up more money on said option.*

He was born in 1888 in Boston, the son of an Italian count who was wedded to an American lady from Cartersville, Virginia. His father, who was consulting engineer of a codfish cannery and a bean packery, brought him up in Boston, sending him to Noble and Greenough's School and later to Cornell. Here, majoring in psychology, he earned his M.A. and Ph.D. and became a Fellow of the American Society of Psychological Research. From 1918–25 he was an anti-spiritualist lecturer in a fundamentalist college in Breathitt County, Ky., and from 1926–28 he was a professor of psychology at Ohio State University.

It was in his first Sabbatical year, during which he toured the West Indies, that he first applied his analytical powers to criminological purpose and where, in the process of solving a number of criminal cases, he gave evidence of his undoubted genius. That he was, withal, a modest man is

shown by his reply to a man who asked him if he could unravel crimes: "Why, no," he said, "that is, no more than any other layman with a somewhat analytical mind."

He had the Latin aristocrat's dislike for all violent physical contacts — had never shot a gun in his life and scarcely knew which end of the thing to hold. When told by a policeman that he need take no physical part in an arrest, but simply to tip him (the policeman) off as to who was to be arrested, he felt that this was the ideal procedure for the criminal investigator: the planning brain — while other men supplied the physical force.

He delighted in conjectural fancies as to the cause of crime, on one occasion spiritedly contending that the bizarre architectural surroundings of a certain town would tend to produce crimes equally bizarre and grotesque, and on another questioning the influence of music on crime, suggesting that it is quite possible that some tunes incite robbery, some murder, and others assault. He would sit with jumping nerves when assailed with an idea of some new and brilliant theory on primitive psychology. Perhaps, for instance, he could determine some quantitative relation between, say, heartbeats and insensibility to pain, and his discovery might go down in the history of psychology as "His" Theorem!

Once, while brooding over the conclusion of a highly tragic case in which he had taken part, he arrived at the decision that crime detection was a damnable occupation and that a man following it would become a monster. Said he: "I, for one, will never engage in the sport or trade of manhunting" — a statement lacking authority for within five minutes of its utterance he was offered a case and accepted it with avidity. It would seem that the virus was in his blood.

To his death he remained unmarried; this, for the reason that having made a psychological investigation of the basis of agreement of married couples at the altar he discovered that each meant and was expecting diametrically opposed things. His conclusion, therefore, was that marriage was in its essence a disagreement and was consequently legally invalid according to the law of contracts.

In the last case in which he was concerned he was tricked by his own analytical instincts and found himself involved in the murder of the child-wife of a Hindu. Although falsely accused of the murder — the claim being advanced that he had perpetrated it as a coldblooded psychological experiment — he was unable to prove his innocence and was hanged on January 20, 1929.

If you can't "guess who" this psychological criminologist was, turn to page 127.

"Q"

Here is Number Three in Roy Vickers's brilliant series of detective stories about the Department of Dead Ends. Again Mr. Vickers unfolds the case history of an unusual murder; again, with almost painful deliberation, we follow the step-by-step events leading up to the tragedy. Every factor is perfectly clear: the characters, the situation, the motive, even the modus operandi *of the crime itself. Everything but that one ominous shadow in the background: the Department of Dead Ends.*

How does that seemingly disinterested, seemingly inefficient bureau of Scotland Yard, that slow, sluggish, but elephant-memoried Department of Dead Ends, eventually see through the protective coloration that surrounds a truly perfect crime?

The Department of Dead Ends is miraculously English: it apparently muddles through. But this too is protective coloration; for behind the muddling-through and the deceptive lack of imagination wait those patient, painstaking pursuers who never know when they're beaten because they never dream of giving up.

The original title of this story was "The Cowboy of Oxford Street." Your Editor changed it to "The Case of the Merry Andrew." Definition of merry-andrew: one whose business is to make sport for *others. Andrew Amersham, you will discover, fulfilled that definition in more ways than one . . .*

THE CASE OF THE MERRY ANDREW

by ROY VICKERS

ONE of the curiosities of murder is that the murderer very rarely understands his own motive. "I did her in because I didn't want her to make trouble with the wife." This has often been said, in varying forms; but it can never have been true.

We are driven to look for the real motive in some deep but unconscious emotional urge. There is the case of Andrew Amersham, a perfectly sane man in so far as a murderer can be sane — who committed the murder first and discovered his own motive afterwards.

Amersham was an amiable, rather pitiable little man. Not very likeable because he was stuffy and old-womanish in his tastes. Also, his credulity was over-developed — he would believe almost anything that was told him — a trait which, for some reason or other, the English strongly dislike.

We pick him up in the spring of 1901 at the age of 28 when he was living in a boarding house at Islington, employed at a wage of £4 a week by a firm of estate agents in Oxford Street. He is five feet four, thin and rather sallow. He suffers badly from what would nowadays be called an inferiority complex, which is easily explained

by the fact that he had long wanted to marry and that no remotely suitable girl had ever given him encouragement.

The perpetual snubbing drove him to a dream-life and in the early summer we find him going nightly to Olympia where Colonel Cody (Buffalo Bill) was beginning the final tour of his Wild West show. Then, suddenly, this stuffy, old-womanish little man made an astonishing attempt to turn his dream into reality. He threw up his job in Oxford Street and signed on at the show as a laborer for a three months' tour of the Provinces.

Here he fraternized with men who had begun life as real cowboys. One of them taught him the essentials of lasso work and rope spinning. He made sufficient headway to be put into the show itself and to act as feeder in a rope-spinning act.

In October the tour came to an end. He appears to have made a clean breast of his motives to his former employers who, after a suitable homily, gave him back his old job. By November he was again sunk in the misery of sexual loneliness. But in early December he met Constance Amelia Burwood.

She was a distinctly pretty woman of 35, temporary companion to an elderly lady, whom she was helping in the choice of a house in Bryanston Square. And she mistook Amersham for the manager of that prosperous business.

She astonished and delighted him by accepting his stammered invitation to dinner. She told him that she was the daughter of a deceased Colonel and he believed her. She told him that she had had one unhappy love affair when she was a young girl, after which she had put the thought of men out of her life — and he believed her again. The truth was that she had had anything but a dull life — that as her physical charms were beginning to fade she had run to cover and had fortunately stumbled upon a somewhat eccentric old lady who had forgotten to ask for references. Middle-age loomed ahead of her with the threat of destitution. She was perhaps unduly pessimistic, but it is none the less true that she would have married almost anyone who could afford to support her on the simplest scale.

To the unsophisticated Andrew she was full of pretty tricks and she undoubtedly knew how to make the most of what was left of her physical beauty. And so with her tutored caresses she healed the wounds left by innumerable snubs. Andrew Amersham was undoubtedly happy during the brief period of his courtship — so happy that he was taking no risks.

She had told him colossal lies about her past, but he was by no means straightforward with her. He let her go on supposing that he was manager, in receipt of a salary too reasonable to require definition. He sustained his deceit by drawing heavily upon his little nest egg of some £500 left to him by his mother.

She gave him a hard luck tale about the considerable sum of money left to

her by her father, the Colonel. And another tale of a dishonest employer having robbed her of her own small savings. He believed them both and gave her £80 with which to buy a trousseau. There was enough left from the nest egg to provide a comfortable honeymoon at Ilfracombe. Then came confession.

It arose quite naturally out of a discussion about taking a house and furnishing it when they returned to London.

"We shall have to see about the furniture and try and arrange something," he told her. "And as for the house — what about Islington? You see, they only pay me £4 a week and a small bonus at Christmas."

Now whatever else one may say about women like Constance, it is true that society treats them somewhat harshly. In her life Constance had suffered many disappointments — and she took this one very decently. There was, moreover, a bright side. Even a share of £4 a week, with a small bonus at Christmas and the hope of an ultimate increase, was a great deal better than the nothing to which she had fearfully looked forward.

"All right, Andrew! Never mind about the house. We'll live in digs. Perhaps something may turn up."

Andrew was very doubtful about anything turning up, but Constance had ideas. One of the ideas materialized before Christmas — in the person of William Edward Harries..

Harries was in the middle fifties — a businessman living in partial retirement. Five years previously he had made himself responsible for the rent of Constance's flat. He had been amongst the most loyal of her admirers, but his wife had found out and brought the affair to an end. Now that his wife was dead he was delighted to renew the acquaintance and was immensely tickled by the fact that she was now a respectable married woman.

He was a big fellow, weighing some 15 stone, old-fashioned in appearance, for he wore long side whiskers (Dundreary) that had been fashionable in his youth. He was very well preserved with scarcely a touch of gray. A breezy, genial-bully type of man with tastes, one must believe, that were more than a little tainted with eccentricity. For instance, it was he who insisted on meeting Constance's husband.

From the start he gave their acquaintanceship an atmosphere of its own. He sent a formal invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Amersham to dine with him at the old *Café de l'Europe* in Leicester Square. But not in the restaurant. In a private room, decked with flowers.

Andrew was afflicted with an incurable respectfulness. "So this is Andrew," said Harries. "How d'you do, Mr. Harries!" said Andrew. And "Andrew" and "Mr. Harries" they remained thereafter.

Throughout the dinner Harries took the measure of this man and enjoyed himself immensely. He had made no definite plan, though he had found

where the Amershams were living and knew all that he needed to know of their circumstances. The plan, we may take it, grew up somewhere between the soup and the coffee.

He threw off a thin enough story about his previous acquaintanceship with Constance and saw that it was believed. He felt quite unable to avoid patronizing Andrew.

"There, Andrew, my boy, that's a curaçao! Don't be afraid of it — it won't hurt you. You watch Connie — she used to know how to put it down — didn't you, my dear?"

Harries' conversation bristled with that kind of remark and he saw that it told Andrew just nothing. Andrew was, he decided, a unique specimen who knew nothing of the current music-hall jokes and had never been to a farce. Harries could take any liberty he liked. We are told that he was actually holding Connie's hand across the table when he made his proposition.

"Connie, my dear, I can't tell you how glad I am to see you happily married to a man I can respect. Your husband's my sort of man and I think we understand each other, eh, Andrew?"

"Yes, Mr. Harries, and thank you, I'm sure!" Andrew, slightly fuddled with the wine and the liquor, rose to his feet to make a speech about it, but Harries sat him down again.

"Of course we do, Andrew! That brings me to what I want to say. I'm getting old, Andrew, and I'm very lonely. After so many years of domestic life I can't get used to popping about from one hotel to another. You're living in rooms and you can't like that very much. Now suppose you were to take a nice little place at Hampstead and I'll come and live with you as your paying guest. But the rent, the rates, and the servants' wages will be mine. And Connie shall tell me what the housekeeping works out at. I like a good table."

At this stage we have no more than the bare fact that Andrew consented. One imagines him demurring a little at first, but only at the possibility of Harries' paying more than his fair share, for Andrew was not greedy. His fatal credulity must have made it easy for the others to reassure him on this point. In a month the three of them were settled at Hampstead.

It was one of the early houses of the garden suburb that had been built for an artist. It was an eight-roomed house with a studio on the top floor — an elaborate affair in fake Tudor style with oak rafters, which would greatly have offended present-day taste. The studio was by far the best room in the house and so was allotted to Harries as a bed-sitting-room. There was one other room on the top floor and that was Connie's, the middle floor being shared by the two maids and Andrew. The furniture and equipment, for every room except Andrew's, was provided by Harries.

To this régime Andrew was contributing £3-10 per week. The odd 10 shillings, together with the trifling bonus at Christmas, barely paid his lunches and season ticket. It was

when he was driven to borrowing £4 from his lodger for the purchase of a new suit that Harries decided to make another change in his host's fortunes.

Harries, more to provide himself with a lazy occupation than with the idea of making money, had bought an agency in what he regarded as a freak enterprise. He was, in fact, the English representative of a French firm who had hit on the idea of hiring actors to perform little plays which could be photographed and subsequently rented in the film form to those music halls that made a feature of Animated Pictures. Harries had a single room in Shaftesbury Avenue and he turned up when he felt inclined and filled what orders had arrived by post.

"Andrew, I don't like to see a man of your ability hard up for a few pounds. Your people don't appreciate you. I do. I'll give you £6 a week with a small commission to take care of my agency. There, boy, don't thank me — thank Connie!"

And so Harries became not only Andrew's "lodger," but also his employer. Regarded by itself, it was a fair enough arrangement. Andrew was a good and conscientious worker, who more than covered his salary by the increased attention given to the business. For a year everything seemed to work smoothly — for everyone except Andrew. For during this year a number of little conventions had sprung up which, designed nominally for Andrew's benefit, tended to leave him in the cold.

There was, for instance, what we may call the "outing" convention. Within their first month together Harries, over breakfast, had asked them both to dine with him in town that night and go to a music hall. But after breakfast Connie had taken Andrew aside.

"Of course he has to ask us both — with him living in the house. But he's done so much for us that I do feel we oughtn't to put him to any extra expense. And with taking two of us out everything's doubled, isn't it! I'm only thinking of you, Andrew. You're much too independent spirited to like having another man spending a lot of money on you, which you can't possibly return."

