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INQUEST ON A DEAD TIGER

by HAROLD R. DANIELS

A LITERATE PLAINCLOTHESMAN from Traffic Division once referred to Deputy Inspector Pete Kerwin as Javert. The allusion was completely wasted on the hard-bitten Traffic Squad. If the policeman had said that Kerwin was a dedicated policeman who hung in there like a bulldog—and that's what he meant—he would have been better understood.

One overcast, muggy day Kerwin walked up the steps of Third Precinct Headquarters. He wore a dark-blue suit with a vest and a plain dark tie at a time when the Commissioner himself wore a sports jacket and a tieless shirt to his office. He turned left inside the door and walked through a dank and smelly hallway to the booking room.

A uniformed sergeant and a civilian were working behind a wooden railing. The uniformed sergeant recognized Kerwin at once and stood up. "Something I can do for you, Inspector?" he asked.

Kerwin said, "No, thanks. I want to see Lieutenant Shaw. He's expecting me." He walked through a door leading off the far end of the room.

The civilian watched him go with a look of malicious anticipation on his face. He drew his finger across his throat and made a strangling noise. "Kerwin," he said. "The Gestapo."

The sergeant said in a bored voice, "Why don't you close your big mouth and file those summonses like you're supposed to."

The clerk, not at all disconcerted, said, "The Commissioner's hatchet man. He's here to bust Shaw down for lousing up the Gallagher thing. Bet you a buck."

"Save your money."

"What I say, it's about time. Shaw lost his grip a long time ago. Thinks he owns this precinct."

The sergeant turned to stare at

the clerk. "You're a poisonous little louse. The Lieutenant saved your job twice that I know of. Now close your mouth like I told you."

Lieutenant Shaw had his head bent over some paper work when Kerwin walked into the office. Kerwin had time to study him briefly before he looked up. Shaw was in his early fifties. His hair was iron-gray over a florid face with a bold nose and a strong jaw. Kerwin had known Shaw for twenty years. They were friends, of sorts. Yet Kerwin knew that Shaw would greet him with the blend of contempt and amused tolerance that he reserved for all City Hall Precinct cops.

He did. He said, "Hello, Pete. Haven't seen you since you got promoted out of Safe and Loft." The way he said "promoted" made a slur out of the remark.

Kerwin had promised himself that he would not let Shaw needle him. The assignment he had this day was miserable enough without needling. He said, "That so? I guess it has been a long time. How are things, Ed?"

"Not so good or you wouldn't be here." Shaw stood up. "You phoned and said you'd be down. You didn't come to audit the property book. What's on your mind—the Gallagher homicide?"

Kerwin said, "Don't get thick with me. I just do what they tell me."

"I know." Shaw sat down again. "Sit down, Pete. I'm not sore at you. How much muscle did they give you?"

"Enough." Kerwin took a typed piece of paper from his pocket and passed it across the desk.

Shaw read a couple of sentences out loud, remaining slouched in his chair with a sardonic expression on his face. "—to make inquiry into the homicide of Daniel Gallagher on July 16th and to determine if any laxity existed in the investigation by the police official having jurisdiction."

Shaw passed the paper back to Kerwin. "Like you said, muscle enough. At least they didn't take the Patch away from me yet."

"The Patch?"

"That's what they call the Third Precinct around here—the Cabbage Patch. It goes back to the days when it was all Irish." Shaw suddenly stood up and banged his big fist on the desk. "All this for a no-good hoodlum like Dinny Gallagher. I never had to stand an investigation in all the years I've had the Precinct."

Kerwin said, "Gallagher had lots of friends. He was a character in his own way. The papers have been making a thing of it."

Shaw said disgustedly, "You can call him a character if you want to. The papers—I read them. How he used to be a prizefighter and how game he was. How he called the Mayor by his first name. I say he was a liar and a thief and a hood-

lum. You know what they called him in the patch? The tiger. Tiger Gallagher. I booked him a half a dozen times right in this station."

"You never stuck him with a felony, Ed."

"Because he was an ex-pug and a harp in an Irish ward. Because he had a way about him."

"I'm not down here to pass judgment on him," Kerwin said. "I'm supposed to find out who killed him."

"And if I tried to find out the way the book says."

"That's what it says on my orders. You know the score, Ed. There's more to it than whether or not you tried to solve it. There's been some loose talk that you had reasons for not pushing the investigation. I've got it to say—I don't try to judge Gallagher and I won't try to judge you. I'm going to find out what I can. What I find out I'm going to report to the Commissioner."

Shaw said coldly, "That's your job." He pushed a button on the intercom and said, "Lou, bring me the Gallagher file."

Both men waited in silence until the sergeant came in with a manila folder. He handed it to Shaw and left the room again. Shaw passed the folder to Kerwin. "It's all in there," he said. "Autopsy report. Record of arrests. A summary of my investigation. I had two men assigned to me from Homicide. Their reports are in there too."

Kerwin said drily, "I've seen their reports. Both of them complained that you interfered with them."

"I told them what to do. It's my Precinct."

"They're competent men, Ed. They only wanted to do their jobs."

"Ah, sure."

Kerwin stood up, holding the folder. "I'll look the rest of this stuff over later. This place where Gallagher was killed—the Dublin Social Club?"

Shaw said, "Six blocks South on Green Avenue."

Kerwin said, "I'll see you later, Ed."

Shaw nodded. "Sure. Say hello to Augie Schwartz for me." He watched Kerwin go. He smiled faintly, but a wary and tired expression swiftly eroded the smile.

The Dublin Social Club was a nondescript bar with a decor that leaned strongly toward shamrocks. There were two customers at the bar. Kerwin ignored them and spoke directly to the bartender, a small neat man in his fifties. He asked "Are you Mr. Schwartz?"

The bartender said, "I am. Can I get you something?"

"Not when I'm on duty." Kerwin held his badge out for Schwartz to see. "I'm looking into the Gallagher business."

One of the customers, an old man with an Irish lantern-jaw and the pink skin of a baby said, "Ah, now, poor Dinny." He pointed

toward the floor. "Right there is where he was lying in his own blood, poor, poor lad."

The second customer said proudly, "He was a friend of mine, Dinny was. Used to call me his old buddy. The place isn't the same with him gone. Yes, sir. Called me his old buddy. He was a prizefighter once, you know."

Schwartz said gently, "The gentleman knows all that." He drew two beers. "Now you boys go on over to a booth and play a hand of crib. Take these with you." After they had drifted away he said to Kerwin, "I thought Lieutenant Shaw was all the police we needed in the Patch."

Kerwin said awkwardly, "This is something a little out of the ordinary."

Schwartz asked shrewdly, "Is Shaw in some kind of trouble?"

"What made you ask that?"

Schwartz bent down to polish the shining bar. "I don't know, exactly. There's been a lot of noise made over Gallagher." He nodded toward the two men in the booth. "The two old-timers there. Ready to cry about poor Dinny. You know what they used to hope when he walked into my bar? They hoped he wouldn't notice them. He was a mean and vicious man and the only decent thing he ever did was to get himself killed. I'm just sorry he picked my bar to do it in."

Kerwin asked, "Were you working here that night?"

"You're from the police. You know I was. You don't have to beat around the bush."

Kerwin said, "Sorry," and meant it. Schwartz had a quiet dignity that demanded respect. "Would you tell me about it?"

Schwartz leaned on the bar. "It was a slow night," he said reflectively. "Most of my trade are longshoremen and cargo handlers and there was a ship loading. The *Newark Merchant*. And Tiger Gallagher came in. He was a weak man, Inspector. He had the strength of a bull elephant yet he was a weak man. He never walked in my bar. He always made an entrance. Being weak he had to have attention. Do you understand what I mean?"

Kerwin nodded.

"He had to let everyone know that Gallagher was here. There were only a couple of men at the bar. Gallagher said in his loud voice, 'Who's buying? Who's the live one?' And you'd have thought him a jovial man, Inspector." Kerwin nodded, and Schwartz went on. "One of the men at the bar bought him a shot and a beer. Al Murphy, that was, and him out of work and nursing his three beers for a whole evening."

Kerwin asked, "Why would he do that?"

"Because Gallagher put his arm around his shoulder and pinched his cheek. As if he was being playful but enough to hurt. And saying, 'Murphy is my old buddy. Murph'

will buy the Tiger a shot and a beer.' And Murphy bought. With tears of pain running down his cheeks he bought. What else could he do?"

There wasn't much you could do, Kerwin thought, in the face of raw brutality.

Schwartz drew a small beer for himself and nodded politely at Kerwin. "Change your mind? It's a hot day and it would be my pleasure."

"All right. Make mine a short one."

Schwartz drew the cool beer and set it in front of Kerwin. "Right after that," he continued, "George Fath come in. George is a little man with glasses. He walked up to Tiger Gallagher and said, 'I want to talk to you, Gallagher.' His voice was high and scared but brave too. You know?"

Kerwin sipped at his beer. "I know."

"And Gallagher turned around and said, 'What do you know. Another one of my buddies. Come on over, Georgie. We ain't got any secrets here. You got another fifty bucks for me, George? George is my real buddy. Pays me not to come around to his place, don't you, George?' "

Schwartz finished his own glass of beer. "Fath got really mad then. He shook his little fist at Gallagher and shouted, 'You were up there this afternoon, trying to get her to see you. She told me about it. You let her alone, Gallagher. You just keep away and let her alone!' "

"What did Gallagher do?" Kerwin asked.

"He grinned in his dirty fashion and asked, 'What makes you think she didn't let me in, Georgie?' And Georgie lunged at him, trying to hit him. Gallagher just pushed him away at first, laughing all the time. Then he got mad and twisted George's arm until the little man went down to his knees. Gallagher said, 'Knock it off, Georgie, or I'll break your arm.' So George just sort of wilted in on himself and went out the door."

Schwartz drew two glasses of beer and brought them over to the two old-timers at the cribbage table. When he came back he said, "After Fath left, Gallagher started to tell Al Murphy how he had gone up to Fath's tenement and what he had done there. Al didn't want to listen. He said he had to go home. So did the other customer. That left me alone with Gallagher. I didn't want to hear him talk with his dirty mouth, so I went down to the basement to tap a keg of ale. I've got a trap door here behind the bar. It's awkward getting up and down. I heard the shot from down below but it took me a few seconds to scramble up. When I did, I saw Dinny Gallagher sitting on the floor, his hands stretched out as if he was trying to pull himself to his feet. But he was dead. I took a dime out of the cash regis-

ter and tried to call Lieutenant Shaw."

"Tried to call him?"

"He was out getting coffee. I told the desk sergeant what had happened. Before I finished telling him, Shaw himself got back and I told him what had happened."

"What did he say?"

"He told me to hold on and not touch anything, that he'd be right over. Right after I hung up, young Joe Harrison came in—he's one of my regulars. I told him to run down the block and find the regular beat patrolman. Moore his name was. He was about due to come by. Then I waited."

"How long?"

"Just a few minutes. Until Lieutenant Shaw came in."