It was Andrew himself who suggested that a simple way out of the difficulty would be for him to make an excuse to cry off. Next week there was another little outing with the same little speech in different words by Connie. After it had happened twice it slipped into being an understood thing that Harries should invariably invite them both and that Andrew should as invariably make an excuse.

Shortly after Andrew had begun to work for Harries the dinner convention was established. Andrew left the office at 6 and, with a longish walk from the station, was rarely in the house before 7. Connie discovered that Harries tended to lose his appetite if dinner were later than 7. She and Harries had drifted into the habit of dressing for dinner — it saved trouble if they wished to go out anywhere

afterwards. And as she felt sure that Andrew would not care to sit down in morning dress, and further as he did not possess a dinner jacket anyway, it seemed simpler that he should have a good square meal in the middle of the day and just a light supper about 8 o'clock after dinner had been cleared away.

Andrew, of course, was very blind. Even with the £6 a week and the small commission — with £3-10 going to the household — there was little enough left after meeting his daily expenses, in which the good square meal was included. Twenty pounds a year was the utmost he could give to his wife as a dress allowance. But he knew nothing of dress values and merely thought she did extraordinarily well with the money.

Connie gradually accumulated several pieces of jewelry. First there was a gold wrist watch, frankly and openly a present from Harries. There was nothing to cavil at in this, for Connie had presented Harries with an exactly similar watch bought at the same shop at the same time. The two watches were, they said, a quaint pledge of their friendship. But neither considered it necessary to explain to Andrew that in the back of one of the watches was engraved "W. H. to C. A." and in the back of the other "C. A. to W. H." There was a diamond ring which she told Andrew had cost £5 — and he believed it. She told him she had won the £5 at the races — and he believed her again. And later he believed the several tales which accounted for the bracelet, the pendant and the brooch.

After his solitary supper he would join them in the drawing room and stay with them until they drove him out with the phonograph, which he detested, being a quiet little man.

It was not until the second year of this régime that he began to be acutely miserable. He made the discovery that in any given week he enjoyed scarcely half a dozen hours of his wife's company. Not since they had been at Hampstead had she favored him with a single caress. The old inferiority complex was inflamed again. Then quite suddenly he revolted.

One Saturday night he went into her room when she was dressing for dinner and was contemptuously snubbed.

"It's not fair, Connie. I've never been given a fair chance. We don't have any home life. We hardly ever see each other. And it's all Mr. Harries." And then looking, we must suppose, like a pocket Napoleon: "Harries must go!"

"Don't talk so silly, Andrew! We couldn't keep up this house without him — nor the servants."

"We don't want any of it. We could get a little place of our own."

She utterly failed to understand what had happened. So she laughed at him and dared him to speak to Harries. She must have been very surprised when he took her at her word and went straight across to Harries' room.

"Well, Andrew, my boy, what do

you want? I shall be down presently. Won't it wait?"

At any other time this would have cowed Andrew. But he was worked up now. He looked round the studio, taking in the fake Tudor beams, the senseless skylight, the sideboard, the incongruous bed with its heavy rails. He stood there, hating the lot.

"You've been very kind to us, Mr. Harries. But I've been thinking it over and I don't think it quite works, if you know what I mean. Of course, this is really your house — there's no question of asking you to leave it. But I'm taking Connie away. We're going to have a little place in Islington all by ourselves."

Harries was not angry. His attitude to Andrew was such that he could never feel anger towards him. He laughed, quite sincerely, for he was amused.

"Why, Andrew, if you and I part company where are you going to get another job?" he asked.

"I hadn't thought about that, Mr. Harries."

"Of course you hadn't! Now run away, there's a good lad! And ask Connie if she can spare me a minute. She can slip on a wrap if she isn't dressed."

Andrew went away. He even obeyed the order to tell Connie that she was wanted. For part of him was still pure automaton.

But there was a part of him that was nothing of the kind. There was that inferiority complex. We have all been told nowadays until we are tired of hearing it that a sense of inferiority is a very dangerous thing to nurse if you do not fully understand it. If you do not even recognize that you have one, heaven knows where it may drive you! And Andrew did not know that he had one — did not even know that Connie's coldness to him had driven his imagination to create a dream-world in which there was no Harries. As once before he had created a dream world in which there was no office, but only cowboys who taught him lasso work and rope spinning.

It was a full week before the dream matured and once again translated itself into reality. He crept into Harries' room in the small hours. He reached through the back bed-rails, noosed the neck of the sleeping man and, obtaining great leverage with his feet against the head of the bed, strangled him.

Then he threw one end of the rope over the nearest fake Tudor beam. He could not pull the body up on the rope, for he weighed less than 10 stone and Harries weighed 15. A man cannot pull a greater weight than his own, but if he is in reasonable health he can lift one far greater.

An upright chair and a directory. With his shoulder he got the dead man's feet on to the directory and steadying the body with the rope he pulled the body into an erect position. He fastened the other end of the rope round the double tassel hooks normally used for the cord of the skylight. Then he caused the heels of the corpse to knock away the chair.

He was in no hurry. He was able to observe that in the brief struggle Harries had broken a thumb nail. A suicide should show no signs of a struggle. Andrew looked about him.

In the bed, undamaged, was a gold wrist watch, twin of the one Connie wore. Andrew fastened it on the dead man's wrist, then moistened his handkerchief on his tongue and wiped from it his own fingerprints. The unbroken wrist watch would kill the suspicion that there had been any kind of struggle, thought Andrew — whereupon he went to bed and slept until he was awakened by the scream of the housemaid who was taking tea to Harries' room.

Though there was no apparent reason for William Harries to commit suicide — there was still less apparent reason why anyone should want to murder him. True, as the police at once recognized, it might have been done by a jealous husband — but in this case the hypothetically jealous husband weighed less than 10 stone. Even if he could have overpowered a man of that size he could not have hoisted him on to the beam and secured the rope on the double tassel hook. There was, of course, the possibility that Andrew might have strangled him first and, in short, that he might have done exactly what he did do. But what might have happened is of little interest to Scotland Yard if it cannot be proved. And in this case it could not be proved.

There was, in fact, not a single clue to support the theory of murder. The rope, bought orginally to manipulate the sideboard through the skylight, had been stored in the tool shed. Moreover, by the nature of the case it was impossible that any clue could be discovered later on.

Andrew Amersham in short had committed the perfect crime. There was no possibility, it seemed, of his paying the penalty unless he confessed. And why should he confess? The poets may believe that the avenging furies haunt the murderer, but police records do not bear this out. And, so far from being haunted, Andrew was undoubtedly proud of his deed. The murder, we may say, made a new man of him.

The new man, on the night after the inquest, went to his wife's room. In her anger at what she regarded as his intrusion she gave voice to those suspicions which the police had kept to themselves. He neither admitted nor denied the charge. He just took two of her silver-backed hair brushes and beat her rather brutally. She put in a good deal of screaming, but as the servants had left after the inquest there was no one to hear her.

It was when her strength was failing under his repeated blows that she gasped out:

"Will — he's killing me! Willie — don't let him!"

The castigation immediately ceased. Until that moment he had not known why he was beating her. It was not for anything she had said — it was just that this meek little man was turning savage — finding his release,

as the psychologists would say. And now her words, which in themselves proved nothing, suddenly brought a dimly apprehended fact to his full consciousness.

"You've been carrying on with him behind my back. Go on — haven't you?"

And then the dreadful retort gasped out between sobs:

"What if I have! You didn't think you were getting this house and all the rest of it for nothing, and you needn't try to kid me."

He did not mind her accusing him of the murder, rather liked it in fact. But this was a cruel charge — the more unbearable because he seems to have understood that, though unjust, anyone but she herself would have been justified in making it. To it he made what seems to us the irrelevant answer:

"If I can't kid you, you can't kid me any longer."

He pulled her from her bed. She scratched and bit him, but he got a good grip on her hair and dragged her into the room that had been Harries'. She was terrified, because she thought that he intended to murder her, too. Indeed, it may well have been his intention to do so, but the intention was never fulfilled.

He flung her on the sofa, where she lay panting, too exhausted to attempt to run from the room. He snatched up a poker and broke the door of Harries' sideboard. Then he helped himself to a stiff tot of Harries' brandy. This, in her mind, must have ranked as a remarkable thing in itself, for she knew that he had not touched alcohol since the night of that fateful dinner at the *Café de l'Europe*.

"I've been a fool — and you needn't tell me that again, because I know it. You gave him what you ought to have given me, and it's no good your saying I was standing in on it, because you know I wasn't. I've hated it here."

He took another brandy, sipped it while he sat on the edge of Harries' bed and looked up at the beam on which he had hanged him.

"You've broken the glass on my wrist watch," she whimpered. "That's the second time this week. It only came back today."

But Andrew was not in the mood to bother about a wrist watch.

"I'm not the first man to be fooled by a woman. We don't want to talk any more about Harries. He's all over. The question is, what am I going to do with you? Serve you right if I was to string you up. But that's all over. Tell you what I'm going to do with you, Connie, I'm going to forgive you."

Now a man, in the simple calculation of Connie's class, was a man. Harries, she quite realized, was "over" — and it would obviously be wise to take what she could get. She poured forth a fervent torrent of promises of good behavior for the future. But the swashbuckling, brandy-drinking, wife-beating Andrew was not afflicted with credulousness and paid no attention. At the end of it all she asked him where they were going to live.

"I dunno. I'll think it over. Tell you

in the morning. And now hop off to bed — go on! Do what I tell you or I'll set about you again."

By the following morning the violence had evaporated, but the meekness had not come back. As they sat together in the kitchen over a breakfast which she had prepared he gave his decision.

"We're going to live here. The rent is a hundred and twenty, and it's five weeks to June quarter-day. I'll be able to manage it. You'll have to keep the place clean and have supper ready for me when I come in — at 7."

What was left of Harries' capital went to Chancery, but the agency went to Andrew. He ran over to Paris and obtained a renewal of the contract in favor of himself. While there, he established relations with another French studio and three Italian studios. For in those days France and Italy dominated the new-born industry.

Andrew scraped together the rent by quarter-day and was safe in his possession of the house for another three months — and in that short time a great deal happened.

In those days there was not in Great Britain a single house devoted solely to the film. Some of the music halls ran it as a cheap turn, and there were a number of individuals on the road with a small assortment, who would turn up and take a room in the town hall for a couple of nights. Quite suddenly Paul Nillsen, a Swede, started a chain of tiny theatres to be devoted exclusively to the cinematograph film. But before he had opened a single theatre a rival chain was started by George Aventaar (the father of the distinguished royal academician). Each had to go to Andrew for service. Each offered an ahead contract with a cash deposit and by employing an astute solicitor on the contracts Andrew was able to accept both offers.

The dramatic picture was making a slow start. They were 10-minute affairs, most of them very crude — but some of them struck a very high level of artistic technique (which is just about to be rediscovered). But with this new fillip, production increased and within a year the two-reel drama was born. Andrew was the first renter to occupy a whole house in Wardour street.

In the meantime his personal life was passing through a no less startling phase of reconstruction. The murder, we may assume, was ever present in his memory, though not quite in the sense that the moralist would expect. So far from being a secret horror it became a positive inspiration to a life of freedom and self-determination.

For instance, there was the occasion some five months after the murder when he turned up at 7 o'clock as usual to find Connie all in a flutter because she had mistaken the time and had not prepared his supper.

From the new Andrew she had almost expected another beating and no doubt felt some difficulty in believing her ears when he said:

"Never mind all that, Con! I've given you the chance and you've been trying to take it. Go and put your

best clothes on and all your jewelry — we're going out. Hurry up."

He took her out to dinner. To a private room at the *Café de l'Europe*, decked with flowers.

"Remember when we were here before, Con? . . . Made a bit of a mistake that night — me the same as you. That's all over. You and I are getting along fine. Brought you something — catch hold."

A jeweler's box. And inside was a gold wrist watch. But this gold wrist watch was set with diamond points.

"That's better than the one he gave you. Look at the diamonds. Put it on and chuck his in the river."

Connie gushed with gratitude and renewed penitence.

"I wouldn't ever have worn his jewelry again only you told me to, Andy. I never really cared for it. And I promise you you won't see any of it again ever."

"Rats!" said Andrew. "You go on wearing that stuff every time I take you out until I can give you better."

At intervals of a few weeks he brought her back to the *Europe* and substituted first a better diamond ring, then a better pendant, a better bracelet, and finally, just after Christmas, a better brooch. But Connie demurred against throwing Harries' jewelry into the river.

"The wonderful luck you've been having in business might change, Andy, and then we'd be glad of the stuff to pawn it."

"All right!" he agreed. "It isn't luck — it's brains. But you can store the stuff if you like."

On the same principle he gradually replaced every item of furniture that Harries had bought, down to the last sauce pan and corkscrew. When everything in the house was his own, bought by himself, he let Connie engage a cook-general to help her. Then a cook and housemaid — which brought him level with Harries. Then a cook, a housemaid and a parlormaid and a wholetime gardener — and Harries was definitely beaten.

This ended the reconstruction phase, after which he seems to have settled down. Within three years of the murder he was paying income tax on £3000 — and even so his returns were not as frank as they ought to have been. Andrew was saving money though he gave his wife pretty nearly everything she wanted. He never beat her again — was in fact very kind to her. But he always spoke to her in a genial bullying way.