While Schwartz was talking, a painfully thin man in his early thirties had come into the bar. Schwartz drew a beer and handed it to the man with a nod, saying, "Hello, Conn."

Conn bobbed his head but did not speak.

Kerwin said, "I think I'll have another beer. Have one with me." He put money on the bar. Schwartz drew two beers and came back to lean against the bar opposite the Deputy Inspector.

"What time did the patrolman—Moore—get here?"

"A few minutes after Lieutenant Shaw."

The man named Conn said bitterly, "Shaw."

Schwartz started to speak and Kerwin shushed him with a wave of his hand. "What about Shaw?" he asked Conn.

"What about him? They ought to investigate him, that's what about him. He pushed poor Dinny Gallagher around for twenty years. Now poor Dinny is dead, God rest him, and Shaw and the rest of the cops are just forgetting the whole thing." Conn sipped at his beer and said sourly, "Don't kid yourself. They know who killed Dinny."

"What do you mean, he pushed Gallagher around?"

"Every time there was even a street fight around here he had poor Dinny pinched."

"Conn, you're like all the Irish. You were scared stiff of Tiger Gallagher like everyone else in the Patch. Now that he's dead he's suddenly become a saint, according to you," Schwartz said.

"He wasn't any saint. But he had a lot of good points. Even you have to admit that." Conn turned to Kerwin. "He was a fighter, you know—used to fight as a middleweight. Never was knocked out."

Schwartz answered disgustedly, "That's a lie. He was suspended by the Boxing Commission for going into the tank. And I saw the third mate from the *Newark Merchant* half kill him in this very club a couple of months ago. You were here yourself, Conn. The sailor was twenty pounds lighter, too."

Kerwin frowned. "You made a statement," he said to Conn. "You said that Lieutenant Shaw knew who killed Gallagher."

Conn said importantly, "Sure he knows. All the big-shot cops down at City Hall know. Gallagher was cutting in on the bookies. They're the ones that had him killed. Augie Schwartz will tell you that Shaw left here that same night that Gallagher was shot dead and was gone for over an hour. The other cops and the reporters were looking for him."

"Where do you think he went?" Kerwin asked.

"Right over to O'Garry's place to get his orders. That's what I think."

"O'Garry?"

"O'Garry the bookie. Not only that, Shaw was seen with O'Garry the next day. A lot of guys saw him."

Kerwin stood up to go. Before he did he said to Conn, softly, "You know, it's a funny thing. I'm a cop and I'm from City Hall. But I'm damned if *I* knew who killed Gallagher." As he left he heard Schwartz chuckling.

Lieutenant Shaw was in his office when Kerwin got back to the Third Precinct. He grinned and asked, "How did it go, Fearless Fosdick?"

Kerwin flared up briefly. "I told you once, Ed. I'm just doing a job. If you'd done yours better I wouldn't have to be here. I'll put it on the line—I don't know how you usually handle homicides in your precinct, but you butchered this one."

"I did, eh? Tell me about it."

Kerwin said disgustedly, "Oh, knock it off. You've had this precinct what—ten years?"

"So?"

"Maybe you've grown too personal about it. You're not out on an island by yourself. I talked to a couple of people and I got a picture. Lieutenant Shaw, the master of the precinct, the captain of the ship. Maybe we're busy with big crime and small politics down at City Hall but we get the same picture."

"It's nice they know I'm here. I thought they forgot the Third outside of election years."

"That's a stupid remark, Ed. You know who cries about City Hall politics? The old has-beens who can't handle their jobs any more. Bill Pickerel in Traffic. Or Jake Eno out in the Fifth Precinct. Is that the way it is with you? If it is, you ought to get out."

Shaw said slowly, "The day I can't handle this Precinct they won't have to ask me to get out. Is there anything else you want to point out?"

"Just this. I think you're covering up for somebody. If you are, I hope you didn't take a dime for it. I hope to God you didn't."

Shaw stood up and leaned on his desk. His voice was thick as he said slowly, "You shut your mouth."

Kerwin stared at Shaw until he looked away again. Shaw passed his hand over his face. "I never took a nickel in my life, Pete."

Kerwin tapped the Gallagher file. "I have to go by this. It needs explaining. On the night of the sixteenth, a few minutes after the murder, you called Homicide and had two men assigned to you. These are the two men who claimed that you hampered them."

"I told you once—it's my Precinct. I could have put them out on the street tagging parking violators if I'd wanted to."

"That's not the point. They both stated that you weren't at the Dublin Club when they got there. They checked in at Precinct and you weren't there either. You have a murder on your hands and you disappear. Does that make sense?"

Surprisingly Shaw grinned. "Did you ask Schwartz?"

"No."

"He could have told you."

"Told me what—that you went to see O'Garry the bookie?"

"Who said that?"

"Does it make a difference who said it? Somebody said it. Somebody believes it. You know how that makes you look."

Shaw said thoughtfully, "I suppose so. It's funny the way things turn out sometimes. I never tried to hide where I went. It didn't strike me that it was anybody's business. There wasn't anything I could do for Dinny Gallagher. I'd sent for the Homicide men and put in a call for the Medical Examiner. I had Moore there, keeping people out of the place . . ."

"Moore? He's the beat patrolman?"

"Was. And Schwartz had told me about the argument between Gallagher and George Fath. I had a pickup out on Fath."

"Let's get back to Moore," Kerwin said. "Schwartz sent a man out to find him, yet he didn't get there until after you arrived. Don't tell me he got lost on his own beat."

"He found a door on Koppelman's meat market unlocked. He stopped to check the building and to tell Koppelman to come down and lock up."

Shaw fumbled in the drawer of his desk and brought out a tin of tobacco. He lit his pipe and went on. "Annie Gallagher came in right after Moore got there. I've known Annie for thirty years—her and old Dan Gallagher. Schwartz had put a tablecloth over the body. She walked over and lifted a corner of it before I could get to her." Shaw's pipe had gone out. He looked at it and frowned. "Pure Irish. She crossed herself and said, 'I had to see him with my own eyes. Thirty-five years old and dead now.' So I took her home."

"If you felt that someone should take her home, why didn't you send Moore? It strikes me that you had things to do."

Shaw said in a faintly surprised

voice, "I told you. I've known her for thirty years, her and old Dan. Old Dan has been in and out of veteran's hospitals since the First World War. Think of that, Pete. That's more than forty years."

Kerwin, annoyed that the conversation was drifting away from the main subject asked dutifully, "What happened to him?"

"Gassed. They sent him home to die a dozen times, but he's one of those tough wiry little guys and he just hung in there. Annie ran a little bakery to help but the old man didn't know that. He was sick, a wreck of a man, and he saw in his son Dinny what he could have been. Dinny couldn't do anything wrong in his eyes and Annie let him go right on feeling that way. There aren't many like her."

"Sure." Kerwin made an attempt to steer Shaw back to the subject but Shaw refused to be diverted.

"Mornings, when I walked a beat in the Patch, she'd call me in for a cup of coffee. Four o'clock in the morning, and she'd be baking —humping hundred-pound sacks of flour, and Dinny up in bed. That's your Tiger that the papers call a character."

Kerwin said in small desperation, "Let's get back to Fath." He glanced at the Gallagher folder. "He made an assault complaint against Gallagher two months ago, according to this. Then he dropped it. On the sixteenth—the day Gallagher was shot—he had trouble with Gallagher in the Dublin Club, less than an hour before the shooting."

"We picked Fath up two hours after the shooting."

"I read that in here," Kerwin said. "He claimed he was sore at Gallagher and that he stopped in at a couple of bars after he left the Dublin Club. There's damned little substantiation in here."

"He wasn't carrying a gun when we picked him up."

"He could have ditched it somewhere. What was between him and Gallagher?"

"Fath's wife used to be Gallagher's common-law wife. Name is Edith. Gallagher beat her up one too many times and she walked out on him. She wasn't much—but neither was Fath. Left alone they would have made out. Gallagher wouldn't let them alone."

"What about this assault complaint?"

"I handled that myself. If I had my way, Fath wouldn't have dropped it. Gallagher got drunk one afternoon and went up to see Edith Fath. George was there and he tried to stop Gallagher from coming in. Someone called the beat cop—it was Moore—and he went there to try and break it up. He got a little shook—Gallagher was tough if you didn't know him inside—and Moore pulled a gun on Gallagher. A neighbor called the Precinct and said an officer was

in trouble. I took the call myself. You know how it is. You get a call like that and you don't wait for anything."

"What happened then?"

"I came up the stairs to Fath's tenement and there they were. I told Moore, 'Don't ever pull a gun on a slob like this,' and started to cuff Gallagher around. A pig like that, you don't need a gun. And I took him in. But Fath withdrew his complaint."

"Why?"

"The way I see it, Gallagher still had something for Edith Fath. She was afraid to be alone when he came around and I guess she made Fath understand. Fath started paying Gallagher to stay away from her."

"It figures that if Gallagher still kept bothering Fath's wife, he had good reason to kill him."

"I never said he didn't. So did a lot of other people. I picked several of them up the same night I had Fath picked up."

"All right. He had a reason. He didn't have a solid alibi. Why did you let him go two days later?"

"I was satisfied he didn't do it," Shaw said.

Kerwin said angrily, "I'm not. Didn't you even put a tail on him?"

Shaw shook his head.

Kerwin flared out at the Lieutenant. "You can't judge these things for yourself. Who are you to sit there and say you're satisfied he didn't do it? You're not the Commissioner. You're not a Felony Court judge. You're a police lieutenant in command of a precinct! Now either you know who did kill Gallagher or you think you're big enough to condemn him all by yourself and let it die in your Record Room. You're not that big, Ed. I'm going to pull Fath and his wife in but I won't do you the courtesy of booking them in your precinct. I'll take them downtown."

Shaw smiled. "Go ahead. You'll have to extradite them."

"Extradite them?"

"They've left town. By bus. I think they were headed for Des Moines."

"And you let it happen." Kerwin stood up. "All right. We can trace them. We can extradite them. I'll have a fugitive warrant out for them in half an hour."

"Go ahead. But I wouldn't sign it if I were you. Get the Commissioner to do it. He can stand a suit for false arrest easier than you can."

Kerwin said bitterly, "I'll risk it." He picked up the desk phone and started to dial a number. He dialed three digits and hung up the phone. Shaw had risen and was staring out the window. Kerwin, still furious, said, "Ed, I don't want to burn you down, but you don't give me any choice. I can't cover for you."

"I didn't ask you," Shaw said without turning around.

Kerwin slammed the Gallagher folder down. "That's the hell of it.

If you had asked me I could burn you without thinking twice about it. All right. We'll forget Fath for a while. What about O'Garry?"

"The bookie?"

"The bookie. I've got it that you went to see him the day after the murder. Why?"

"Well now, why don't you ask O'Garry?"

"I will."

"You'll find him in the Avalon Travel Agency—that's his cover. It's three blocks south of the Dublin Club."

Kerwin said sardonically, "Thanks."