Connie, for her part, turned into a somewhat timid but very respectable wife. She was a bad manager, having perpetual trouble with her servants. But she did her best with the instinctive loyalty of her class to the paymaster.

The last of a long line of servants whom she had dismissed had known all about the cash box under a loose board in the built-in wardrobe with its little cache of jewelry. She walked off with it and it was not until six weeks later — August, 1906 — that Connie discovered her loss. She went straight to Scotland Yard about it. By October Scotland Yard had fished the jewelry

out of four London pawn shops. They asked the Amershams to call at the Yard to identify the pieces.

Detective-Sergeant Horlicks had recovered the jewelry. On a Friday evening he showed the items to Superintendent Tarrant of Dead Ends.

Tarrant borrowed the jewelry and looked long at the gold wrist watch. Then from a cabinet file he produced the gold wrist watch that had been found on Harries' wrist after death. He noted that, in outward appearance, they were exactly the same.

"Oh, Horlicks — when the Amershams call I will see them first, I'll send that jewelry back to you when I've done with them."

Connie was again all of a flutter, a very frequent state with her. When she had made her complaint she had visualized a respectful detective handing her back her jewelry in her own house. Instead had come an anything but obsequious invitation to Scotland Yard and she had refused to face the ordeal without Andrew.

Each item of jewelry was in a little carboard box bearing the name of the pawnbroker from whom it had been recovered. Connie identified the ring, the bracelet, the pendant and the brooch, and finally the gold wrist watch. And then the fatal dialogue began.

"That watch looks to me extraordinarily like the one found on your late lodger, William Harries, after death. Are there any special marks by which you could positively identify that watch as yours, Mrs. Amersham?"

"Yes, Mr. Tarrant. If you open the back you'll find some reading inside. It says 'W. H. to C. A.' I'm C. A."

"And William Harries was 'W. H.'?"

"Yes. They were presents to each other, weren't they, Andrew? I mean I gave him one exactly like that with the initials the other way around."

"Just open the watch, will you, Mrs. Amersham, and show me the inscription. Then perhaps I needn't trouble you any further."

With a certain difficulty — for she had never done it before — Connie pried open the back of the watch.

"Oh! This says 'C. A. to W. H.' It's the one I was supposed to give him — not the one he gave me."

"Precisely!" snapped Tarrant and turned to one of the clerks. "Evans — lock the door."

Tarrant had shouted the last words to work up the dramatic side. He gave them a long pause to shake their nerve, then opened a direct attack on Connie.

"If you are right in what you say, Mrs. Amersham, you have been in possession of Harries' watch for the last three years. That means that the one found on his wrist was really yours. How do you account, Mrs. Amersham, for your watch being on Harries' wrist?"

"Why, they were as like as two peas, Mr. Tarrant! They might have got muddled up some time and poor Will might have put mine on by mistake."

"Harries never put your watch on his wrist by mistake, Mrs. Amersham." Tarrant fluttered a dossier.

"Has either of you heard of Mr. Murfoot, a jeweler at Hampstead?" he asked. "Now wait a minute. William Harries died in the small hours of May 18, 1903. We have here a statement from Mr. Murfoot that on May 17, William Harries brought a gold wrist watch to him for repair of the glass. So you see he couldn't have taken your wrist watch in mistake for his own because he knew that his own was at the jeweler's."

"I remember that!" cried Connie. "But it was my watch he took to Mr. Murfoot to save me the trouble."

"It's very easy for you to say that, Mrs. Amersham, but not so easy for me to believe it. It was Harries' watch that went to the jeweler's and when it came back two days later — the day of the inquest — you claimed it as yours — to prevent our asking any dangerous questions."

"Oh, I never!" protested Connie.

"The watch that was found on Harries' wrist," thundered Tarrant, "had no fingerprints on it. If Harries had put it on himself he would have been bound to leave his own fingerprints. One of you put that watch on his wrist after he was dead. And the one who did it wetted a piece of thin cloth, probably a handkerchief, by putting it on the tongue — and rubbed the whole watch and bracelet. Microscopic examination revealed saliva."

"Oh, I never — I never!"

"You two crept into his room that night. You noosed him as he lay asleep. Then both of you pulled on the rope and swung him up. In his struggle to free the rope from his neck he broke a thumbnail. And to conceal the fact that there had been any struggle one of you put the wrist watch on him."

"We didn't — we didn't!" screamed Connie. "Andy, tell him we didn't!"

"I'll tell him you didn't," said Andrew. "You can leave her out of it, Mr. Tarrant. I did it all by myself. She didn't know anything about it till this minute."

"That's plucky of you, Amersham. But if you're offering that as a confession I can't accept it. You must have been in together. You couldn't have pulled him up by yourself — he was too heavy."

"I didn't pull him up, Mr. Tarrant. I lifted him up — after I'd strangled him. . . . All right, I'll say it all slowly so you can write it down. But let her go first."

They let her go. They took her along to Detective-Sergeant Horlicks' room. When Andrew had finished dictating his confession a clerk brought all the jewelry into Horlicks' room. And red tape compelled Horlicks to ask her to identify it all over again.

She snatched up the gold wrist watch and pried open the back.

"There you are!" she cried. " 'W. H. to C. A.' This is my watch. There needn't have been any mistake about it from start to finish."

"There wasn't," said Detective-Sergeant Horlicks.

But we must assume that he said it to himself.

Your Editor was deeply impressed by this original short-short. There's the sound and smell of the outdoors in it; the landscape is so deftly sketched you can almost see it; the tang in the air is so winy you can almost taste it.

This story could be titled "Hunting Accident," except that Ed May really didn't have his mind on hunting — and it was no accident . . .

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

by OWEN CAMERON

SQUINTING against the first sharp touch of sunlight on the ridge, Clarence said, "Did you read about that hunter getting killed last week? Shot by his own brother?"

Clarence and Ed May were behind a down-log, watching the trail that led off from the ridge. They had hunted together for six years, a kind of companionship that makes men closer than brothers.

"It's a funny thing about hunting accidents," Clarence went on idly. "I noticed it a long time ago. It's always the same story. Everybody tries to make it easy for the man whose gun went off. No one even hints that he was careless. Just another hunting accident. Too bad — let's bury the corpse and forget about it. It's hushed up, like doctors do when another doctor cuts too deep. Funny, isn't it?"

"Yes," Ed May said absently. He was thinking about his wife. He thought of her long legs and her white skin, and the way the bright, soft, downy hair grew on her neck, and the trick she had of turning her profile to you, and looking at you out of the corners of her eyes.

"Last season, right in this country," Clarence said, "there was a funny one. Two partners split up, to hunt both sides of a little canyon. One sat down for a smoke, and when his partner crawled out of the brush on the other side, he shot him. He said he thought it was a bear. A bear with a red hat, for God's sake! And bear season wasn't open! But they didn't even scold him. No, they just said it was too bad, but accidents will happen. You read about that, Ed?"

"You told me about it," Ed said. For the thousandth time he asked himself: *But what's wrong with me? I give her everything she wants. I'm not stupid. I look all right. But I don't think she even knows what I look like. Then why did she marry me?*

Clarence hissed softly and touched Ed's knee. They stared at the up-trail, where it emerged from the blue-brush into the scattered timber of the lower slope. They saw faint, veiled movement, more of color than of shape, and a doe stepped daintily into the open and stopped, looking around warily. Two fawns of the last spring followed, one pausing beside the doe, the other trotting boldly

down the trail until it reached the first bit of browse. The doe moved on, and the men waited tensely for the buck that might be behind her.

Ed was still thinking about his wife. They had been married a year, and for almost that time Ed had known she did not love him. She did not even dislike him — he was just there, like a stick or a stone.

Clarence relaxed slightly and said, "But it happens all the time, year after year. Like that fellow who shot the horse. Some outfit was packing a buck out on horseback, and he saw the horns and shot the horse."

"I remember," Ed said. *Maybe it's because I'm so slow. Like the way Clarence always gets the first shot at a buck. He moves while I'm thinking about it.*

Clarence was talking again, in a low voice, his eyes on the doe. "I read a piece last week, about two hunters over on the coast. One came in packing the other, shot through the lungs with a .300 Savage. So he said, but nobody checked the bullet, of course. He said his partner had dropped his gun, and it went off and killed him. They just took his word for it, and said accidents will happen, and let him go. It's sure funny, if you think about it."

The doe froze, looking up the hillside directly at the down-log. Both men held their bodies rigid, scarcely breathing until she flapped her ears and then bent her neck to sample a mushroom.

Too slow, I'm always too slow, Ed thought. *Look how long it took me to find out she had another man. Maybe I never would have found out, if I hadn't seen them together. If Clarence was in my place, he would have guessed right away. But I'm too slow.*

"Remember the fellow who talked about sound shots?" Clarence whispered. "He said he hadn't seen anything, but he had heard the brush rustle, and shot at the noise. Wouldn't he be a fine hunting-partner? Anyone who would go hunting with a damn fool like that would be a damn fool, wouldn't he?"

"Yes, I guess so," Ed said vaguely. *Slow — dumb and slow*, he told himself. *And now that I know, I haven't even figured out what to do about it. Clarence would have done something then and there. But I have to think it over. I even go hunting with him as usual. I talk to him as though nothing had happened. Maybe by next year I'll decide what to do.*

Ed's face twisted with self-contempt. Clarence was talking again.

"Maybe these country people figure a man wouldn't spoil his hunting trip that way, by deliberately shooting his partner. Most of them are hunters, too, and I guess they think that if you like a man well enough to go hunting with him, you can't hate him enough to shoot him."

"Anyone knows you don't go buck-hunting with the idea of killing a man," Ed said.

Just as I go hunting with you as usual, when I'd cheerfully kill you, he thought. Then, because he was slow, he went

back over the talk until he came again to that point and heard the exultant inner voice shouting.

He turned his head to the right, glancing at Clarence. Clarence was looking the other way, at the three deer. They had passed into the thick growth at the foot of the slope, and were now visible only as brown patches glimpsed through the bright green of cedar seedlings.

Ed fixed his eyes on the back of Clarence's head. He pulled back the hammer of his rifle, squeezing the trigger at the same time, so that his gun was cocked without a sound. He covered the hammer with his left hand. He looked away, up the trail. He wanted to go over the whole thing once more, slowly and carefully.

But that's always been my trouble, he thought, and added aloud, "I've always been too slow, too careful."

"Look what it's got you," Clarence said. "Money in the bank, a beautiful wife — everything."

"It never got me anything," Ed said. He looked at the trail, thinking, and again put his thought into words. "But I've changed. I'm never going to be slow and cautious again. I'm going to be quick, Clarence — quick like you!"

He turned suddenly toward Clarence, bringing his rifle up from his knees. But his eyes moved faster than his body, and he looked with astonishment and almost amusement into the round, steady muzzle of Clarence's gun.

It was unquestionably an accident. The two men had hunted together for six years, and were closer than brothers. The sheriff was tactful, the coroner apologetic, and everyone tried to make things easy for Clarence — especially Mrs. May.

One of the most popular detectives in American magazines between 1906 and 1912 was Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, the immortal Thinking Machine. The career of the Thinking Machine was short but spectacular — a mere half-dozen years; his astonishing adventures came to an untimely end with the heroic death of his creator, Jacques Futrelle, in the "Titanic" disaster of 1912. But anthologists (includ. Yr. mo. Hble. Svt.) have kept the memory of the Thinking Machine glowingly alive, despite the fact that the entire book-record of his cases consists of only three volumes, a now-forgotten short novel and two books of short stories (one exceedingly scarce).

Jacques Futrelle did not always write about the Thinking Machine. He wrote other stories about other detectives. Here is one of them — about Detective Garron. The original version of this story appeared in 1908; since then it has never been reprinted, nor has it ever been included in any of Jacques Futrelle's books. It's a curious story, full of curiously disturbing undertones. Although conceived and written nearly forty years ago, the story bears a curious resemblance to William Irish's PHANTOM LADY *and to the legendary tale of the frantic young woman whose mother disappeared in a Paris hotel.*

Jacques Futrelle's experimental probings, as long ago as 1908, make us wonder to what new heights of technique he might have raised the detective story had he not died so tragically at the age of 37 . . .

THE STATEMENT OF THE ACCUSED

by JACQUES FUTRELLE

"IT WAS only a fleeting glimpse I caught of her as she hurried along the brilliantly lighted hallway, past the half open door of my room; a young woman, and yet such a face! It was no longer young, and I wondered if youth had been so obliterated by the merciless hand of sorrow. But beauty was in her face — the cold, colorless beauty of marble. Her lips were slightly parted, her great dark eyes were wide, and in that bare instant I saw something of fear in them, even horror. Tendrils of her hair escaping from the cunning small hat she wore, a filmy veil, and the pallor of her face, seemed to make her look weird, witch-like.

"For ten, perhaps fifteen minutes, I had been standing beside my open window which overlooked the roofs of the adjoining buildings; I felt the need of breathing the clean, cool, salt-tanged air that now swept in from the sea. I had not been in my room any longer than that. I had not even paused to turn on the lights when I came in, but had gone straight to the window, opened it, and stood beside it there in the darkness. I had not been well for some time. It was some absurd nervous trouble. I had always been

nervous, but of late I had been constantly giddy, there was a continual pounding of blood in my ears, and queer, throbbing pains in my head; at times they drove me frantic. The breeze at the window was cool, fresh, and soon I did not notice the oppressiveness of the room; the tormenting pains in my head had almost ceased.