"I'll call and tell him you're coming," Shaw promised. "Otherwise you won't get anything out of him except travel folders." He hesitated. "Pete?"

"Yeah."

"You think it's pretty rotten, don't you? Me being buddy-buddy with a bookie."

Kerwin said stiffly, "I'm not assigned to the Vice Squad."

"It's not the way you think it is. I don't take anything from O'Garry. He's not with the mob. He's a little guy, an independent."

"He's still a bookie."

Shaw said disgustedly, "Ah, knock it off. You've got big bookies downtown. I've got O'Garry. He doesn't let anyone get in over his head. No loan sharks. No rough stuff. If anyone starts betting big, I get to hear about it. You think these people in the Patch wouldn't go downtown if I closed up O'Garry?"

Shaw wheeled around to see that Kerwin had already left. He sat down at his desk and put his head in his hands wearily. Then he remembered that he had promised to call O'Garry and he picked up the telephone and dialed a number . . .

O'Garry, a pudgy little man in his sixties, said to Deputy Inspector Kerwin a few minutes later, "Why did Lieutenant Shaw come to see me? Because he wanted to know if I knew anything about who killed Tiger Gallagher."

"Why would he think that?" Kerwin asked. "Did you have any trouble with Gallagher?"

O'Garry shrugged. "Who didn't?" The telephone rang and he picked it up and said, "Call me later," before he turned back to Kerwin. "A year ago he came in here just before the seventh race at Hialeah." O'Garry gestured toward a radio on the shelf behind him. "They broadcast it. There were a dozen three-year-olds in the race. Black Simon was the favorite but there was a six-to-one shot in there by the name of Colony Bid that looked good. There were half a dozen horse players around. Pretty good action on the races they broadcast, you know. Black Simon got out in front by six or seven lengths but Colony Bid wore him down in the stretch and won. And Gallagher said, 'Hot damn. I had ten bucks on him to win.' I told

him, 'Not with me, you didn't.'"

The telephone rang again. O'Garry picked it up and said again, "Call me later."

Kerwin asked, "Did he have a bet?"

"Of course not. He was pulling the old past-post trick. He came over and grabbed me by the arm and asked the horse players, 'You guys heard me bet Colony Bid didn't you?' And there wasn't one of them that had the nerve to call him a liar." O'Garry shrugged. "Neither did I. I paid him. After that he pulled the same trick once, maybe twice a week. And there wasn't a thing I could do about it. If I didn't pay him he would have wrecked the place, maybe put me in the hospital with a broken face."

"Did Lieutenant Shaw know all this?" Kerwin asked.

"I never told him about it but he knew. Not much went on in the Patch that he didn't know. That's why he came to see me. He thought Gallagher might have tried the same strong-arm stuff on the big books downtown."

"Did he?"

"Not that I know of. If he did, he'd have been dead a lot sooner."

Kerwin thanked O'Garry and started to leave. O'Garry held him.

"Inspector?"

"Yes?"

"About Shaw. He's a good officer. People like me know the good ones. If I ever offered him money he would have broken my back."

"Sure."

After leaving O'Garry's, Kerwin started to walk back toward the third Precinct. He passed the Dublin Social Club and, on an impulse, stopped in.

Schwartz was alone behind the bar, tinkering with a clock. He looked up as Kerwin walked in. "Inspector," he said. "A cold glass of beer with me?"

Kerwin said wearily, "I guess so."

Schwartz put the beer in front of Kerwin and picked up the broken clock. Absently he said, "That Conn that was talking so much. Don't pay attention to him. He's a liar."

"I know the type," Kerwin said. "Listen, Schwartz. You were talking about a fight Gallagher had with the third mate of some ship. What was his name?"

"Wendell. Olaf Wendell."

"And he gave Gallagher a beating?"

Schwartz smiled. "He did. Gallagher was a great one for picking fights with smaller men and drunks. Wendell was small—but he was chunky. Gallagher came in here while Wendell was quietly drinking his beer. He winked at the boys at the bar and jostled Wendell so that he spilled his beer. Wendell didn't say anything. He just ordered another beer. Gallagher, thinking Wendell was scared of him, jostled him again. The sailor ordered another beer. When he got

it he poured it down Gallagher's front and said, 'Now move away, you swine.' "

"So Gallagher started a fight?"

"He started it and that's about all. Wendell gave him a terrible beating. After he knocked Gallagher down the fifth or sixth time, Gallagher begged, 'Enough.' So Wendell stepped back and dropped his hands. And Gallagher drove his two thumbs into Wendell's eyes. We had to take him to the hospital. He still wears a patch over his left eye. The retina is detached and he'll be half blind the rest of his days."

"And Gallagher got away with that? That's mayhem!"

"Lieutenant Shaw practically got down on his knees and begged Wendell to make a charge against Gallagher. He wouldn't do it. Said he'd take care of Gallagher in his own way when the time came."

"Shaw knew about the fight, then?"

"Of course."

"What ship was Wendell with?"

"The *Newark Merchant.*"

Kerwin rubbed his forehead. "Just a minute, now. You say Wendell was with the *Newark Merchant*. Was he back at work at the time Gallagher was murdered?"

"You mean, out of the hospital? Back with his ship? Yes."

"Listen now, Schwartz. Didn't you tell me that the night of the sixteenth, the night Gallagher was murdered, business was slow because the dock workers were loading the *Newark Merchant?* Sure you did. So Wendell was in port."

Schwartz finished assembling the clock and held it to his ear. He nodded in satisfaction. "Good as new. You're thinking Wendell may have shot Gallagher to get even for the loss of his eye? I suppose it's possible. Lieutenant Shaw thought of the same thing. He sent a patrol car down to the docks to pick up Wendell the same night Gallagher was killed. But he didn't hold him. The *Newark Merchant* sailed for Antwerp on the eighteenth. Olaf Wendell was aboard."

"How would you know that?"

"My trade are dock workers. They talk ships when they aren't talking women or gambling."

Kerwin finished his beer and left the Dublin Club. He went on home without stopping in at the Third Precinct.

The next morning the Deputy Inspector ate an early breakfast in the Patch before he again visited the Third. The same civilian was behind the desk when he did get there and he fawned at Kerwin. "Good morning, Inspector."

Kerwin mumbled something unintelligible and moved past him. The clerk glanced down the hall to see if the sergeant was in sight. He wasn't and the clerk said, "Inspector?"

Kerwin paused. "What is it?"

"Lieutenant Shaw isn't in yet."

"All right. He isn't in yet. Anything else on your mind?"

"I was just wondering how you were making out on the Gallagher deal."

Kerwin asked angrily, "Who told you what I was working on? What business is it of yours?"

"I'm not stupid, Inspector. I've got a pretty good idea of what goes on around here."

"You have, have you. What's your name?"

"Harrison."

"It's like this, Harrison. You talk too much."

Harrison said bitterly, "You cops are all alike. Once you get a little rank you scratch each other's backs. You'll whitewash Shaw just like he covered up for Moore. I was trying to help you out and you act like I was dirt."

Kerwin said ominously, "I guess you better talk a little more at that."

"I don't have to tell you anything —and you don't have to make any cracks about getting my job. You'll have to go to the Civil Service Commission and I don't think you guys want to do that."

"You think wrong, Harrison. I'm not whitewashing Shaw or anyone else. I'm investigating a homicide and I'd just as soon book you as a material witness as try to con information out of you."

Aware that he had pushed too far, Harrison said nervously, "Oh, I'll tell you anything you want to know. I didn't mean anything personal. I just get tired of being treated like an orphan just because I don't wear a uniform. The record sergeant is always on me."

"I can believe it. What about Moore? Is that the same Moore that had the beat where Gallagher was shot?"

"That's him."

"What about him?"

"All I know is he asked for a transfer half a dozen times in the last couple of months. Shaw wouldn't give it to him."

"That was Shaw's business."

"Yeah. But two days after Tiger Gallagher was shot dead, Shaw gave him a transfer to the Traffic Division and had him take his annual leave effective at once."

"And what do you read into that?" Kerwin growled.

"Moore was scared of Gallagher. That's why he wanted the transfer. He had trouble with Gallagher a couple of times."

There was a stir at the door and Lieutenant Shaw walked in followed by a rawboned woman in her sixties. He said, "Hello, Pete. Annie, this is Inspector Kerwin. Pete, this is Annie Gallagher. I've got a few things of Dinny's that I told her I'd release to her. Come on in my office."

Kerwin said awkwardly, "Pleasure, Mrs. Gallagher."

She said, "I'm pleased to meet you, Inspector."

Shaw took a key from his desk. "I've got to go down to the property room. Dinny had some personal stuff. A few bucks." He left.

Kerwin, trying to make conversation, said, "Won't you sit down Mrs. Gallagher?"

She said, "Thank you," and sat primly in a chair, clutching her handbag to her.

"I'm sorry about your son."

"About Dinny? Why? No—wait. I don't mean it that way: I'm not bitter about what happened. I just can't understand why you should be sorry, Dinny being what he was. He was nothing, Inspector. Nothing. I guess you think it's a terrible thing to hear a mother talk about her son that way?"

Kerwin said nervously, "Well, I—"

"I don't see why I should lie about it. I didn't feel sorry about Dinny myself. I didn't even cry. The time for crying about Dinny was years ago when he was a little boy."

Kerwin tried to change the subject. "How is Mr. Gallagher? Lieutenant Shaw says he's home from the hospital."

She said calmly, "Dan is dying. The doctor is with him now. That's how I could get away to get Dinny's things. It's no more than a matter of days."

"I'm sorry. I mean, I'm really sorry."

She nodded. "I thank you for it. Dan is a good man. He's been a good man all his life. Do you know, for all the years in the hospitals and all the pain and all he missed out on, he never complained. Oh, I'll cry for Dan, I will. But he lives with pain and they can do nothing for him, so it's better, perhaps."

Shaw came back into the room with a manila envelope which he handed to Annie Gallagher. "Here it is, Annie," he said. "He had thirty dollars in his billfold. It's in here with his knife and watch and a few other things."

She stood up. "Thank you, Eddie Shaw," she said and started for the door. When she reached it she turned. "Eddie, Dinny didn't have more than a dollar or two on him when he left the house that night. You put thirty dollars in the envelope, didn't you?"

Shaw reddened. "No. Why, no, I didn't. Dinny must have met someone who owed him some money. I can show you the receipt book if you want me to."

"Never mind. Goodbye, Eddie. Goodbye, Inspector."

Kerwin stood up. "Goodbye, Mrs. Gallagher."

Both men stared at the door after she left. Then Kerwin asked, "Did you?"

"Did I what?"

"Put money in the envelope."

"Do you want to see the receipt?"

"No." Kerwin reached for his billfold and took out a ten-dollar bill. He put it on the desk. "Get that to Mrs. Gallagher some way if you can. She makes me feel the same way you do." He stood up. "All right, Ed. That was something

else, something personal. It was a privilege to meet a woman like her. Now I've got to lay it on the line officially. Did you pick up a seaman by the name of Olaf Wendell on the night Gallagher was murdered?"