"Yes, I had been standing there some ten or fifteen minutes, staring out over the gloomy, uneven roofs below me. Perhaps you know the fascination of a single bright point in the darkness. Perhaps you know how it compels your attention. Well, after a little time I noticed such a point of light, a mere glint on the roof of the next building. I thought at first it was a fragment of glass shining by reflected light from a window in the hotel where I lived. For no other reason than the sheer brightness of it I kept staring at the point of light, and after awhile it seemed to become a tangible thing. A revolver! The thought startled me a little. Yes, a revolver! The longer I looked the more certain I was. The light was flashed back to me by the short, nickeled barrel, and it seemed to grow clearer as I looked.

"Perhaps another minute passed, and then a trap-door in the roof opened suddenly and the head and shoulders of a man appeared. He carried a small flashlight and turned it about here and there seeking something. At last he stepped out on the gravel and stood there a moment, then he made a tour of the roof. He stopped at the place where I had seen the bright point of light and picked up the revolver. I had known it was a revolver and yet, when the man held it in his hand, a sort of shudder ran over me. He flashed the light upon it and examined the weapon, and I at my window thirty feet away, safe in the dark, looked with an interest as curious as his. It was a singular appearing firearm, short, sturdy, and rather bulky as to barrel — indeed it seemed to have two barrels, one above the other; its general shape was not unlike an old-fashioned derringer. . . . After a time the man went back down the trap, and gloom fell again on the roof. The bright point was gone.

"All this was before I saw the woman in the hallway. I don't know just how many minutes it was before my reverie was broken by the sound of the woman's quick steps. That, too, startled me a little. I think it was because the sound seemed so near, almost in the room. I whirled about. My door was half open — I had not been aware of it — and I decided to close it. It was then that the woman hurried past along the lighted hallway. My glimpse of her was brief but I noted every detail — the deadly pallor of her face, the terror in her dark eyes.

"Certainly it was not more than half a minute that I stood staring at the spot where she had been, and then, just for curiosity, or it might have been because of the stealth in the woman's manner and the strangeness of her face, I went to the door and looked out. It was a hallway without

turns in the direction she had gone, but she was not in sight. I knew then that she had gone into one of the rooms beyond mine. I couldn't guess which one, besides it was no concern of mine. It was only midnight, and after all there was nothing startling about her being there; and the fact that I had not heard a door open or close along the hallway was of no consequence. Yet, I kept wondering which room she had entered.

"I was just about to close my door and turn on the lights when I heard the muffled crash of a revolver shot. There was no mistaking the sound. It came from somewhere down the hallway, in the direction the woman had gone. For an instant I stood still listening, but only for an instant; then I flung open my door and ran out. I don't know just where I intended to go or what I intended to do. However, what happened shaped my decision, for the door of Room 666 burst open almost in my face, and there was the woman coming out!

"She hesitated when she saw me.

"'What's the matter?' I demanded. 'What happened?'

"She didn't answer; instead she tried to rush past me. Instinctively I put out both hands to stop her and succeeded in getting hold of one of her wrists. Her hand slipped through my fingers as a serpent might have done; I was pushed backward, stumbled, and went reeling against the wall behind me. When I straightened up again the woman was disappearing down the stairs.

"I didn't try to go after her. Instead I ran into my own room, three doors away, and telephoned to the office.

" 'Someone has been murdered in Room 666!' I told the telephone girl. 'A woman fired the shot. I tried to stop her, but she got away from me and ran down the stairs. She is still in the hotel. Don't let her get away!'

"And then, for a little time, I don't know just what happened. I remember the horrible pains in my head, probably because of all the excitement, and a sudden weakness in my legs. I may have fallen; I don't know. It could not have been long before I heard the opening of the elevator door, followed by the rush of feet in the hallway. I looked out. I saw the house detective, and with him was Verbeck, the night-clerk, a policeman in uniform, and two badly frightened bellboys.

" 'Did you catch the woman?' I asked. I was very excited but I tried to be calm.

" 'No.' It was the house detective, Garron, who answered me. 'Was it you who 'phoned the office?'

" 'Yes.' Garron looked at me curiously. He was a tall man, slight, with deepset eyes and the face of a ferret.

"Suddenly he moved on to Room 666, with the rest of us at his heels. The door stood wide open, and we all waited at the dark threshold for him to turn on the light. It came suddenly, a flood of it. What I saw in the room made me gasp in spite of the effort I made to be calm. I saw a

man lying on the floor, face down, with his right hand outstretched toward us grasping a revolver. But the thing that made me cry out was a dark, crimson stain, and across the room a trail of blood. It was as if, wounded, the man had dragged himself across the floor. Perhaps he had been trying to reach the door — or the telephone beside the door.

" 'Is he dead?' asked the policeman.

"Garron dropped on his knees beside the man and pressed an ear to the body over the heart.

" 'He's dead, all right,' he said brutally.

"The policeman helped him turn the body over. I looked into the upturned face and cried out again. I should have fallen if Verbeck had not been there to support me.

" 'Do you know him, Mr. Meredith?' Garron asked abruptly.

" 'Yes — yes, I know him,' I told Garron after a moment. 'He's Frank Spencer. I have known him for years; he's an old friend of mine.'

" 'Did you know he was staying in the hotel?'

"Garron's deepset eyes were glowing into mine with a fire that suddenly aroused an unaccountable anger in me. I seemed to feel an accusation in his abrupt questions.

" 'Why do you ask?' I demanded.

" 'If he is an old friend and you knew he was here in the hotel you surely would have known the number of his room,' Garron explained patiently. 'You 'phoned downstairs that someone had been murdered in Room 666. You didn't mention Mr. Spencer's name. Am I to suppose you did not know he was in the hotel?'

" 'No — no, I didn't know he was in the hotel.' I hesitated at the vague menace in Garron's voice. 'I didn't know he was here!'

"Garron spoke to the night-clerk. 'How long has Mr. Spencer been here, Mr. Verbeck?'

" 'Nearly a week,' Verbeck told him.

" 'As a matter of fact,' Garron went on, 'there has been no one living on this floor for the last three or four days, except Mr. Meredith and Mr. Spencer?'

" 'No one at all.'

" 'And certainly no woman?'

"Verbeck shook his head.

" 'But there *was* a woman,' I insisted. 'I *saw* her. If you had taken the trouble to guard all the entrances to make sure she didn't leave the hotel — instead of rushing up here where you can do a dead man no good — you might have caught her.'

" 'If the woman was in the hotel when you 'phoned the office, then she has not escaped.' Garron was quite positive. 'Every exit is guarded; she would not be allowed to pass.'

" '*If* she was in the hotel?' I repeated. 'I tell you she *was*, I saw her!'

"All this time Garron had been on his knees beside the dead man. Now he stood up and said something to the policeman, then he turned and stared at me. I didn't like it. I was about to protest when he spoke to me rather

gently.

" 'I know you have been ill, Mr. Meredith, and all this excitement has been too much for you. Suppose you go to your room, and if you have anything there to drink, take it. You need a good stiff drink. You are as white as a sheet.'

"Verbeck helped me to my room. It was only a little while after that Garron rapped on the door and came in. I had taken one of my headache powders and was quite calm; the pains in my head were almost gone.

" 'The woman?' I asked. 'Did they catch her?'

"He shook his head. 'No woman left the hotel from the time you 'phoned the office. If she is here she will be caught. You may be sure of that. I should like to have a description of the woman as you remember her; and whatever else you may know of all this.'

"I told him frankly everything I have just related, even to the apparently unconnected detail of the man picking up what seemed to be a revolver on the roof next door. I gave him a minute description of the woman.

" 'You didn't turn on the light when you came into this room, and you left the door open?'

" 'I didn't leave the door open,' I corrected. 'I remember distinctly that I closed it behind me. It must have swung open.'

"He got up, opened the door, then closed it casually. The latch didn't catch; the door swung back on its hinges. The incident, trivial as it was, gave me a thrill of satisfaction.

" 'Why didn't you turn on your light?' he asked, as he sat down again.

" 'The room was hot and stuffy. I was feeling ill, and my first thought was to open the window.'

" 'When you 'phoned downstairs you said someone had been murdered in 666? You said that?' he asked.

" 'Yes.'

" 'You said *murdered?*'

" 'As I remember it, I did.'

" 'Why?'

" 'I had heard the shot, I had seen the woman trying to escape, and naturally my first thought was murder,' I explained. 'I was excited when I went to the 'phone, and I used the first word that came to my mind.'

" 'But you didn't *know* there had been a murder?'

" 'No, I didn't *know* it.'

" 'You say you heard a shot. You didn't by any chance hear more than one shot?'

" 'Only one. Was more than one fired?'

" 'Two shots at least. One entered Spencer's back just below the heart; the other was embedded in the woodwork at the door.' He looked at me keenly for a moment. 'The shot that was embedded in the woodwork at the door was fired from Spencer's revolver — the one he held when we found him.'

" 'But if the two shots had been fired simultaneously,' I suggested, 'there would have only been the sound of one.'

" 'If they had been fired simultane-

ously Spencer must have been standing with his back toward whoever shot him, and he would have been shooting in the opposite direction.'

"I began to see what he was driving at.

" 'So one of the shots must have been fired after the other,' he went on patiently. 'You see that, don't you?'

" 'I heard only one shot,' I insisted.

"Suddenly Garron's tone changed.

" 'You say you didn't enter Room 666 from the time you heard the shot fired until I came upstairs?'

" 'No,' I told him.

" 'You didn't so much as lay a finger on Spencer's body when we found him?'

" 'No.'

" 'Don't you know,' he went on mercilessly, 'don't you know there was no woman concerned in this affair at all?'

"The question brought me to my feet and I stood for an instant swaying giddily; blinding anger suddenly swept over me. I tried to speak; I couldn't.

" 'What motive did you have to murder Spencer?' Garron demanded.

" 'You are accusing *me* of murder?' My voice came at last. 'Why do you think I —'

" 'Your hand!' Garron pointed to it. 'The back of it is covered with blood. I noticed it when you met us at the door, when we first came up here. In Spencer's room, I called the policeman's attention to it.'

"I glanced down at my right hand, amazed. Blood, yes — a great splotch of it. How did it get there? How could it have been there all the time and passed unnoticed by everyone except Garron?

"For a long time I remembered nothing. When semi-consciousness came I seemed to be looking down a long, narrow passageway, hedged about with steel bars. At its end was a chair. . . . When I opened my eyes a doctor was sitting beside my bed. A few minutes later I was put under arrest charged with the murder of Frank Spencer.

"The following day a lawyer came to see me in my cell. He had been my father's old friend. He found me at the tiny wash basin scrubbing the back of my right hand. He asked me a great many questions in no way connected with the murder, and all the while he searched my face, my eyes, with a look of bewilderment.

" 'I think you ought to know,' he said at last, 'that the pistol you used to — the pistol with which Spencer was shot — was picked up on the roof of a building next door to your hotel.'

" 'Yes. I told Garron I had seen a man find one there.'

" 'It was thrown from a window of the hotel,' he persisted. 'The person who occupied the room directly beneath the spot where the pistol fell heard it strike. He thought someone was trying to force the trap-door, so he dressed and went up to investigate. He found the weapon; it was a *Maxim noiseless*.' He waited a moment, evidently, for my reaction. 'It looks something like an old-fashioned derringer;

the part underneath that looks like a second barrel is really a muffler.'

" 'Yes, I know.'

" 'Garron turned it over to the police, and they have managed to find a man who says he sold it. *He will swear he sold it to you and that you paid for it with your personal check!*'

"If he had expected to startle me with this accusation he was disappointed. Garron had said there were two shots fired in Room 666; if one of the shots had been fired with a noiseless pistol, I could not, of course, have heard but one. In a way it was a point in my favor.

" 'My boy,' the lawyer said after a long time. 'I've known you ever since you were a little chap. You were always sickly, nervous, never normal. I've watched you grow into manhood with an awful fear of what was coming. It has come. Your mother died in an asylum.' He stopped speaking and took off his glasses, and I could see that his eyes were dim; then he put on the glasses and his eyes were stern. 'Your father was one of my best friends, and I shall do what I can for you — to save you. But there's only one thing to do — you must plead insanity!'

I came to my feet in a rage. I thrust out my hands to throttle him. Across the back of my right hand was a great crimson splotch. I shuddered and put my hand behind me.

" 'You believe I am guilty,' I screamed at him. 'And you call yourself one of my father's best friends.'

" 'The circumstantial evidence is overwhelming,' he said gently, 'except for motive.'

" 'Motive!' And I knew it was my moment of triumph. 'There was no motive. That's where I shall beat them; and beat you, if you believe I murdered him.'

" 'Insane men need no motives,' he told me. 'I will admit, to humor you, that you honestly believe you saw this woman you describe; I will admit that I think you don't *remember* shooting Spencer. But you are not yourself, my boy. The disease that wrecked your mother's life —' He left it unsaid and got up to go. 'I shall plead insanity when you are arraigned.'

" 'And I shall deny it,' I declared; I beat upon my table. 'I shall prove that I am not insane.'

" 'If you do you will send yourself to the chair,' he said sadly.

"He went away, and I lay stretched on my cot for hours, thinking, thinking. The blood splotch on my hand was beginning to annoy me. And I closed my eyes to shut out that long, narrow passageway hedged about with steel, and at its end a chair. But I couldn't. Finally I slept.

"When I awoke I felt a great change had come over me. I saw clearly the way to save myself. They all believed me guilty, even my own lawyer. I would prove them mistaken, and I would prove it by evidence.

"I began by sending for Garron. He came into my cell and sat down opposite me; his chalky face was without expression.

" 'It is not a confession,' I told him. 'I know you believe I lied about the

woman I saw pass my door, about hearing a single shot; I know that the blood spot on my hand, and the finding of a Maxim noiseless pistol *supposed* to be mine will be damning evidence in a court of law. I know all these things, and yet I am going to ask you to save me. You can do it because you are clever. And I don't believe you would do a man an injustice.'

" 'Thank you,' he said.

" 'To begin with you must assume that my story of the woman is true. You need not really believe it, but you must *pretend* to believe it. You must act as if you were trying to save me rather than to convict me.'

" 'I understand.'

" 'Only one question,' I rushed on with confidence and enthusiasm; Garron's attitude was most encouraging. 'Did your men find any trace of the woman? Did you find any?'

" 'No,' he said. 'If there was a woman she didn't leave the hotel that night. And there was not one woman in the hotel who answered the description you gave. Not even a servant,' he added, 'I made sure of that. And no one connected in any way with the hotel can remember that a woman, fitting your description, came into the hotel that night.'

" 'Perhaps she wasn't in the hotel when you searched it; perhaps she had already left. She may have left within five minutes of the time I saw her.'

" 'How?' he asked.

" 'She need not necessarily have gone out a door — there are fire-escapes,' I suggested. 'It would be only a drop of a few feet from the bottom platform to the ground, and at the back of the hotel at least two of these fire-escapes open on an alley. I saw the woman run downstairs from the sixth floor — that's my floor — and if she did get away by a fire-escape it was from the fifth floor or one below that. All the fire-escapes open by window into the halls.'

" 'I hadn't thought of that,' he admitted frankly.

" 'As a matter of fact when you saw the blood on my hand you were so firmly convinced I was guilty you made no particular effort to locate the woman, except to have the exits guarded. Now — we are always supposing there *was* a woman — if a woman opened a window and climbed out on a fire-escape she might have left a trace somewhere; and, of course, she would have been compelled to leave the window unlocked behind her.'

" 'Of course!' A strange expression was creeping into Garron's eyes; I couldn't read it.

" 'Then we must remember that a woman is hampered by her skirts,' I pointed out eagerly. 'She may have had to take hold of the window frame to pull herself up. Don't you see? There is a chance she left a bloodstain on the window frame!'

"For a minute or more Garron merely stared at me.

" 'And if we suppose all this,' he said at last, 'we must, of course, forget the bloodstain on *your* hand.'

" 'No, don't forget it!' I exclaimed.

'Remember it. And remember, too, that I tried to stop the woman; that I even took hold of her wrist. She wriggled away like a snake and pushed me backward against the wall. If' — I was quite excited over the success of my deductions —'If she had blood on her hand, *that's how I got it on mine!*'

" 'I hadn't thought of that,' Garron said again.

" 'You hadn't thought of any of these things, because from the beginning you believed I was guilty.'

"A subtle change was in Garron's face. I wondered if I had convinced him.

" 'I think you have the right to think,' he said after a while, 'that we didn't go as far in our investigation as we should have. Believe me now, I'll go the limit.'

" 'And search Spencer's room,' I urged, 'search it again. Something may have been overlooked. If the woman by chance dropped a handkerchief — a jewel — any little thing —'

"He nodded. A fever of madness was upon me, but it was the madness of relief — Garron had believed me! He went away, and for hours it seemed I sat staring at the crimson splotch on the back of my right hand.

"Garron came again about dusk. At sight of him I fairly leaped at the bars of my cell.

" 'Well?' I demanded.

" 'On the ledge of the window which opens on the fourth floor fire-escape,' he told me, 'I found marks and scratches that may have been made by somebody climbing out. But the important thing was — the window was unlocked.'

" 'It just happens,' Garron went on, 'that the fire-escape has been recently painted. The fresh paint was marked by unmistakable signs of footprints — the footprints of a woman. The alley beneath the fire-escape is paved, so it is impossible to say whether anyone dropped from the last landing to the ground.'

" 'But the footprints!' I exclaimed. 'They would show if the woman were going up or down.'

" 'They show that she was going down. Also I found on one side of the window frame, at about the place where a person would take hold of it —'

" 'A bloodstain!' I burst out. It was too good to be true. Now I could be rid of that vision of a long, narrow passageway, and at its end a chair. After a moment I said, 'Thank God!'

" 'It seemed to be a bloodstain,' Garron corrected in his unemotional voice, 'a small one. I cut away the wood where the stain was on it, and have turned it over to an expert for examination.'

" 'And if he says it *is* a bloodstain?'

" 'Your story begins to sound plausible,' Garron admitted. 'Meanwhile, since you insisted, I made another search of Spencer's room, a thorough going-over.' He paused, and I noticed a narrowing of his deep glowing eyes, a tightening of his lips. 'I found this!'

"Casually he extended his hand. In it lay a stickpin, a solitary ruby surrounded by pearls. I realized this was

the crucial point; he had tried to trick me. I knew that if I had lifted my hand to my tie —

" 'One of the bellboys has identified this pin as yours.'

" 'Mine?' And I was surprised at the cool steadiness of my voice. 'No. I have one like it. You'll find it in my belongings somewhere, if you'll look.' I took the pin in my hand. 'Just where did you find this in Spencer's room?'

" 'Across the room from where we found Spencer — all the way across. It had been dropped near a window — the window from which the pistol must have been thrown out. It's the only window in the room overlooking the roof. And the window was open.'

" 'Seems to me it's Spencer's pin.' I took a good look at it. 'I've seen him wear it. Or was Spencer's pin a pearl surrounded by rubies? I can't remember. But I can't see that it's of any value as a clue to the woman.'

" 'If that pin is yours,' Garron suggested quickly, 'if it can be proved yours, it would be the last link in the circumstantial chain. You wouldn't have a chance to clear yourself.'

" 'That's true,' I agreed and I smiled, just a little. 'I bought my pearl and ruby pin at Tiffany's. Perhaps there's a record of the sale; my pin was quite expensive. Do you mind finding out? And now let's talk about this Maxim noiseless pistol. The police can prove, I understand, that the pistol with which Spencer was killed — the one found on the roof — is one I bought and paid for with my personal check?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'I am going to admit I did buy such a pistol a few months ago, and paid for it with a personal check. I had bought a huge place up in Connecticut, a lonesome out-of-the-way place; I still own it. It is quite a distance from the station, and sometimes when I went up there unexpectedly I had to walk it. The old couple who take care of the place for me suggested that I buy a pistol for protection on the long walk. On one of my trips my bag was stolen on the train. In the bag, naturally, was my pistol.'

" 'Go on,' Garron said.

" 'There are any number of these pistols,' I went on, 'they are all alike and they are not numbered; I asked about that when I bought mine. If the woman came to the hotel to kill Spencer and she knew of such a thing as a noiseless pistol, isn't it more than possible that she, too, bought one?'

"After a long time Garron nodded.

" 'There are three things for you to do,' I rushed on. 'First, look through my belongings and see if you find my stickpin; if you don't find it go to Tiffany's and satisfy yourself that I bought such a pin. Second, go to the gun store where I bought the noiseless pistol — I think it's the sole agency in New York — and find out if one has ever been sold to a woman. Third, find the woman who left the bloodstain on my hand, the woman whose footprints lead *down* the fire-escape. You know there *is* a woman — she must be found!'

"The following day I received a

short note from Garron:

> I found the pearl and ruby pin in your belongings. It has been identified at Tiffany's as the one you bought there.

"Three days later there came a telegram for me, dated at a small town sixty miles above New York:

> Analyst reports stain on window frame is human blood.
>
> Garron

"A week passed, and no further word came from Garron. Where was he, I wondered, and what was he doing in that small town up State?

"On the morning of the eleventh day Garron came. I beat upon the bars frantically at sight of him. The turnkey let him in; he dropped down on my cot and sat without speaking until the jailor's footsteps had died away in the distance. Then from a pocket he took out a small paper parcel. He opened it and held up a woman's glove! I tried to stifle a cry that escaped me; I reached for the glove.

" 'Keep your hands off,' he commanded sharply. 'There are bloodstains on it. Your life depends on those stains being undisturbed.'

" 'You found the woman!'

" 'I found her, yes,' he said. 'I traced her through a photograph I found on the table beside Spencer's bed. It was the picture of a boy, a baby, made by a photographer in a little town up State. I went to the town, found the photographer, and he told me who the boy was. The woman is the boy's mother, the boy is Spencer's son.'

" 'Spencer's son?' I couldn't believe it. 'I never knew Frank Spencer was married.'

" 'He never was,' Garron said gravely. 'It's the same old story. The boy was born, and Spencer was fond of him. He made liberal allowances to the mother, and they lived quietly in the small town. She is known there as Mrs. Rosa Warren, a widow.'

" 'But the glove!' I demanded. 'Where did you get it? What has the woman to say? Where is she now?'

" 'She is under arrest,' Garron told me. 'She admits that she went to Spencer's room that night at his request, and showed me a letter making the appointment. It was to be a last conference before he left for a long trip — where she did not know. He was to transfer a sum of money to her.'

" 'Why did she shoot him?' I asked. I was calmer now that the circumstantial net was closing around the woman.

" 'Her story of what happened in Spencer's room is incredible,' Garron said. 'She tapped on the door, she says, and there was no answer. She opened it and went in. The room was dark. She heard a noise and knew someone was in the room. She was trying to find a light, but doesn't remember touching Spencer, didn't know there was blood on her glove. Then came a pistol shot — the shot you heard. She thought Spencer was trying to kill her — remember, this is her story — and she ran into the hall-

way to escape. She ran almost into your arms. You seized her, she struggled free and ran down two flights of stairs. Then she realized there would be an alarm, and to avoid embarrassing publicity, she decided to go out through a window to a fire-escape and down that way.'

"Those old pains broke loose in my brain. I got to my feet, clasped both hands to my head, and fell prone. Garron lifted me to the cot. After a long time he told me the rest of it.

" 'Now, of course, we know the motive for the murder. She had loved this man, he had deceived her, he was going away, perhaps forever. At the gun store a clerk remembered that a noiseless pistol had been sold to a woman, but it is doubtful if she could be identified after so long a time. Of course she denies this. And then there is the glove!'

"Again Garron held it up. I turned on the cot and stared at it, fascinated.

" 'I found it in her house,' Garron said. 'There had been no attempt to conceal it, or even to clean it. That seems to be all. I think the woman will confess.'

" 'And she would have let me go to the chair!' I groaned.

"I was arraigned and dismissed without trial. The woman had made further damaging statements, and in spite of her pitiful plea of innocence, she was held; the evidence against her was complete. I remember only the final words of the judge who set me free:

" '. . . an insane man who, by the sheer cunning of his madness, has broken down the circumstantial evidence against himself, and proved the guilt of the woman now under arrest. The prisoner is now discharged in the custody of his attorney.'

"Two days after that something impelled me to go to the office of a famous surgeon. I held out my right hand.

" 'Please amputate that hand at the wrist,' I requested.

"He stared at me as if I were mad.

" 'Amputate it?' he repeated. 'Why?'

" 'It is covered with blood, and it won't come off,' I told him. 'It is beginning to annoy me.' "

Mr. Howard Meredith, whose statement is set forth above, committed suicide four days after he was set free. A second statement was found clutched in his hand. It read:

"It is not just that a woman should die in the chair. The truth is, *I* killed Frank Spencer. I shot him in the back, and I thought I had killed him, then I threw the pistol out of a window. He had said I was insane, so I consider my act justifiable. He shot at the woman in the dark thinking it was I. I bought the second stickpin in Miami. It matched one I had purchased years ago at Tiffany's. I don't know which pin was found in Spencer's room. I did have my bag stolen on the train, but the pistol was in my pocket. Garron is a fool — and so is the judge who set me free."

EQMM holds an enviable record as the birthplace of brand-n[illegible] fictional detectives and criminals. It was in the pages of EQMM that you first m[illegible]nthony Boucher's dipso-detective, Nick Noble; Lillian de la Torre's 18th centu[illegible]leuth, that fine old gentleman-and-scholar, Dr. Sam: Johnson; Percival Wilde's comic criminologist, P. Moran; James Yaffe's specialist in impossible crimes, Paul Dawn; Jerome and Harold Prince's metropolitan manhunter, Inspector Magruder; and Pat Hand's canny cardsharper, Careful Jones. In the case of each of these new stars, your Editor persuaded the author to make the protagonist a "series" character.