"I did. I released him the next night."

"And he got on a boat for Antwerp. Didn't you even give him the routine about staying available for questioning."

"No. He had an alibi. He was working cargo aboard his ship."

"I've seen ships being loaded. They're like a madhouse. Nobody could keep track of anybody else at a time like that. It's a lousy alibi and I don't see how you could have let him go, not in your right mind."

Shaw said stubbornly, "I was satisfied he didn't kill Gallagher."

Kerwin shouted angrily, "You were satisfied he didn't do it! You were satisfied that George Fath didn't do it! You can't just satisfy yourself, Ed. You've got to satisfy the Commissioner. And, yes, by God, you've got to satisfy me. I'll tell you again. You don't have the authority to sit in judgment on Gallagher or anyone else." He leaned forward and lowered his voice. "Damn it, Ed, are you covering up for one of your own officers?"

"Like who?"

"Like Moore. The beat cop who had trouble with Gallagher. I've got it that you turned him down a couple of times when he wanted a transfer—and then let it go through right after Gallagher was killed."

Shaw shook his head. "I didn't transfer him because he killed Gallagher."

"In the spot you're in, you'll have to prove that. He had trouble with Gallagher, didn't he?"

"Sure he did. I told you he pulled a gun on Gallagher once. I made a mistake then. I cuffed Gallagher around, shamed him in front of Moore. Gallagher was too yellow to try and get even with me. So a few nights later he had some of his cronies give Moore a going-over. They took his gun away and gave him a shellacking."

"Why didn't Moore turn him in?"

"Gallagher was too smart to lay a hand on him himself. He stood by and watched it."

"What about the others? Didn't Moore recognize them?"

"Sure he did, but it was his word against theirs. I told him to forget it and next time use the gun. Then I took a sergeant and a couple of men and went down in the Patch and worked a few of them over. That's all I could do."

"You could have been broken for it."

"I doubt it, Pete. This time I had the witnesses. If I didn't do it, they'd have crippled the next man I put on the beat. It's my Precinct, Pete. I know how to handle it."

"Was that why Moore asked for a transfer?"

"I suppose so. But I couldn't let him have it then." Shaw fumbled for his pipe. "Moore isn't a real cop, Pete. He's not yellow, but he has too much imagination. He'll do fine in Traffic on an administrative job. If I'd let him transfer then, Gallagher would have bragged how he ran him off the beat. That would make it tough for the other patrolmen. And Moore would wonder, all the rest of his days, if he had dogged it in the clutch."

"But Moore was sore at Gallagher and he was late making his rounds the night he was killed."

"That occurred to me."

Kerwin reached for the telephone and Shaw asked, "What are you going to do?"

Kerwin said angrily, "I'm going to locate Moore and have him sent down here."

Shaw shrugged. "Be my guest. He's up in the Gaspé Peninsula on vacation. Fishing."

"Damn you, Ed, you sent him up there."

"He likes to fish. Can't help that."

Kerwin said in a level voice, "Fath out of the State. Wendell out of the country. Moore in Canada. Three people who could have killed Gallagher and you let them all get away. And you never checked the bookie angle downtown. You've bungled this thing from start to finish Ed. I've got to recommend that you be relieved and suspended and that the investigation be opened wide."

Shaw looked away. "It's your party."

Kerwin, in frustration, said, "I don't get it, Ed. You picked up Fath and Wendell. You started out in a competent manner. What happened?"

Before Shaw could answer the telephone rang. Shaw picked it up. "Yes," he said. "Yes. I know. What? When did it happen? Yeah. Maybe it is at that. No, that's all right. There won't be any trouble. I'm sorry, Annie. I'll drop over sometime today." He hung up the telephone and turned to Kerwin. "That was Annie Gallagher. Old Dan is dead."

"That's too bad, Ed."

"But you don't care about that. You want some answers about Dinny Gallagher." Shaw walked over to look out the window. "What will you tell the Commissioner? That I have delusions and think I'm King of the Patch? Or that somebody bought me off?"

"He'll make up his own mind," Kerwin said.

"I guess he will at that." Shaw came back from the window. "Are you in a hurry?"

"We might as well get it over with. I'm supposed to call the Commissioner whenever I'm ready to make a recommendation."

Shaw sprawled in his chair. "You know," he said reflectively, "I thought Wendell did it. Fath is a lightweight. I couldn't see him using a gun."

"What made you stop thinking Wendell did it?"

"I went to Gallagher's wake."

Kerwin said impatiently, "All right. You went to Gallagher's wake."

"Remember I told you about Annie Gallagher coming into the Dublin Club to see Dinny's body. She said, 'I had to see him with my own eyes.' She didn't say, 'Who did it?' I thought about that and it came to me that she had to know or she would have asked. At the wake I asked her about it. I think she would have told me anyway when she heard that I was questioning Fath and Wendell. She's a decent woman, Annie."

Kerwin exhaled. "Lord. Her own son."

Shaw glanced at the Inspector. "You've a habit of jumping the gun," he said. "Shall I tell you what she told me?"

"By all means," Kerwin said sardonically.

"In her own words then. This is how it happened . . . Dinny, early in the evening, came into the kitchen and took a bottle of milk from the icebox. Annie followed him out and said, 'Dinny, I've got something to say to you.'

"And Dinny said, 'Ah, look. I've got my own problems. Don't give me that routine about getting a job and turning in some money to keep the joint going.'

" 'I haven't asked you about a job in five years.'

" 'Then get off my back.'

" 'You're going to listen to me, Dinny,' she said.

" 'I said get off my back.' He was shouting at her by this time.

"Annie said, 'Keep your voice down. Your father is sleeping.'

" 'So what? All he ever did in his life was sleep and make like a wounded hero. Why don't he stay in the Vet's hospital where people don't have to look at him?' "

Shaw relit his pipe. "What Annie didn't know then is that old Dan had got out of bed and was standing in the kitchen door listening to all this. And don't forget, until right then he thought the sun rose and set on Dinny."

Kerwin asked, "You got another pipe? Lend it to me. But don't stop."

Shaw passed pipe and tobacco over. "So then Annie said, 'Your father belongs here. This is his home. If you don't want to look at him, why don't you get out. I don't want you. How does it feel, Dinny, to hear that? I don't want you. I wish I never had to see you again.'

"And Dinny said, 'That doesn't bother me.'

" 'Nothing bothers you,' she told him.

" 'You know something?' he asked her. 'You bother me. You think I don't get tired of looking at you too? Moping around making like it was such a big deal keeping a roof over the old man's head. Put-

ting on an act for people to see how hard you work and what a bum I am for not helping out.'

"Annie asked him—and she meant it—'Where did you come from, Dinny? From Hell? Dan and I couldn't have a son like you.'

" 'You should know,' he told her.

" 'I'd have slapped you for that once,' she said.

"And he told her—don't forget, old Dan was hearing all this—'Yeah, and you know what happened when you tried belting me. So don't try it again.'

" 'I won't,' she told him. 'Dinny, that girl you went with once came up to see me today. She wanted me to make you leave her alone.'

"Dinny laughed. 'Edith Fath?'

" 'Edith Fath. She's married and she's trying to make something of it. You leave her alone, Dinny or you'll be sorry.'

" 'What can you do about it?' he asked her.

" 'I've got friends in the Patch, Dinny. Men who work on the docks. Truck drivers. Produce men. Big men. If you go near that woman again, I'm going to get some of them to beat you half to death.'

" 'You'd do it. I believe you'd do it.'

"She moved over and stood in front of him and asked him again, 'Are you going to leave that woman alone?'

" 'Get out of my way,' he told her.

" 'Are you?'

"He said, 'Ah, shut up and leave me alone.' And then he pushed her away. She grabbed at his arm and he half pushed, half hit her. 'I said get out of my way,' he shouted. And right then old Dan came into the kitchen. Annie had slumped into a kitchen chair with her head in her arms. Old Dan bent over her and asked, 'Are you all right, darlin'?' "

Kerwin realized that he was holding his breath. "Go on," he urged.

"Annie got right up and tried to cover up what had happened. 'You shouldn't be out of bed, Dan,' she told him.

"Old Dan didn't pay any attention. He started moving toward Dinny. 'Now, then, by God,' he said. And Dinny backed away, scared of the look in the old man's eye. He said, 'Get away from me, old man,' but Dan kept coming toward him. All this time Annie is saying, 'Go on back to bed, Dan. Let me help you back to bed.'

" 'I'll kill you with my two hands,' the old man said. And Dinny, backing around the table, pleading with him. 'I don't want to hit you. You're making me do it. Make him stop, Ma!' "

Kerwin heard a clicking noise and felt a sharp twinge on his lower lip. Only when the pipe refused to draw did he realize that he had bitten through the stem. Shaw passed him another one.

"Right then old Dan lunged and grabbed Dinny. Dinny tried to push him away and Annie was on Dinny like a tigress, scratching at his face and neck with her nails, all the time screaming at Dinny to let the old man alone. She hurt him. He drew back his fist and knocked her to the floor. She was almost unconscious. When she knew what was happening again, Dinny was gone and the old man was bending over her. There were tears in his eyes. 'He hurt you, Annie?' he said. 'Nor was it the first time.'

"'I'm all right,' she told him. 'Let me help you back to bed.'

"'All this time," old Dan said, 'You telling me what a help he was and how good things were going with me flat on my back.'

"He left her then and went to the bedroom. When he came back he said, 'He'll be at the Dublin, I suppose.'

"'What are you going to do, Dan?"

"'That would be my business, Annie.'

"'What have you got in your pocket?' she asked him.

"He showed her. An Army .45. Annie tried to stop him but he would have none of it.

"'You stay here,' he told her. 'I'm not the man you deserved, Annie. I've done little in all the years to be a husband to you. But no man can hurt you and live. Not while I live.'

"'Ah, Dan—' she pleaded.

"'I'm his father. I'm responsible for his life. And I'll be responsible for taking it away from him.'"

Shaw tamped out his pipe and stretched. "And that's the way it was."

Kerwin sighed. "Good God!"

"That's how I felt."

"But why didn't you make a report on it? Why did you stick your neck out?"

Shaw smiled. "It would have made me look good downtown, wouldn't it? A first-degree homicide closed out in forty-eight hours. The catch was that I'd have had to arrest that old man. He spent forty years in hospitals, Pete—he was only the shadow of the man he could have been. I made a ruling. The Patch owed him and Annie whatever time he had left. Not the department. Not the Commissioner. The Patch. Me. So I gave them that time. Are you going to tell me that I didn't have the authority and that I'm just a lousy Precinct Lieutenant? Because, if you are, I've got all morning to listen."

Kerwin said thoughtfully, "Why, no. No. I'd say that this was strictly a Precinct matter and that you handled it very efficiently. I'll work something out with the Commissioner." He stood up. "Ed, I haven't had a drink before lunch in twenty years. But I'm going down and see Schwartz at the Dublin Club and have one now. I'd be proud, Ed, if you'd join me."

a new story by

MARK VAN DOREN

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**MARK VAN DOREN**
TITLE:	***This Other Honor***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	The Inspector
LOCALE:	United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*There is more than one kind of honor: a private and personal honor that perhaps can be kept secret; and a public honor that was the Inspector's very life . . .*

WHEN THE TELEPHONE RANG, professor John Eldred called upstairs to his wife Sally, "That will be the Inspector telling me I'm late."

"All right, dear, you answer it."

He knew she was getting ready for bed, and perhaps at this moment was deciding which book to take with her. He spent most of his Thursday evenings in the Inspector's apartment; she spent hers at home with their two small sons and with what she once had referred to as her "book of the week." She teased him, saying she had to keep up, didn't she, with the literature he taught those girls at the college?

The conversation with the Inspector lasted longer than she had supposed it would. He was a crisp old boy—not nearly as old, though, as she made him out to be—and her assumption was that having said "I'm here, I'm waiting," he would hang up. That would be a sufficient rebuke. Not that John had any obligation to go; but they were good friends, and this was a standing date. It pleased John more than he would admit that the Inspector liked him so much and enjoyed talking shop with him. She never went to sleep before John came home, knowing he would have things to tell her that she wouldn't hear otherwise.

She listened now, standing at the door of their room, but could distinguish no word from the study, whose door must be half closed.

Then he was through. She heard him running up the stairs two steps at a time, and met him by the banister.

"Is he busy? Aren't you going?" The thought both pleased and disappointed her. "Or was he mad because you didn't come on the dot?"

"Listen, Sally." He was strangely excited. "You'll have to get dressed. He's coming here."

"What?" She gave her hair a poke, and looked down at her dressing gown. "Of course, if he is." She turned away, undoing the silk belt at her waist. "I must be ready by the time he gets here. I'm sure he disapproves of half-dressed women."

Then the full novelty of it struck her. "But John! He disapproves of *women*. He disapproves of *me*. Are you sure I should go down? I will, but are you sure?"

"All I know is," Eldred said, "he wants to see you as much as me. Maybe more." He himself hadn't got over it either. He smiled at her, drily. "You're wrong about his opinion of you. It's as high as mine —higher, since he knows none of your faults. I do, and love them: a low occupation."

They were in the bedroom now, she before the long mirror, and she went through the motions of beating him with the back of her hairbrush. "You've probably bragged to him about how bright I am. You do to everybody, silly. Whereas you are perfectly aware—"

"He wasn't very articulate over the phone; I've never encountered him before when he was confused, and I confess I didn't help much. But one thing was clear: he counts on you this time. He said so."

Busy with lipstick, she said, "Hurry down, dear, and see what we have to drink. I'll be along soon; I want to make sure the boys are asleep. If I'm not on hand when he comes, tell him the chief detective will join you two men presently. She's just home from Homicide, where she solved three mysteries in six minutes."

He lifted her yellow hair, kissed the tip of an ear, and left her.

They were both in the living room when the doorbell sounded. Sally sat down and pulled a magazine to her lap, opening it at the middle and pretending to read. She had forgotten to ask John if he told the Inspector she was upstairs when he called. John went promptly to the door and opened it.

"Hello, sir. We're delighted to have you here."

The Inspector stepped in quickly and without a word took off his coat and hat. John offered to hang them up, but the Inspector threw them on a small chair by the hall table, meanwhile peering through the archway to where Sally sat with her magazine. When she did not

glance up, the Inspector turned his sharp features inquiringly upward to the face of his tall friend. Even, thought Eldred, imploringly. That was queer.

"Sally," said the Professor, "here he is. You know, sir," he added sidewise to his guest, "my wife couldn't tell under oath what article she is lost in. She got down here only a minute ago."

The Inspector, without a smile, walked in and put out his hand to say she must remain where she was. She rose, however, and gave him her own hand.

"John, you have shaken what little confidence the Inspector had in me. Sit over there, sir. I'll just listen if you like."

"No, Mrs. Eldred, please." The Professor had never seen him like this. A marvel of self-control, he was all intensity now; his blue eyes fairly burned, and his lean cheeks were flushed. He sat on the edge of the chair as if it were a temporary seat from which he might have to spring at a moment's notice. And still he said nothing.

"I'll bring in some drinks," said Eldred. "I think I know what you want, though my Scotch isn't as good as yours."

"No, no!" the Inspector said, not troubling to be gracious. "I'm not drinking tonight." He appeared to think that this should have been obvious. "Coffee, though, if you have it."

"Of course," said Eldred, moving toward the kitchen. "We'll all have that." On the way out he looked at Sally, who nodded.

The Inspector leaned back—without relaxing, though, like one who waited. Both of them listened for the sound of cups and saucers.

"Mrs. Eldred," he said, "I appreciate your coming down. Your telephone is—where?" He looked around him.

"In the study." She went over and opened a door. "Shut this, if you like, and be as private as you please. I never hear John, so I won't hear you."

"Oh, no, not now!" The very suggestion seemed to disturb him. "But I'll be called. I gave them this number."

"Of course." She sounded stupid to herself.

"Mrs. Eldred"—but whatever he was about to say he didn't go on with. Perhaps, she thought, he was saving it for John too. Yes, that must be it. She found herself almost as nervous as he was.

"Tell me, Inspector," making conversation although she knew there was no need of it, "tell me, have I been right in supposing that you don't take women very seriously?" He lifted himself a few inches, then sat back again, rubbing the arms of his chair. "Because if you don't, you might like to hear that I don't either. As *women*, that is. I'm not sure there's all this difference people talk about. Intuition—that's nonsense."

"No! No, it isn't! There's something in it. I wouldn't use the word, though. I'd say, Mrs. Eldred, they remember more things than men do. As a rule, I mean. Not in all cases, but as a rule. They remember the essentials. They don't go blind—black out. They keep their eye on the ball; they don't miss the main thing, whatever it is."

She looked at him, her eyes large. "But Inspector! This is what John says *you* do. It's why you're—well, famous. It's why you're an Inspector of police."

"Not this time, though, not this time." The remark, so involuntary, so enigmatic, stirred pity in her—for what, she couldn't say, or even for whom. The first scent of coffee, arriving, was a blessed relief, though it altered nothing in him.

"No," he said, "for memory give me elephants and women." He actually tried a smile. He was doing his best.

"Oh, dear! Just when we're all working to get thin." They were both smiling successfully when John came in with the tray, which kept everyone busy for several minutes.

"Now," said John, "what have I been missing? Murder? Mayhem? What? I gathered it was something special, Inspector."

"It was. It is." He was quieter now, yet no less knotted within. "I probably shouldn't be here; it's that important. They'll be telephoning soon—I told Mrs. Eldred I left your number. Three of my best men are asking some questions. I may get the answers any time." He stopped, as if he were listening for the bell in the study.

"A case, then," said Eldred.

"Yes, yes!" His excitement was visible again. "And no matter what I learn, I won't know what to do. That's why I came. I won't know what to do. Oh, I'll know what to *do*. But *can* I? That's why I had to talk to you people. *May* I talk, in utter confidence? You won't like it."

Their silence, while they stared not at each other but at him, was so deep that all at once he could go on; the dam had broken.

"Listen," he said. "People say—Mrs. Eldred said—I don't like women. But I liked one woman more than I intend to tell you, though you will guess how much. I'm not good at stating such things. She was everything to me—everything. She was something like you, Mrs. Eldred, except that she was a little shorter; the same way of listening, though, the same understanding of what I said before I said it. And if I'm not embarrassing you, the same nice hair."

Sally put her hands up before she realized it, then dropped them into her lap. Still uncertain of what to say or do, she reached for the magazine again, folding it and unfolding it. Her husband, speechless, was no help.

"My dear Inspector," she said at last, "it was wonderful of you to

tell us this. When did you know her? A long time ago?"

"She died this afternoon."

"Oh!" There was a world of pity in her voice, and now she did look at John, thinking he might have learned this over the phone. But clearly he hadn't. He was still speechless.

"She was murdered."

"My God." Eldred had found his voice. Sally now had none.

The Inspector, agonized but lucid, looked from one of them to the other as he went on. "She was found in her apartment, strangled. In their apartment, I should say, for she was married. The only woman I ever liked—that much—was someone's wife. A doctor's. The maid had been out for an hour, and when she came back—it was done with a pair of stockings. Diabolically well done; there was almost no sign of struggle. The maid called us, and we were there by six. Nothing had been taken, so it wasn't robbery."

"Unless," said John, rubbing his forehead as if to restore sensation in it, "the maid came back too soon, and whoever it was—"

"We think we know," said the Inspector.

"Not a stranger, then?"

"The doctor."

"Oh!" said Sally again, so agonized herself that the Inspector kept his eyes on her while she said, "And you know why."

"I'm afraid I do. He had found out—But he did that years ago. He knew about us almost from the beginning. He knew we met whenever we could, and wherever. In my place sometimes, but mostly not. He had hated me for years—seven years, to be exact. And I think he hated her, though he wouldn't let her go. He's a big man, soft-spoken. He scared her."

"You mean," said Sally," he threatened her?"

"No, he never did. He never even mentioned me. But she was certain he knew about us, and was waiting. Waiting, soft-spoken, till he couldn't stand thinking about it any more. She told me once it would be like this. Sometime, she said, sometime." He shuddered in his chair, his fine strong hands clasping and unclasping.

"But what is there to go on?" said Eldred. "You say you think—"

"They're working on it now, I tell you. He said he was on his way to make a call, but we don't believe he went straight there. His secretary, the maid, the doorman at the apartment house, the patient who phoned him to come—others too—we're working on them all. What he did wouldn't have taken long, and in a way that makes it harder for us. But we'll see."

He closed his eyes as if he didn't want to see, and his doing so made Sally start.

"You really hope," she said, "it wasn't him. In spite of everything you would rather it had been a

stranger. Even the worst kind, so long as—"

"Sally!" said John.

"But she's right," said the Inspector. "It's why I came here—don't you understand? If I know anything I know it was the doctor; yet any kind of case I make will finish me. No case without a motive, and I'm the motive. And once he's cornered, won't he say that? He will, and take me down with him. I'm finished anyway, Mrs. Eldred; I can't imagine caring about anything again. But that's private, that's personal. The other thing—you see, don't you?"

"I do," said Sally. "And yet you can't prevent it. You *shouldn't* prevent it, you will think. Too many others are involved—your best men, you say. But everybody is. The law is. You can't stop it, and you will think you mustn't. It's terrible, yes, that all of it can't be kept a secret. It *is* a secret, really. But no man can do what he did and be let go. Your oath of office tells you that, and so does your sense of honor. That's private, that's personal too; John and I both feel it in you, as you feel it in yourself. It is honor that will drive you on till he is cornered, and talks, and takes your honor down with him. This other honor is public, is impersonal, but it's important; it has been your life."

"Except with her," said the Inspector.

Sally waited, then said, "Not that you don't exaggerate the consequences. Not everybody will think—"

"Enough will," he said. "I'll have to resign. You can imagine the newspapers. I would, though, anyway. I'm finished. I guess I even want to be."