We have deliberately omitted one important name. 'Way back in our issue of May 1943, we printed Margaret Manners's first story about Squeakie (Desdemona) Meadow. Hopefully — indeed, succumbing outrageously to wishful thinking — your Editor titled that story "Squeakie's First Case." Now, exactly two years later, we bring you "Squeakie's Second Case" — and thus Squeakie becomes officially a "series" character, another of those sleuths or scoundrels, ferrets or felons, whose deeds and misdeeds are to be found exclusively in EQMM.

In her maiden murder-mystery Squeakie and her husband revealed the influence of Mr. and Mrs. North. That influence has faded — in fact, it has almost vanished completely. Squeakie now stands superbly on her own feet (even though at the end of this story with only one shoe). Her development has been rich and full-bodied: in "Squeakie's Second Case" Miss Manners strikes a deeper note, not only in her characterizaton of Squeakie but in her fabric of plot. Miss Manners has that rare talent for packing rather than padding; her method is different from John Dickson Carr's, yet you will have the same feeling on finishing "Squeakie's Second Case" that you have just read not a short story but a full-length tale of detection.

SQUEAKIE'S SECOND CASE

by MARGARET MANNERS

I SHOULD have realized that things would begin to happen when Squeakie announced that she was taking a course in journalism. She broke the news to me in her own fashion, something like this:

"I think a wife should understand her husband's work, don't you, darling?"

"Yes," I said, leaving myself wide open.

"And then, dear, I'll be able to help you. Your stuff is excellent, but newspaper work is stultifying."

I dropped the book I was trying to read. I realized that this was a serious moment. "Newspaper writing is a profession," I said, "an interesting profession, and not stultifying unless one harbors the delusion that one is a Pulitzer prize novelist."

"Oh," she said softly, "I couldn't feel that way about you, dear. But your writing *is* full of clichés. 'Harbors a delusion,' for instance."

"Of course it is," I said. "I cultivate them carefully." I refrained from remarking that Squeakie uses clichés

too, but that she quotes them incorrectly which gives them a peculiar freshness. Rather like finding an avocado on an apple tree.

"After all," she said, "I *have* the woman's angle. That can only be helpful."

"What are you talking about, sweetheart?" I said warily.

She smiled benevolently. "My course. Professor Van Cornfeldt's course, *Journalism as the New American Literature*."

"Good God!" I said. "When did this happen?"

"It's a surprise for you, darling. And now I'm ready to handle one of your assignments."

"One of *my* assignments? Squeakie!"

"Yes," pridefully. "Drink your coffee, dear, it will get cold. One with a feminine slant. You know, something I can get my teeth into!"

Being married to Squeakie is a full time job. Her name is Desdemona really, but I do my best to forget it. Her father was a gentleman of the old school, a chronic quoter of Shakespeare. Squeakie takes after him. Not that that makes things so difficult. A little Shakespeare is a wonderful thing. It's just that sometimes I feel like the guy who was riding the tiger; he couldn't dismount. Well, for days I kept her at bay. Once I stayed out with the boys till four in the morning, because I didn't want to face it.

"Harris," I kept telling her, "would certainly know. Besides he's paying for my copy, not yours. And then your style, dear, it's different!"

"Harris," she said, "might like the difference."

I tried to appeal to a better nature that wasn't there. "Imagine, darling, what your style would be, full of Shakespearean quotes and all!"

"That," she said smugly, "is my idea. Freshen the journalistic jargon!"

Was it any wonder that I gave in when Harris presented me with the perfect (as I thought) way out? He wanted me to interview Ruth Denver Bradley, the popular novelist. It wans't my sort of beat, and anyway I don't like lady authoresses. I had it all doped out. I'd make Squeakie happy by letting her interview the lady. Then I'd take her stuff and rewrite it, killing two birds with one stone.

If Squeakie didn't like it I could say the office had edited her piece. Naturally we couldn't do anything about that because I was supposed to have written it. There was always a chance that such a shocking experience might kill Squeakie's germinating talent in the first flower of youth. But I doubted it.

The night before the interview Squeakie talked about Ruth Denver Bradley and nothing else. She read the paragraph in *Who's Who* until I could have recited it. She informed me that she had been reading Ruth Denver Bradley's latest serial in *Modern Magazine*, and wasn't that lucky? She told me that it was a wonderful psychological novel, and favored me with a synopsis.

"It's about a man who wants to

marry but won't because something terrible happened to him when he was a child. There's something queer about his parents too. His father died from a fall one day, and that was a great shock to him. His mother isn't dead, but he acts as if she is, never mentions her. Oh, it's very mysterious. He's on the threshold of a political career. . . . David, which doctor is the one that Ruth Denver Bradley is married to?"

"He's a psychiatrist," I said. "Dr. Robert Bradley."

"She's a remarkable woman," Squeakie said enviously, "I wonder where she gets her material. Her stuff is so authentic."

"Did Professor Van Cornfeldt teach you to say that?" I asked.

"Don't be jealous, darling. She's an amazing person — an invalid, you know. Never goes out. Rheumatic heart. Her life is a triumph of mind over matter."

"Speaking of clichés!" I said.

I never did get to rewrite the interview because Squeakie never gave it to me. She simply sent it in to Harris with my name on top — and he liked it! Said he hadn't realized I was so versatile.

It was two weeks later, on my day off. The phone rang. I picked up the receiver and sure enough it was Harris.

"Ruth Denver Bradley killed in domestic accident!" Harris shouted. He always talks in headlines. "Call her editor, David. Get the story. See the bereaved husband. Give us the picture of the famous invalid at home, and death lurking on the staircase."

"What happened?" I said.

Harris dropped the rhetoric and went to work. "Tall, private house with a big stair well in the center. She fell from the top all the way down. There's an invalid's elevator, a lift without a shaft, rigged up in the stair well for the convenience of the sick wife. But the lady was timid about it, and didn't use it very often. Obliging husband takes top floor for office, even though inconvenient for a doctor. His wife used downstairs floor. This morning she went up to see him and fell over — dizzy spell — bad heart — Look, do I have to tell you your business? Get busy!"

Squeakie was shocked by the news. "All the same," she said, "I don't know how she could have fallen over, David. She wasn't tall, and those bannisters are high."

The phone rang again.

Harris was in a state. "Listen, Meadow, the police say it wasn't an accident. The angle is suicide. Did you notice any melancholy when you interviewed the lady?"

"Oh?" I said. "O. K. Why not?"

But Squeakie wouldn't have suicide. "It's ridiculous, darling. She didn't kill herself. I know. I talked to her. Do you think I wouldn't know? David, it was *murder!*"

The phone rang. "Here we go again," I said. I felt as if the top of my head would come off any minute. "Go away," I said to the mouthpiece, "I don't like you."

"Likewise," said Harris, "but there are things above our personal feelings. Louis Kingdon, editor of *Modern Magazine* called us up just now. He insists that it isn't suicide. He's going to raise the roof if the police accept that as the answer. Also he's saying some very nasty things about Ruth Bradley's husband. I think they're putting your friend Lieutenant Gregory Sawyer on the case. For God's sake get over there. It's disgusting the way I keep getting you on the phone. If you were any sort of a newspaper man you'd be there now."

"The editor," I told Squeakie, "also feels it couldn't have been suicide. All right for the editor. He ought to know. But you! . . . If this were the seventeenth century they'd burn you in the village square!"

She had the sense to keep quiet.

The first thing we saw when we entered the Bradley house was a square of heavy black fabric lying in a bulky heap on the tiled floor of the hall. We couldn't see the poor twisted body underneath it, but that grotesque impersonal shape of death was a terrible thing. It was a strange way for a woman to lie dead in her own house.

A few of the lads from downtown were hanging around. Doc Evans had evidently looked at the body and they were waiting to have it taken away. Lieutenant Gregory Sawyer looked pleased to see us, or maybe I should say to see Squeakie.

Before I could even pass the time of day with anyone, Squeakie went straight to the heart of the problem. "It wasn't suicide," she said, by way of answering Gregory's greeting. "I talked with her two weeks ago."

Gregory was a little taken aback, so I explained about the interview.

"I wondered when it would come to that, David," he said. "Be careful or they'll be calling you Mrs. Meadow's husband." He smiled fatuously at Squeakie and took us upstairs to show us the place from which Ruth Denver Bradley had fallen.

The house was impressively proportioned with very high ceilings. We walked slowly up the long flight of magnificent marble stairs which seemed to coil around the huge bannistered oval of the stair well. Unfortunately the purity of classic line was marred by the heavy cables which ran from floor to roof. We reached the top landing and I looked down and saw the little lift cage crouching at the bottom. Beside it the black cloth spread like a stain on the tiled floor.

I asked Gregory where the cage had been when she fell.

"Just where it is now," he said, "at the bottom."

"But I thought she rode up in it."

"She did, but . . ."

"But the nurse must have gone down in it again," Squeakie said. "Of course! The nurse left her patient upstairs and went down in the lift cage. Then the patient fell. Since the cage was still downstairs the nurse must have been downstairs too. There's an alibi for you, Gregory. But where is the nurse? Have you questioned

her? She's a pretty little thing. I saw her, you know, when I interviewed Mrs. Bradley. Gregory, why did the nurse go downstairs after she had taken Mrs. Bradley up?"

Gregory looked at me over Squeakie's head.

I shrugged. "She does it by remote control," I said. "But the opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the management."

He led us along the top landing. "This is where she fell. The gate in the bannisters was closed — but not bolted. You can see that it couldn't have been an accident."

He was right. It was obvious that Mrs. Bradley must have fallen through the gate which had been cut into the bannisters to allow passage from the lift to the landing. The bannisters *were* too high for anyone to have fallen over accidentally, and one couldn't very well fall through the gate unless one wanted to. It opened *inward* on the landing. There was a spring-closing so that if anyone stepped through it and forgot to bolt the gate there would be no dangerous gap. You could lean against it all you wanted to, and, bolted or not, it would never swing out. It had to be opened deliberately by the victim herself, or by someone else. Murder or. . . .

"It might have been suicide," I said.

Squeakie turned on me more in sorrow than in anger. "But didn't I tell you that it wasn't suicide, David? Where is the nurse, Gregory?"

He shook his head. "Gone, Squeakie — just like that! According to the maid who was cleaning silver in the pantry the nurse, Katherine Dawson, came down in the lift to get her patient's shawl. She went out through the rear of the house and vanished. We haven't found her yet. But Haley is out looking."

"Why did she run away?" Squeakie asked, and then went on dreamily, "Ruth Denver Bradley hated her nurse. I saw that when I interviewed her. She kept smiling and saying little things in a nasty way. I think she wanted the girl to lose control of herself."

"You ought to tell us things like that," Gregory said gently. "Any helpful word would be humbly appreciated by the police department."

"That's sweet of you, Gregory. Where was Ruth Denver Bradley's husband when it happened?"

Gregory pointed to a door almost opposite the little gate. "Dr. Bradley was right there, in his office. He was waiting for a patient to come for analysis."

I measured the distance with my eye. "Two or three steps would have been enough," I said. "Open the gate, push your wife through it, go back into the office. . . ."

"And the patient?" Squeakie asked, interrupting me without apology.

"It's a confusing case," Gregory said sadly. "Haley, bless his heart, calls it 'distinguished.' He's very proud of it. You see, the Doctor's patient is none other than Harvey Thompson.

And, of course, he doesn't want publicity, David. I gather he's been seeing the Doctor for nerves. Probably brought on by his last campaign."

"Harvey Thompson! The name is familiar," Squeakie said.

"It ought to be," I told her. "You'll be voting him into office next time round if I know anything about women voters. He'll be the next candidate for Comptroller. He's the power behind the clean government campaign. What company you keep, Lieutenant!"

"Yes," Gregory said. "The guy exposes corruption wherever he finds it. I wonder if Haley's been stealing any candy bars lately. Anyway, Thompson just got in on this one. He was, if you can believe it, looking at his feet as he climbed the stairs to the Doctor's office. He didn't see anything until Ruth Denver Bradley shrieked as she fell past him."

"But he must have seen the nurse come down in the lift cage." Squeakie said.

"He did. The cage came down with the nurse in it just as he began walking up. He had no idea that there was anyone waiting on the top landing."

Squeakie's brow furrowed. "But if she was going to see her husband, in his office, why did Mrs. Bradley wait on the landing? She was a sick woman. Why didn't she go into his office and sit down. The nurse could have brought the shawl to her there. Was she afraid that the nurse wouldn't come back?"

Gregory looked at her closely. "I don't know," he said. "Dr. Bradley took his wife's death pretty well, considering the circumstances. But when we told him the nurse was missing he nearly passed out. Look, I've got to go down and talk to all of them now. If you two want to hang around, I guess I won't have to notice you too much."

We had barely reached the hall below when the front door opened and a gust of cold air carried a booming voice to us. "Got her," it said. "I've got the nurse, Lieutenant. She's no bigger than a kitten, and is she scared! She says she forgot. Maybe it's amnesia."

"Gosh!" Gregory said, very much pleased. "Haley's done it again. Now we'll find out a few things."

Sergeant Haley, better known in police circles as "the Comet," stood there red-faced and proud. If he'd been holding the girl in his teeth he couldn't have looked more like a well trained retriever bringing in the kill. Before I could say hello to him, the door of the living room opened and a man came into the hall.

He was wearing a small brown beard and carried himself with a self-conscious air of assurance that some actors and doctors occasionally affect when dealing with other poor mortals. At the moment, however, his assurance seemed the worse for wear. It was evident that Dr. Bradley had been badly shaken. He didn't look at us but at his wife's nurse. We looked at her too. She stood, staring stupidly, pathetic as a frightened school girl. Her navy topcoat hung from slender shoul-

ders and her hair was a mass of wind-ruffled curls.

"Katherine," the Doctor said, "why did you go away? I've been so worried."

The girl's eyes opened wider and wider until her whole face seemed to be lost and only eyes left. They were so horrified I wanted to put my hands over them. I realized that it wasn't the Doctor she was looking at but the form under the black fabric.

"My God!" she whispered, "who?"

"The Doctor's wife is dead, Miss Dawson." That was all Squeakie said, but it had a violent effect. The tired white face of the nurse seemed to float over her shoulders, and the enormous eyes lost focus.

"Oh," she said softly, "she killed herself. How cruel!" Then she swayed and Haley caught her as she fell.

Dr. Bradley knelt anxiously beside the girl he called Katherine. He spoke only once, and then it was to Gregory. "She didn't know," he said. "Can't you see she didn't even know?"

"Yes, I see." Gregory's voice was as deliberate as an accusation.

Gregory chose to use the dead woman's study for his investigation, and Squeakie was there to take notes. Shorthand is the pretext Squeakie uses to intrude on the secret conversations of the police. As is usual with volunteer workers she didn't seem to be taking her work too seriously. Her principal interest was the dead woman's desk and bookcase. She made a thorough search of everything, but it was the bookshelves which seemed to fascinate her.

We were waiting for Haley to bring Louis Kingdon, the editor, in. Gregory thought we ought to do him first because he was in such a fury.

Suddenly Squeakie turned from her anxious perusal of book titles. "They're so noncommittal," she said sadly.

"Nonsense," I said. For here I might be expected to shine. After all, I was a writer too, of sorts. "They're craft books," I explained. "Dictionaries, reference books. . . . What would you expect in a writer's study?"

"Why — ideas, inspiration, something . . ." Squeakie stopped and shook her head.

"You get those from life," I said patiently. "From going and seeing, hearing and doing."

"But," Squeakie said, "she didn't go. She stayed right in this house."

Louis Kingdon came into the room and Gregory motioned us to keep quiet. He was a heavy man with powerful well-kept hands and a thick mane of brown hair. He had a way with women, courteous and bland, as if they were skittish horses. Squeakie looked as if she liked him. It interests me to see the men that Squeakie admires. They almost never look like me.

"Ruth Bradley didn't kill herself." Kingdon spoke first. "There are things going on in this house, Lieutenant. I think she was pushed over. It's the only answer. She certainly did not commit suicide."

"You seem very sure," Gregory

spoke quietly.

"Of course, I'm sure. She had three installments of the novel we're running still unwritten. Do you think any author would kill herself with a third of a book to write?"

"Isn't that unusual," Gregory asked "I mean, don't you buy these things complete? Awful risk, isn't it?"

"Well, in a way," Kingdon said. "We don't do it often, but she worked better that way. We always had a full synopsis of the story. We knew we could have it finished if . . . she wasn't a well woman," he added lamely. "But she'd been an invalid for years, there was no reason to suspect that anything would happen. You see, she was one of those writers who don't finish things unless the pressure is on. If I'd waited for a completed manuscript I'd have waited forever."

"You have the synopsis in your office?" Squeakie was standing in front of an open file she had been rummaging in. There was a gleam in her eye that I didn't like.

"No," Kingdon said, "I haven't. She kept it here."

"And how were the various installments sent to you? By mail?" I didn't get the drift of Squeakie's questions at all. Neither did Gregory but he sat there trying hard to look as if he did.

Kingdon smiled graciously. "As a matter of fact, young lady, I usually called for them myself. That's why I came here today." He frowned angrily.

"The nurse and the maid both say there was a manuscript waiting for me on the hall table in a manila envelope. It's not there now. I wish you'd try to find it for me."

Gregory glared at him, then said: "You think Ruth Bradley was murdered. Why?"

The editor looked satisfied at last. This was the question he had obviously been waiting for. "Less than a week ago," he said, "Ruth telephoned me and asked me to come to see her. She sounded almost hysterical. I came immediately. She told me that she had discovered that her husband and her nurse, Katherine Dawson, were in love with each other. She hadn't said anything to either of them. But she said she couldn't go on pretending any longer. She was going to have her revenge. She was going to discharge the nurse, but she loved her husband and there would be *no* question of a divorce."

Kingdon paused dramatically.

Gregory rose. "Thanks," he said drily. "I'll keep that in mind. You can go. We'll call you if we need you."

Kingdon shook his head. "I'd like to stay and look for that manuscript," he said.

The maid, Mary, came in next. She was pretty and malicious, and evidently didn't like Miss Dawson. She told her story with many suggestive glances.

"I was polishing the fish slice when Mrs. Bradley and Miss Dawson left the study together. I saw them both get into the lift cage. I looked special because I was surprised. Mrs. Bradley never likes to use the elevator unless

she has to. But before Katherine Dawson followed Mrs. Bradley into the elevator I saw her — Katherine Dawson — deliberately lean over and *drop the shawl she was carrying on one of the hall chairs.*"

Gregory nodded, looking solemn as an owl. "That's extremely important, Mary. What else can you tell us?"

"Well, I heard the noise of the lift going up, and then I heard it coming down again. I thought maybe Mrs. Bradley had missed her shawl and was sending Dawson back for it. But I couldn't understand Dawson having dropped it like that, on purpose. Sure enough, I saw Dawson get out of the lift and pick up the shawl, but instead of taking it up she walked out through the hall to the rear of the house."

"Haven't you forgotten something, Mary?" Squeakie said. "Didn't you open the front door for someone?"

"I did not," Mary sounded very sure of herself.

"But what about Mr. Thompson?"

"Oh, him? When there's office hours for the Doctor the door is left open. The patients walk in. I did see Mr. Thompson for just a second. It was just before Dawson came down. After she went to the back of the house, I heard the rear door slam. I didn't see her again till just now when the Sergeant brought her back."

"You saw Mr. Thompson start up the stairs, and then Miss Dawson came down in the lift and went toward the rear of the house? Is that right, Mary?" Gregory spoke carefully.

"That's right, sir. A minute or two later I heard the scream and saw Mrs. Bradley's body hit the . . . Oh Sergeant, it was terrible! That poor, poor woman!" Mary turned to Haley and began to sniffle in her handkerchief.

Squeakie stuck her head out of the closet she was poking in to ask if Mary had seen the manuscript on the hall table that morning? Yes, Mary had seen it. Was it there later when Mrs. Bradley fell? Mary looked puzzled and decided she couldn't remember. Squeakie sighed and stuck her head back in the closet.

Gregory told Mary how helpful she had been, and she went out still sniffling.

"Can I escort Mr. Thompson in now, Lieutenant?" Haley asked in tones that would have been suitable for a church.

"Yes, you can escort him in now, Sergeant." Gregory answered just as gravely. Haley marched out carrying his head as carefully as if the slightest breeze would blow it off his shoulders.

"Haley likes a distinguished case to be properly handled," Gregory said.

"Heavens! Look what I've found! It was in an envelope under some papers." With all the flourish of a magician bringing a rabbit out of the hat, Squeakie held out her hand to us. On it there was a tiny key.

"So what?" I said. "Everybody has an old key or two knocking around in desk drawers. It doesn't mean a thing."

Squeakie put her head on one side and fixed one bright eye on the key. She looked like a sparrow about to

pounce on a juicy worm. "Well," she said vaguely, "suppose it's the *'key of villainous secrets'!*"

"What's that?" demanded Gregory.

"A key of villainous secrets? It's a line from Othello."

"Oh," said Gregory. "Is that all the reward of so much searching, Squeakie?"

It was a rhetorical question but Squeakie saw fit to answer it with a provocative I-know-something-I-won't-tell shake of the head.

I translated for him. "She says no. In other words she did find something else, but she wants to be coaxed."

Gregory brought his hand down on the desk in a slap that made the lamp wobble. "Don't withhold evidence," he thundered. "What did you find?"

"Well! If you're going to be nasty about it. I found the synopsis to Ruth Denver Bradley's novel.

Gregory tried not to look disappointed. "Better turn it over to Kingdon."

Squeakie gave him a winning smile. "Not right away, Gregory. We can leave it where it is for awhile. You see, I've been following the serial in *Modern Magazine* and later on I'd like to read the synopsis and see how the story ends."

"Good Lord!" I said.

Fortunately at this moment Harvey Thompson came in. He was a tall, thin man, slightly gray at the temples and had the worried air of the reformer. He looked the part of the righteous man, the enemy of corruption, but I had to admit he lived up to it. A man who made it his business to uncover ugly scandals couldn't be too careful. Thompson neither smoked nor drank. It was rumored that he had recently been courting a young society girl, but his behavior on this was, as the saying goes, above reproach.

"Sit down, Mr. Thompson," Gregory spoke carefully. "Nasty for you to have been here just at that moment. You had an appointment with the Doctor, I presume?"

Harvey Thompson nodded. "I had an appointment," he said. "You must forgive me if I seem a little shaky. It was pretty dreadful. She fell right past me, you know."

"Have you any opinion at all about the case?" Gregory asked.

Thompson smiled thinly. "I'm not qualified to have one," he said graciously, "but being human, of course I have. I think it was suicide. The woman was ill. Probably she was depressed. When the nurse left her alone at the top of the stairs the impulse came to her. She was fascinated by the idea of falling. . . ."

"Bosh," Squeakie said rudely. "She wasn't that type, Mr. Thompson. She'd have been more likely to kill someone else than herself."

"Oh," Mr. Thompson said, "I may very well be wrong. I didn't know Mrs. Bradley. Just seen her once or twice walking around with her cane and shawl. Such a pity for a young woman to be an invalid. Must have been hard on her husband."

"Excuse me," Squeakie said, rising

and moving toward the door. "I'll go and tell Mr. Kingdon that I've found the synopsis. Isn't it lucky?" she said smiling at Thompson, "I found the synopsis of Mrs. Bradley's serial in *Modern Magazine* right here in this room."

The door closed quietly and she was gone.

"Hmmmm," Gregory said, "I think I'll go and see Miss Dawson." He opened the door and indicated that Harvey Thompson could go out first. "If you'd like to leave, Mr. Thompson, I think. . . ."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. But I'll wait for a few words with the Doctor. There may be something I can do. I shouldn't like him to think I ran off."

When we crossed the hall I saw that the body had been removed, and that made me think of fingerprints. But Haley said only those of the nurse and Mrs. Bradley had been found on the gate.

We found Miss Dawson in the library. She was very nervous. Her fists were clenched in her lap until the knuckles showed white. She didn't look at us as she talked.

"Mrs. Bradley wanted to go up to talk to her husband. She didn't say why. I went with her, but when we reached the top I discovered I'd left her shawl downstairs. It's very important that Mrs. Bradley be protected from chill. Any change in temperature is . . . " she stopped short, stricken. "I mean, was bad for her. I went down to get the shawl but I couldn't find it anywhere. I looked and looked. I thought that Mrs. Bradley had probably gone into the Doctor's office and was talking to him there, so I just kept on looking." She paused apologetically as if ashamed to offer us a feeble excuse.

"I haven't been well these last few days, over-tired or something. Suddenly I felt dizzy and ill. I slipped into a coat that I keep in the rear of the house and went out through the back door to take a walk around the block. I must have been feeling worse than I thought, because I forgot where I was and wandered around in a daze. I didn't know what the Sergeant wanted when he found me." Her eyes filled with tears. "It never occurred to me that Mrs. Bradley would kill herself. I feel guilty. I shouldn't have left her."

"You didn't tell that quite right, Miss Dawson," Gregory said softly. "You didn't have to look for that shawl. It was on the hall chair where you had deliberately dropped it. Mary saw you pick it up when you went to the rear of the house."

The girl moaned and bent forward as if to protect herself from a blow. "I haven't been well," she said brokenly. "I forget things."

"It won't do, Miss Dawson. You knew something was going to happen up there on the landing. At the last minute you lost your nerve and dropped the shawl so that you'd have an excuse to get away before it did happen. You see, we know about you and the Doctor."

The girl covered her face with her

hands.

"Leave her alone!" Dr. Bradley had opened the door and was standing on the threshold. I wondered how much he had heard.

"You can see the girl is near collapse. She didn't know. I didn't know. There was no plan. Do you think I murdered my wife? Why, I didn't even know she was coming upstairs to see me! Stop badgering Miss Dawson — she can't bear any more."

That was pretty evident to all of us. But Gregory was a policeman, and this was a queer case. "Who was responsible for your wife's death? You had a motive. Miss Dawson ran away. She evidently knew something was going to happen. I'm sorry but I may have to do quite a bit of badgering, as you call it."

"All right, I'll tell you," the Doctor said. He came into the room and Squeakie slipped in after him. How much had *she* heard?

"Robert, please!" Katherine Dawson was trembling.