"No, Inspector, no, you don't," said Eldred, setting his cold coffee on the piano. "You're too good a man."

"Ha!" The Inspector, as if stung, turned to his friend. "You're bright, you're kind, but you don't understand some things."

"I don't understand anything," put in Sally. "You mustn't think I was telling you what to do. I was telling you what you *will* do, probably. If you came for advice, I can't give it. Nobody should. But if we keep on talking, then maybe—"

The phone rang in the study, and all three of them jumped. The Inspector went, pulling the door to behind him. They both started to speak at once; stopped; and stared silently at each other until he came back a few minutes later. He walked with a touch of his old briskness.

"Very intelligent fellow, Sims." Even his voice had lost some of its strain. "He summarizes progress as nobody else can. And there's been progress. It's quite clear the doctor did it. He let so many see him, he covered himself so poorly, he doesn't stand a chance. They haven't told him this, but they

think he knows. They've even let him go, on the theory—fancy this—that he will lead them to the other woman."

"The other woman!" They said it in unison.

"They think there must be one. The only thing that baffles them, they say, is the absence of a motive. They can't imagine why he did it. Nothing he says—of course, he's not confessing—throws any light on that."

Sally was studying him closely. "So you feel better—for the time being?"

"Not much," wryly. "A little. It's a breather. But the main outline hasn't changed."

"Oh," she said, "but it might have. What if he's too proud to tell? I'm sure some men—some women, too—have done this thing and never told why. Too personal, too private. Too painful to their self-esteem."

The Inspector sat down, then got up again. "I ought to go. I ought to be on the job."

"You are," said Sally. "Now I have this question. Supposing he never tells—supposing nobody ever knows—would you still be finished? Could you go on?"

"Being a policeman?"

"Yes."

"I don't know." He dropped into his chair again. "You understand what I'm doing. I know the motive and I'm not telling—yet."

"You mean you might, even if you didn't have to, and bring it all down on your head?"

He rubbed his cheek. "It won't be that simple. When the time comes he will tell, if only because he hates me. And who would blame him? I never liked him, yet I couldn't blame him."

"But what if it *is* that simple?"

"I tell you, I don't know." He both wanted her questions and didn't want them. They pressed him, and they hurt; but it was good to feel something, even this. Eldred, walking slowly up and down the room, for the first time was useless to him. The Inspector looked at him, then looked away.

The footsteps on the porch made them jump again. Whoever was out there stood motionless a minute, then jangled the bell.

Eldred, turning to the Inspector for instructions, got an impatient signal, a wave of the hand, to open the door. "It will be one of our men," he said. "Something's happened."

But it was the doctor. Neither of the Eldreds, paralyzed, could doubt it. The man who walked in had eyes for only one person in the room, and he advanced on that person, with a lightness of step surprising in view of his bulk, until he had to stop because the Inspector wouldn't move.

They stood there, the big man glaring through thick glasses down at the little one, until the Inspector spoke.

"How did you know I was here?"

"They told me." His voice, said Sally to herself, *was* soft: an ugly softness that went with his dark heaviness and his protuberant eyes. "They tell me everything I want to know—and more. They tell me I killed her."

"They haven't told you that."

"Not in so many words, but it's what all their questions have been about. I understand these things, just as I understand, you little swine"—his voice did not rise even now—"why you've kept out of sight so far. You're afraid, you're afraid. You should have been there when they talked to me. I asked for you; I said I had a right to see the top torturer; but you were not available. Those men don't know why, but I do. You're afraid."

The Inspector did not avoid the eyes that bore down on him. "Afraid of what?"

For the first time the doctor showed that he knew two other people were in the room. "With *them* listening?"

"Why not? They are old friends of mine; they are perfectly discreet."

"Discreet! What an idiotic word. Send them away—upstairs or something."

"No, they stay here. Now tell me. Afraid of what?"

"All right, then. Of what I'll say."

"What will you say?"

"You know."

The Inspector said slowly, "Yes, I know."

"You know I'll do it, too—unless—"

"What?"

"Unless you call them off."

"Who?"

"Your dogs down there."

"I'll never do that."

The doctor's hands shook at his sides, and he grew pale. He couldn't have expected this.

He tried again. "Yes, you will, when you believe I will."

"I believe it now."

Suddenly the doctor was afraid. His voice sank even lower. "But—but if I give you my word I won't."

"No."

"I'll be quiet if you are." He was pleading.

"No."

The last word, like a blow, all but made him lose his balance. Or so it seemed, for he clutched wildly at himself. But then he clapped one hand to his mouth, swallowed what it held, and stood still, his eyes dilating, before he fell to the floor, shaking the whole room as he did so.

He writhed, his back bent in a bow, then turned over convulsively, his face buried in the rug, and finally lay motionless.

Sally, starting toward him, was held back first by her husband, then by the Inspector, who said with difficulty, "Whatever that was, it was quick—if it worked. Take her upstairs, John. I think it did work."

He was bending over the doctor. "I wonder what it was." He was both stricken and curious. The professional man in him was struggling back. He suddenly went into the study; but before he could start dialing the phone, the doorbell rang again.

It was a detective—two detectives—who had followed the doctor here. Another moment, and they were inside with the Inspector, who grew so busy giving them orders that he seemed not to notice Sally on the stairs.

Then he did, and he called up to her. "Mrs. Eldred, you and your husband will be asked to testify about what happened here. Not, however, tonight. You won't be disturbed again."

Sally paused on the top step. "Will you, Inspector?"

The men thought he hadn't heard this, for they touched him—both of them—and motioned up the stairs.

"What was that, Mrs. Eldred?" To her he sounded far away.

"Will *you* be disturbed?"

"Yes," he said, opening his notebook. "You know I will. But not too much. Thank you, Mrs. Eldred. I'll manage."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **GERALD KERSH**

TITLE: ***The Unkillable Man***

TYPE: About a policeman

LOCALE: Mexico

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Gomez, the tough Mexican, was a legend in his own time—and with good reason . . .*

I GOT THIS STORY FROM CRUMP, who had it straight from the lips of Gomez. And very strange lips they must be—knocked out of shape, cracked, divided in two places by old white scars.

Scars. If you could strip Gomez you would discover a complete history of violent accidents carved on his knotty little body. Life has chiseled some queer hieroglyphics in the flesh of that abnormally tough Mexican.

His skull is battered and dented like an old aluminum saucepan. His ears resemble bulbous red fungi. One eye is darkened forever; the other has the brightness of two.

A rifle butt has made a sinister ruin of his nose. The line of his jaw has some peculiar lumps where it was broken and badly set. Yet, by some miracle of chance, he has never lost a tooth and flashes a great smile that seems to be made of peeled almonds set in coral.

He limps. His shoulders, under the white jacket, look as fragile as a coat hanger. A bulge at the left armpit betrays the presence of a big revolver, worn in the American style. He talks gravely, and with punctilious observation of all the courtesies.

He drinks little, eats less, smokes much, and loiters to this day in the cafés of Mexico City. There he sits, smoking black cigarette after black cigarette, and taking tiny sips of tequila, that desperate Mexican liquor that rasps the throat like prickles.

Gomez had a political education. That is to say, he was in a revolt or two in the good old days when

bullets were dear and life was cheap and Pancho Villa steeped himself to the elbows in blood. In those days, since Gomez was younger, and had both his eyes, he could shoot the pips out of the six of spades in six shots at twenty paces. Now he can manage only five out of six.

One day a company of soldiers surrounded the farmhouse in which Gomez and seven of his comrades were hiding. It was a lively little siege, while the cartridges lasted, and there seems to have been some very pretty hand-to-hand fighting in the last few minutes.

But in the end Gomez was captured. He was the sole survivor, and had been wounded during the battle. Nothing much—a ball in the lung. The enemy captain dragged him out, and slapped his face, and burned him with a cigar-end for good measure, and told him to say his prayers.

Then Gomez was propped up against the white wall and shot. He counted the firing squad—seven. His last thought was that he wished he had the Mannlicher rifle of the second man on the left.

These are the bare facts. Gomez was sentenced to death, executed, shot seven times in the chest, and has the scars to prove it. He fell. The captain gave him a finishing shot in the head, and the soldiers rode away leaving him to the vultures.

Night fell. Day broke. A couple of peons passed, and saw a redness which seemed to move. It was Gomez. He was not dead. The captain's bullet had passed between the skull and the brain; the soldiers' bullets had punctured no immediately vital spot.

The peons bandaged him up. He recovered and went on his way. A year or two later he joined the forces of law and order and became a policeman, married, settled down, begot daughters. There were little incidents, of course. Once a criminal broke Gomez' skull with a hammer. He recovered.

Another time he was shot in the back. The bullet missed his spine by a sixteenth of an inch, scraped his heart, perforated a lung, and came out at his armpit, just grazing the great artery. He got better.

Two men threw him from the roof of a four-story building, through a glass fanlight. He lay with eleven broken bones for a whole night before he was found.

Then the authorities sent him after a bandit—some desperado who had shot a cashier in a restaurant and taken to the hills. Gomez loaded his guns and set out. But the word went before him, and the bandit was waiting. He had a very particular desire to kill Gomez, just because no man had ever done so before.

He was a methodical fellow, this bandit. Having notched the noses of six big bullets, he sat behind a rock

until Gomez came within point-blank range. Then he opened fire.

Two of his bullets hit Gomez in the abdomen, the rest struck higher up. Gomez found time to fire one shot, which killed the bandit, and then Gomez fell flat.

An ambulance picked them up the next morning. It was impossible that Gomez could still be alive. They took him fifty miles up the bumpy road and put him on a slab in the mortuary refrigerator. The good wife of Gomez came to look at him. She screamed, "My husband! He lives! He moves!"

And so he did. He was not quite dead. The cold of the refrigerator had kept away peritonitis. The miracle was that he had escaped pneumonia—quite apart from the gravity of his wounds.

After a few months in hospital, Gomez walked again, and went about his business. He still covered the underworld. Black-browed assassins found a new hobby—trying to kill Gomez. It became a craze, a fad, a mania with criminals.

He was shot again, twice. Then somebody decided that the knife was surer. So Mexico City doctors were confronted with new freaks of human survival. Gomez was cut to ribbons. He lived on. He survived stabs in the liver, the stomach, the throat. He is one of the few people whose hearts have been stitched, and who live to boast of it.

He touched nothing without getting hurt. Once he was thrown through the windshield of a car. Once he was in a truck with four other men. The truck went over a precipice. The four men were killed. Gomez was unhurt, except for a broken leg. And as late as 1958 he was attacked in a café by three men, and stabbed seventeen times. He was sewn up; the three men were buried.

So you still see him, sitting placidly over a little glass of tequila, politely acknowledging the salutes of the awe-struck customers, always refusing three times before accepting a drink, in accordance with Mexican etiquette, smoking tobacco strong enough to choke the devil, and exchanging the lightest of conversation.

And he is afraid.