"Why not?" the Doctor said bitterly. "It's just a matter of washing a little dirty linen in front of others. After all, people have done it before me all my life. I've listened to all the sins of humanity. Now I must talk about my own. Don't be afraid, my dear."

Katherine Dawson stared at him in amazement. "But, Robert I . . ."

"Don't be silly, Katherine. Reticence is all very well, but not if one is charged with murder because of it. Lieutenant, my wife was a sick woman, physically and spiritually. You noticed I do not say mentally. She was a thwarted woman. 'Hell hath no fury. . . .' I didn't scorn her," he added, "but I no longer loved her. I gave her cause for misery, but I tried not to show it. I had no idea she knew about Katherine and me."

"She told Mr. Kingdon about it," said Squeakie, "and he thinks your wife was murdered."

"Murdered!" Dr. Bradley shouted. "But she wasn't murdered! That's what I want to tell you. Kingdon can say what he likes but I know human nature. Human nature is my business. My wife killed herself, and no unwritten story could have stopped her. Her motive was the cruellest, the ugliest one that exists. Spite! She did it to punish us, to make us feel responsible for her death. She was bringing Katherine up to my office to make a scene that would humiliate us both. Katherine couldn't bear to go through such a scene in front of me. That was why she dropped the shawl and came down in the elevator. Ruth couldn't follow her down the stairs. My wife stood there thwarted. Her prey had run away. She was beside herself. The strain on her heart must have been terrible. Perhaps she felt she might never recover from the effects of her rage. In any case, she knew what it would do to our lives if she were found dead. She threw herself down. It's the only way it could have been. Before God, I didn't push her. I didn't even know she was there."

He said it sincerely, impressively,

but somehow it wasn't satisfactory. Katherine Dawson, on the other hand, was suddenly radiant. It was clear that she had thought him guilty of his wife's death. It was equally clear that she believed his story, whether we did or not.

"Tell me, Doctor," Squeakie said suddenly, "did you read your wife's stories?"

"No," he said, "I did not. I have never been particularly fond of popular fiction. Perhaps I should have taken more interest in Ruth's career," he added apologetically, "but I was terribly busy myself and somehow . . ." his voice trailed away.

"I wish," Squeakie said, "that you would read one now. There's a current issue of *Modern Magazine* in the living room. Read an installment of your wife's story. It will take your mind off yourself. And you'll understand your wife better."

"All right," the Doctor said, "you ask in a way that makes it impossible for me to refuse. But I want to say that I think you are inexcusably impertinent."

Squeakie smiled at him without rancor. "You'll feel better later," she said smugly. "To understand me is to pardon all." She turned her back on him and stood looking down at the fireplace.

"The hitch," I said, "lies in understanding her. It can't be done."

As the Doctor and Miss Dawson left, Squeakie suddenly dropped to her knees. "Gregory, something has been burned in this fireplace. I wonder when."

Gregory was grubbing in the fireplace. "I'll have Haley's skin for this," he said. "Paper ash, quite a lot of it! And completely burned."

We went after Mary who seemed much pleased by so much attention from the police. Yes, she *had* smelled something burning. It was while Dr. Bradley was calling the police. She had rushed out to the kitchen to see if there was anything on the stove, but there hadn't been, so she decided it was just the incinerator smoking.

We thanked her and asked Mr. Kingdon. Evidently the missing manuscript still had Mr. Kingdon worried; he was quite snappy. How did we expect him to smell anything burning when he wasn't in the house until after the Doctor's telephone call?

We tried Mr. Thompson who was standing uncomfortably in the hall looking as if he didn't want to stay and didn't want to go. He hadn't smelled anything, but he had been so upset. There might have been such an odor and he would not have noticed it.

"Look," Squeakie said suddenly, as if she were about to do us a great favor. "You carry on down here, Gregory, and I'll go up and see if I can find what this key fits."

"Wait," Gregory said. But Squeakie had already stepped into the lift cage. We stood and watched its crawling ascent to the top floor.

"Maybe she wants us to see that nobody follows her. She shouldn't be doing that, David."

"Are you a policeman or a mouse,"

I said. "Why don't you stop her?"

Gregory changed the subject quickly. "Do you think the Doctor killed his wife?"

"I don't know," I said. "But I bet Squeakie doesn't. She doesn't like her suspects obvious. It wouldn't surprise me if she tried to pin it on Kingdon. He seems awfully eager to have us arrest Bradley."

"But Kingdon wasn't in the house at the time of her death!" Gregory protested.

"That's probably what'll make Squeakie suspect him," I said. "And don't worry, she'll find a way to put him in the house if she needs him there."

"Bradley's suicide theory looks all right. It *could* have happened that way."

"Maybe," I said. "But when these professional students of the human mind are out, they are 'way out. I agree with Kingdon that she wouldn't have left the story unfinished. And what *did* happen to that missing installment, Gregory? Is Squeakie looking for it?"

"I think Squeakie found it," he said. "That's what was burned in the fireplace. But who did it? And why?"

The living room door was thrown open and Dr. Bradley came out. He was holding a copy of *Modern Magazine* in his hands and his voice shook when he spoke.

"My wife," he said unsteadily, "my wife! This story . . . Lieutenant, I don't. . . . Good God!"

A woman had screamed somewhere upstairs. We stood there transfixed, and suddenly moved all at once. "It's Squeakie," I said. "Hurry! It's Squeakie!"

The lift was at the top so I started to run up the stairs. Gregory was right behind me. But it was the bulky Haley who passed us and reached the top first. "Coming, Mrs. Meadow!" he yelled, as he knocked me out of the way. "We'll get him!"

We followed him into the Doctor's office. Squeakie was standing in the middle of the room. She looked just as she always does except that one of her shoes was missing. She stood there, one shoe on and one shoe off, looking at us, calm and self-possessed. Haley was red in the face and puffing like a locomotive. Everybody looked like the devil except Squeakie.

At that moment Dr. Bradley came in. Squeakie limped over to him with the uneven gait caused by the shoeless foot. She picked up his hand and dropped the little key into it. "I found that in your wife's study," she said.

"Darling," I said, "what happened?"

Bradley stared at the little key in horror. "But I had only one," he said. "How did she get it?" He pulled a little chain out of his vest pocket and showed us another key just like it.

"At first," Squeakie said, "I thought you had killed her. You were the only one with a motive. But there was *another* motive. I didn't see it immediately. It was so *unusual*. Even stranger than your suicide theory,

Doctor. It was a motive as fantastic as something distorted in a dream."

"Squeakie," I said wildly, "why did you scream?"

"There was a mouse, I think," she said. "Hurry, let's go, Gregory."

"Jeepers!" Haley said, "you didn't scream on account of a mouse, did you, Mrs. Meadow?"

"No, I didn't scream on account of it."

"What *did* you do on account of it?" I asked.

"I threw my shoe at it." She pointed to the far corner of the room. I went and retrieved her shoe.

"Where are we going?" Gregory asked her. He sounded rather tired.

"To get the murderer," she said.

He clutched his hair. "Where would the murderer be, Squeakie?"

"If we hurry we'll find him in Ruth Denver Bradley's study. He'll be in an awful dither. He's looking for the synopsis of her novel, and I hid it behind the bookcase!"

We tiptoed down the stairs. Squeakie said we shouldn't use the lift because it would make a noise.

When we reached the study door we all heard the faint sounds of someone moving around inside.

"Careful, Lieutenant," Haley said importantly. He opened the door and slipped into the study. Gregory went in after him. The rest of us had to peer through the half opened door. But the angle of the door made it impossible for us to see who was in the room. The faces of Gregory and Haley were registering emotion, but not revealing information. Then they both turned and looked at Squeakie in pained surprise, as if she had dropped a red hot rivet in their laps.

To my amazement Dr. Bradley spoke. He couldn't see any more of the person in the room than we could — but he said: "Arrest him, Lieutenant. He killed my wife."

They brought Harvey Thompson out quietly. There was a look about him that I can't describe, a look of having come to the end of a long road and being glad it was over. Patient and Doctor looked at each other, and the patient's eyes fell.

"I am very sorry," he said. "She must have been a remarkable woman. Doctor, I am sorry."

Dr. Bradley stared at the man before him. "I understand," he said at last. "But the tragedy is greater than you suppose. There was no need to kill my wife, Mr. Thompson. No one in this world would ever have known, no one would have recognized you. It is a waste of both your lives."

The man who fought corruption in high places bowed his head and they took him away.

Afterwards we had a quiet session in the library and Squeakie told us all about it.

"Gregory," Squeakie said, "was looking for clues to support the motive of the husband in love with his wife's nurse. It was a good, orthodox motive. But I said to myself, 'Suppose he didn't kill her?' You see?"

There was a pause while Squeakie

sat there purring.

Gregory looked at me. "I'll bite my tongue off before I'll ask her," I said.

"OK," he said, "but the whole police department is losing face." He turned to Squeakie. "Where did you get by *supposing* he didn't kill her, Squeakie?"

"Well, then, I had to look for another motive. When I found one I had another suspect at the end of it. You see, I had to have a clue that led me to a motive."

"The missing manuscript?" I asked.

Squeakie beamed on me. "That was it, David. At first the manuscript seemed to point to Mr. Kingdon. After all, what would a politician *who had never met his doctor's wife* have to do with her manuscript? *And why would a man kill a woman he didn't even know?*"

She went on, fixing us with a glittering eye, "What was in the missing manuscript?"

"I'll bite," I said.

"Remember, David, I told you about the story? It was the story of a man whose life was cruelly warped in his childhood. His father fell downstairs and was killed. Everyone thought it was an accident and the man was buried. There was a great deal of sympathy for the beautiful young widow and her little son. The mother wears mourning and shows great sorrow. But the child is horrified by her grief. He knows that she killed his father. He saw her push her husband to his death. The boy grows up, haunted by the knowledge of his mother's crime, fearing its discovery.

"In an effort to compensate for his tainted heritage he lives a goody-goody life, never indulging in any of the normal amusements of the young male. The self-righteous puritan flourishes. His zeal for reforming leads him into politics where he is successful. After years of a careful bachelor existence he falls in love and wishes to marry. Very sensibly, he consults a psychiatrist, and in seeking his cure tells the doctor his life story.

"You remember, David, I wondered where Ruth Denver Bradley got the material for her plots? Now do you see? She had a key made to her husband's case records. The *key of villainous secrets* indeed! She found a wealth of material there. Strangely enough, she didn't even know the name of the man whose story she stole. The case histories used numbers instead of names.

"But one day the man who is struggling with his past picks up a copy of a magazine and begins a serial that seems terribly familiar. He looks at the author's name and is horrified to see that it is written by the wife of his own doctor. He tells himself it is only a coincidence. But when the next installment appears he knows it is true. His shameful story is being offered to the public. He feels sure that as the story progresses it will reveal his identity. He sees his career ruined, his marriage shattered. He, the incorruptible politician, will be branded as the son of a murderess!"

Squeakie paused for breath.

"Hold on," Gregory said, "how did he know that the manuscript wasn't already completed and in the editor's hands?"

Louis Kingdon answered him. "I told him," he said. "I knew Thompson. Made it a point to be cordial whenever I met him. I ran into him one day when I was leaving Ruth's house with a manuscript. I chatted about it, among other things."

"Well," Squeakie said, snatching the narrative away from Kingdon, "when Thompson came into the house today he saw the installment lying on the hall table and took it. He probably hid it inside his coat. He had intended to see Ruth Denver Bradley, I think, to ask her to change the end of the story completely. He saw the nurse leave Mrs. Bradley alone. He ran up the stairs, spoke to her. He remembered his father's death. He opened the gate quietly and pushed her through it. Then he turned and ran downstairs. When Dr. Bradley came out of his office it looked as if Harvey Thompson was just coming *up* the steps. While Dr. Bradley was calling the police, Thompson burned the manuscript in the fireplace. It didn't occur to him that there would be a synopsis.

"I hadn't any proof," Squeakie added. "I had to get Dr. Bradley to read the story so that he would see what his wife had done. Even so, it would have been hard to prove if Thompson had denied it. That's why I told him that I had found the synopsis. Then I went upstairs and screamed so that you'd all come up there. I wanted him to have an opportunity to get into the study to look for it, so that we could find him there."

I was very weary when I took my wife home. "You complicated this story," I said, "you really ought to write it."

She smiled at me.

"Was there really a mouse upstairs, Squeakie?" I said.

"Darling, why do you think I threw my shoe?"

But that wasn't an answer, was it? I think that mouse was a red herring.

Solution to "Guess Who?"

Henry Poggioli, Ph.D., criminal investigator *de luxe* made famous by T. S. Stribling in his book titled CLUES OF THE CARIBBEES, published in 1929 by Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc.

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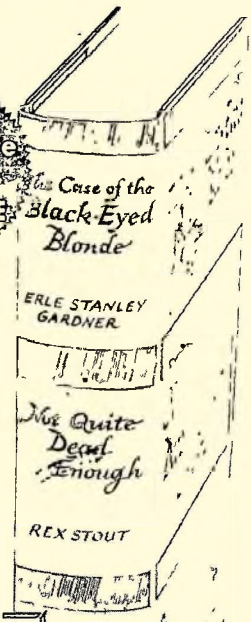

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