That is the extraordinary thing—the really incredible thing. At the back of his mind there is one little nagging fear.

"I fear," he says, "that God is preserving me for something terrible."

" . . . the two girls gazed toward the end of the land which was like the end of the world, far away and abrupt, as if one, after years of walking, might reach the horizon and step over into space . . ."

The story you are about to read has mystery, suspense, and more than a tinge of horror; yet, strictly speaking, the story is not in our field. But we found this tale of two sisters, and of Uncle Loony's box, so irresistible that we could not bring ourselves to deprive you of an unusual reading experience.

THAT PRESENCE OUT THERE

by SANORA BABB

SHERRY WAS WHISTLING TO DOWN her fear and bring up her courage. "Whistles like a meadowlark," her father often said. "A fine bird. A fine girl."

She stopped whistling because she felt the vibration in her teeth and all her bones, and knew that any moment her mother would run up the steps of the dugout to watch the big plane fly over, and see that they still had not gone.

Sherry picked up the two gunny sacks and called Laurie. The little girl came slowly from the barn as if walking in one of her fantasy games. She invited Sherry to look into her pocket. There was the rabbit's foot that Mama and Papa had forbade her to carry.

"If it protects us, don't tell. Magic is secret."

Their mother came up into the yard and shaded her eyes to see the plane, an insect in the big sky.

"The four o'clock," she said. "Well, girls, haven't you started yet? Dark comes early these fall days."

"We're going," Sherry said. But she felt that presence out there; the vast plain was full of it. There was an unspoken rule that they never walked south alone.

"Can't we go west again?" she asked.

"Not so soon. With the big herds on the south range, there'll be more cowchips than in any other direction."

Old Loony's shack was out there too.

The young woman watched the plane. "It's as if the world's at each end, and life is flying over us."

To Sherry her mother's loneliness was like a town coat that she took off and put on, careful not to wear it before Papa, who loved this place, and often said, "This is the life!" Or, "This is pioneering again!" At twelve, Sherry was powerfully aware of a turmoil of both feelings.

"Go on, sillies," their mother said, standing at the slant door of the dugout, her head higher than the roof which was only three feet above ground. "Now get back before dark! Do you hear? I'll be worried."

"Old Loony might get us," Laurie said.

"I thought we'd settled all that. He's harmless. Just stay away from his hut."

"He's only—" Laurie began, and stopped when Sherry gave her a warning nudge. Under her breath she went on stubbornly, "He only killed his wife and he's harmless."

"I heard you, Laurie. That was a long time ago. See all that land out there? Keep a mile or two between you and his hut. You'll be nearer home than Old Loony's. Now, hurry." The pile of dried cow dung they had been gathering for winter fuel would burn fast and many trips were needed.

"What's his real name in case we should meet him?" asked Sherry, delaying.

"I doubt if *he* knows any more."

"Crazy people never know their names," Laurie stated.

"Young lady." The mother was about to lose her temper. "Out there for miles and miles of godforsaken grass, you're not likely to *meet* anybody but some white-faced steers. This is the jumping-off place of the world!"

She turned and went down the stone steps of what was called the doghouse, although the dog slept outside or in the barn. Sherry wished hard that Bounce were with them now to protect them from Old Loony, but the dog was off hunting a rabbit for his supper.

And Papa had gone to the mountains for cedars, as he did before every winter. With only one truck load, they had not enough wood for the long season of blizzards, fierce winds, and deep snow. In the little two-holed monkey stove they burned the cowchips, saving their precious cedar logs. The small room in the ground heated quickly and they managed well enough until melting snows made the earthen walls damp and cold.

Their mother's good voice came up to them, and in some vague sympathy aroused more by her singing than by her statements of loneliness, the girls flung the gunny sacks over their shoulders and started off. They walked through the dry stubble of feterita and cane that they had helped chop in the summer, skinned under the barbed-wire fence and were out on the open plain.

There wasn't another fence for twenty miles—this near-rainless land was used for grazing. Deep wells raised water for cattle tanks but irrigation was still a dream for the dry-land farmers.

Papa stood in his baked field and shook his fist at God, and dared Him, if He existed, to strike him dead on the broken sod, if He

couldn't so much as send a small rain for the broom-corn, and the creek from which he hauled their water. Mama prayed, thanking God for Papa's forgiveness and for the rain to come. On Sundays in the good seasons they all walked in the fields taking pleasure in the young plants. And they swam in the creek.

The little creek was miles ahead of the two girls, in a canyon. They couldn't even see the cottonwood trees along its banks. Nothing but the vast high plain and Old Loony's sod hut, without fence or other sign of habitation. Old Loony did no farming. He owned no animals, not even a dog. He lived alone and went out of his way to talk to no one.

The fact that many years before, in some unknown place, he had committed murder and paid his price in prison and was now daft and lived a hermit life—all this was no cause for concern, beyond the interest in the strange story itself. One did not openly poke his nose into the private affairs of others. The old man gave no name and no one asked it. After a cowhand had talked with him once, he came away saying he was loony and the name stuck.

They had heard about the murder a hundred times, and how Old Loony had only one good piece of furniture in the hut and that was a carved box in which he kept a hand of the woman. They had heard how, when they first came to the plains, a cowboy had observed him drying this hand, hung on a cord in the shade for a certain period every day—the same as one would dry food.

"You know what I'd like for Christmas?" Sherry said. "A look at that dead hand."

"What a scary wish!" Laurie said. "But if he wasn't around, I'd look."

Old Loony seldom left his hut except on rare walking trips to the distant town for supplies; but Laurie made a wish anyway.

No matter how they tried to edge over east or west, the plain was so large and bare that Old Loony's hut was always in front of them.

"It gives me the creeps," Laurie said. "Don't it you?"

"No," Sherry said, full of the creeps.

It was their routine to go several miles with empty sacks and fill them on the way back, each day working nearer home. There were so many cakes of dry dung that they almost forgot about Old Loony.

They had to look out for cactus, and dried devil's claw which grabbed like a hand. Rattlesnakes were everywhere but they gave fair warning, and the huge white bullsnakes slid away over the buffalo grass more frightened than they. Prairie dogs on far mounds sat up as if begging; near ones turned tail and sped underground. Laurie broke a spear of soapweed to see

its white juice flow. They had the plain to themselves except for the creatures underfoot and a hawk circling in the sky. It was a grand feeling.

Herds of cattle grazed in the distance. A meadowlark sang from the grass into the stillness. The stillness was immense.

Sherry stopped as if she had come to a visible line on the gray and monotonous plateau. "It's time to start back."

Before they turned, as if by silent agreement, the two girls gazed toward the end of the land which was like the end of the world, far away and abrupt, as if one, after years of walking, might reach the horizon and step over into space.

Laurie pushed her foot against a large cowchip to loosen it, and stooped to pick it up. "A big one right off. It's good luck," she smiled.

Sherry glanced at the sun. "It's about five o'clock."

Taking the first large piece of dung as a good omen, and her thoughts as a charm, she said, "Let's cut over and walk back near the hut."

Laurie stared at her in alarm. "The luck is only for finding a lot of good cowchips."

"We'll soon see."

Laurie hesitated, then ran after her.

They gathered chips on the way and their sacks were full when they turned north to walk within a hundred yards of Old Loony's.

A small owl on a prairie dog mound swiveled its head to gaze at them.

"You see, it's late," Laurie warned. She was afraid of the dark but Sherry liked the night and assured her of her protection. Nevertheless, Laurie touched the rabbit's foot in her pocket.

"We'll be home before dark easy because we're only going to walk by his place."

When they came even with the hut, Sherry could hear her heart beating. She felt like a spring.

In the clear air of the high plains it was easy to see a long distance. They pretended to be busy but they saw Old Loony sitting on the ground in his doorway watching. There was nothing to do but walk toward home.

Old Loony raised one hand and beckoned to them. They appeared to think his gesture a greeting and lifted their right hands in the salute of the countryside. He rose and walked a little way toward them and called out, beckoning again.

"Don't run!" Laurie cautioned. "We're a thousand miles from a fence, and you're such an idiot that I knew this would happen. With a mad animal it is safer just to walk. Maybe he's the same. We'll just walk."

"I would like to see what crazy really is," Sherry said.

"When you get home look in the mirror."

The old man hesitated and stood with his arms at his sides. He appeared puzzled at their lack of neighborliness, and Sherry said so.

"That's just a trick," Laurie said. "They are very cunning. Don't forget that he murdered his wife and cut her up."

This frightened them both.

The old man came very near and said, "Howdy, girls."

"Howdy, sir."

He smiled. "I reckon I like good manners as much as anything."

His coarse gray hair curled like a dog's over his forehead, and his bushy eyebrows shaded his old faded eyes, which watched them with an animal alertness. He wore a mustache but his whiskers were only a few days long.

Sherry was surprised to see what a small man he was. His little feet stood in unlaced heavy shoes and his hands, quiet at his sides, were terrifying in their delicacy. His clothes were just ordinarily soiled and much patched. A pipe and a can of tobacco weighed his shirt pocket down.

He glanced at the sun to judge the time, and the small sense of well-being they had begun to feel deserted them.

Old Loony said nothing. The girls were shy from not seeing people and also said nothing. A small wind went by and they heard the tick of dust on his shoes.

"If you're tired, come in and rest a bit."

"No, thank you," Laurie said, and her voice squeaked.

He observed them slyly. "I'll show you some of my keepsakes."

They followed him; they could not resist. They leaned their sacks against the hut, and went in.

The small room was neat, much like their own but less crowded. Their walls were papered with newspapers, his were bare. The sisters waited stiffly near the door.

Sherry's throat closed with painful shyness and she could look only at the swept dirt-floor. She saw his little feet move toward the stove. He broke off two pieces of hardtack, a dry flour and water pancake they ate at home, and handed each a piece.

"If I had a fire, I would offer you some coffee. But then, I've only one tin cup."

"Thank you," they whispered.

"Well, I have gourds. But no fire. And look here—the desert tea is all gone. I am flustered by company."

Suddenly, in the habit of autumn, the daylight went out of the world and the plain filled with quick, rising dusk. The old man closed the heavy storm door. The motion caused his clothes hanging on the back to sway darkly.

They were shut in.

"Sit down," he said and motioned toward the only place, a narrow wooden bed.

They refused.

The carved box was nowhere to be seen. A machete such as they

used to chop cane gleamed on the wall. A shotgun and a heavy ax leaned into a corner. Every farmer had these. Nevertheless, the atmosphere was strange. He merely studied them and seemed to enjoy that, for now and then a faint smile moved his mustache. The thin dark pasted itself on the window.

When they could no longer see one another in the room, Old Loony got up and took a lantern from the wall and lighted it. While he was raising the chimney and turning the wick up and down, he began to speak to them, or perhaps he was speaking to himself. Sherry could make out very little of it, but finally, this was clear: "Well, I promised and I must keep my promise."

He hung the lantern back on the nail. Its smoky light threw their long shadows bending from floor to wall, and gave his face a look of morose, secret. Sherry thought he seemed critical of them when he repeated, "I did promise."

He went to the bed and stooped with some care for his old joints and dragged out a small wooden box. It was not carved at all; it was of heavy polished wood and the top was curved like that of an old trunk. It had the charm of all diminutives and the girls gasped at once with delight; but then, with the thought of the hideous dried hand, they froze again into silence.

"Come here," he said, and they went.

He took a key from a gut-string around his neck and unlocked the little chest. They went down on their knees for a better view. He noticed this and smiled as if they were all in this terrible secret together.

When the curved lid was lifted, an odd fragrance rose and in the dim light from the lantern dark swirls of polished hair shone and fell over the edges of the box. The old man slid his delicate fingers under the hair and lifted a part of it which fell as if from a head.

Their breath drew in against all will to prevent it.

"No need to be afraid. She's been dead long ago."

Something heavy and hard rattled around in the bottom of the box.

"Put it on," the old man urged and held the dried scalp with its long dark hair out to Sherry. "You're older. It will suit you better. More like her."

When Sherry hesitated, he placed it on her head and said, "Stand up!"

She was trembling. The hair fell to her fingertips. Permeating her fright was the scent of aromatic wood.

"Turn around."

Sherry stood paralyzed as fear of the dead woman possessed her.

The old man tipped his head to one side and smiled. "I pass the evenings sometimes brushing her hair. That's why it shines so."

Although Sherry was only a girl, tall for her age, and thin, he admired the beautiful hair once more adorning a living woman. He squinted his eyes to concentrate his vision; he did not smile, and he looked at her for a long time.

"Turn around," he commanded again, slowly, gently, almost in a whisper. "Walk, walk."

As she turned, as she walked, the long hair falling about her like a cape, he called out, his voice fierce and young. A woman's name. A cry. A wild lost sound. He shoved the box across the floor and leaped to his feet.

Laurie screamed. "Sister, look out! He's going to kill her again!"

Sherry whirled. He stopped, and his mouth which had been hidden beneath his mustache fell open pitifully.

"You spoiled it," he said. His mouth closed and the mustache trembled over it like a dried weed in a small wind.

Then, shaking himself free of the dream, he shouted to Laurie, who was trying desperately to open the door, "Girl, don't do that."

She stopped pulling at the latch and burst out crying.

"Don't do that!" he repeated and moved toward her.

Sherry stepped in his way, her eyes fiery with courage and fear.

He seemed bewildered. He gestured as if in appeal, but she thought that his eyes were wily and mad. Then he disregarded her and lifted the dead woman's hair from her head and placed it tenderly on the head of Laurie. "Here, you may try it on too."

Laurie was sobbing now, and the dark hair placed askew on her own pale hair was but another horror. She clutched the rabbit's foot in her pocket.

The old man went over to the little curved box and peered in as if he had not seen it a thousand times before. He held up a brush for Sherry to see, but still, when he touched the box, another object rattled hard against the wood.

Sherry tried to smile, to humor him. He sighed and picked up the box and carried it into the light of the lantern.

"Look here, children." He held out a horse's black hoof topped with a slender ankle of sorrel hair. "It was this did it."

They stared obligingly at the hoof, and then he put it back. "Burto got to cropping locoweed, but she kept riding him, and one day he just up and run over a cliff. Broke his neck. Killed her." The old man seemed to be dropping these words into the box. "It was deep down and steep. I had to go on foot. It was rocky and the canyon was alive with snakes. I wouldn't have felt it if they had all bit me. But they didn't bother. I just sat there all that day and all that night. I heard animals in the night, so I lit my pipe. Sunup I found a sharp rock, and it took me a long

time but I made her a decent grave. Then, then—I could hardly do it—I cut off her long hair. Took me all one winter to knot each hair into a piece of cloth. After that I come here and settled. More people around." He sighed a long deep sigh. "I forget how old I am, but it's many a year, many a year."

He was silent. The night was silent, enclosing the hut like a great fur pocket. It was as if no one were in the room. When the stillness was taut to breaking, a swift small running crossed the floor and ended in the old man's shoe. He said nothing, made no move, and the little gecko raced upward, holding on, lifting its head as if for recognition.

The old man turned and blinked. Sherry watched his small hand lift the gecko into his shirt pocket. His eyes still dazed with shadows, he looked at Laurie unbelieving. The ridiculous sight of her slouched against the door, wiping her eyes, the scalp slid forward, the dead hair hanging over her forlorn young face, must have broken a solemn and awful bond, for Old Loony began to laugh.

It was a low chuckle at first, a clumsy lurch of sound. All the lonely splendor of the time before was lost. Then his laughter crashed, shattered like a flash flood through a dry streambed, clearing at last, sparkling, running pure.

This laughter caught Sherry, and then Laurie, and they could not stop. They stumbled about, blind with tears, aching, helpless in release. While the old man was bent over laughing, Sherry snatched the long hair from his sister's head, flung it in the box, and closed the lid.

Seeing Laurie's tousled tomboy-head once more, his hilarity came to an end, but tears of laughter still ran gravely down his whiskered face.

He felt his pocket for the hiding gecko, took the lantern from the nail, and offered to see them home. They thanked him, but there was no need—yes, they were sure. The stars were out and if they watched them they would find their way. Outside, the lantern ringed them in its solitary glow, the black night blacker beyond its rim.

The plain was black and so was the big sky, its stars dropping low over their heads. Fragrance of sage was in the air. Their sacks were not heavy and they walked fast. Their eyes searched unseeing for definition but the line of horizon had vanished.

They felt as if they were always walking in one place, but when they looked back the light from Old Loony's lantern was smaller. It shone steadily like a planet.

After a while they saw the light from their window close to the earth, wavering in the night wind like a star planted on the plain.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ELLERY QUEEN**

TITLE: ***Mind Over Matter***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Ellery Queen

LOCALE: Yankee Stadium, New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *At the fight for the heavyweight championship of the world Ellery felt taut as a violin string. His scalp prickled, and when that happened, there was murder in the air.*

PAULA PARIS FOUND INSPECTOR Queen of Police Headquarters nearly inconsolable when she arrived in New York. She understood how he felt, for she had flown in from Hollywood expressly to cover the heavyweight fight between Champion Mike Brown and Challenger Jim Coyle, who were signed to box fifteen rounds at the Stadium that night for the championship of the world.

"You poor dear," said Paula. "And how about you, Mastermind? Aren't you disappointed, too, that you can't buy a ticket to the fight?" she asked Ellery.

"I'm a jinx," said Ellery gloomily. "If I went, something catastrophic would be sure to happen. So why should I want to go?"

"I thought witnessing catastrophes was why people *go* to fights."

"Oh, I don't mean anything gentle like a knockout. Something grimmer."

"He's afraid somebody will knock somebody off," said the Inspector.

"Well, doesn't somebody always?" demanded his son.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Paula," said the Inspector impatiently. "Look, you're a newspaperwoman. Can you get me a ticket?"

"You may as well get me one, too," groaned Ellery.

So Miss Paris smiled and telephoned Phil Maguire, the famous sports editor, and spoke so persuasively to Mr. Maguire that he

picked them up that evening in his little open sports car and they all drove uptown to the Yankee Stadium to see the brawl.

"How do you figure the fight, Maguire?" asked Inspector Queen.

"On this howdedo," said Maguire, "Maguire doesn't care to be quoted."

"Seems to me the champ ought to take this boy Coyle."

Maguire shrugged. "Phil's sour on the champion," laughed Paula. "Phil and Mike Brown haven't been cuddly since Mike won the title."

"Nothing personal, y'understand," said Phil Maguire. "Only, remember Kid Beres? The Cuban boy. This was in the days when Ollie Stearn was finagling Mike Brown into the heavy sugar. So this fight was a fix, see, and Mike knew it was a fix, and the Kid knew it was a fix, and everybody knew it was a fix and that Kid Beres was supposed to lay down in the sixth round. Well, just the same Mike went out there and sloughed into the Kid and half killed him. Just for the hell of it. The Kid spent a month in the hospital and when he came out he was only half a man." Maguire smiled his crooked smile and pressed his horn gently at an old man crossing the street. Then he said, "I guess I just don't like the champ."

"Speaking of fixes . . ." began Ellery.

"Were we?" asked Maguire innocently.

"If it's on the level," predicted Ellery, "Coyle will murder the champion. Wipe up the ring with him. That big fellow wants the title."

"Oh, sure."

"Damn it," grinned the Inspector, "who's going to win tonight?"

Maguire grinned back. "Well, you know the odds. Three to one on the champ."

When they drove into the parking lot across the street from the Stadium, Maguire grunted, "Speak of the devil." He had backed his car into a space beside a huge foreign-type job the color of arterial blood.

"Now what's that supposed to mean?" asked Paula Paris.

"This red locomotive," Maguire chuckled, "is the champ's. Or rather, it belongs to his manager, Ollie Stearn. Ollie lets Mike use it. Mike's car's gone down the river."

"I thought the champion was loaded," said Ellery.

"Not any more. All tangled up in litigation. Dozens of judgments wrapped around his ugly ears."

"He ought to be hunk after tonight," said the Inspector. "Pulling down half a million bucks for his end!"

"He won't collect a red cent of it," said the newspaperman. "His loving wife—you know Ivy, the ex-strip tease doll with the curves and detours?—Ivy and Mike's creditors will grab it all off—after taxes, that is. Come on."

Ellery assisted Miss Paris from the car and tossed his camel's-hair topcoat carelessly into the back seat.

"Don't leave your coat there, Ellery," protested Paula. "Someone's sure to steal it."

"Let 'em. It's an old rag. Don't know what I brought it for, anyway, in this heat."

"Come on, come on," said Phil Maguire eagerly.

From the press section at ringside the stands were one heaving mass of growling humanity. Two bantamweights were fencing in the ring.

"What's the trouble?" demanded Ellery.

"Crowd came out to see heavy artillery, not popguns," explained Maguire. "Take a look at the card."

"Six prelims," muttered Inspector Queen. "And all good boys, too. So what are these muggs beefing about?"

"Bantams, welters, lightweights."

"So what?"

"So the card's too light. The fans came here to see two big guys slaughter each other. They don't want to be annoyed by a bunch of gnats—even good gnats . . . Hi, Happy."

"Who's that?" asked Miss Paris.

"Happy Day," the Inspector answered for Maguire. "Makes his living off bets."

Happy Day was visible a few rows off, an expensive panama resting on a fold of neck-fat. He had a puffed face the color of cold rice pudding, and his eyes were two raisins. He nodded at Maguire and turned back to watch the ring.

"Normally, Happy's face is like a raw steak," said Maguire. "He's worried about something."

"Perhaps," remarked Ellery, "the gentleman smells a mouse."

Maguire glanced at Ellery sidewise, then smiled. "And there's Mrs. Champ herself. Ivy Brown. Some stuff, hey, men?"

The woman prowled down the aisle on the arm of a weazened, wrinkled little man who chewed nervously on a long green cold cigar. The champion's wife was a full-blown animal with a face like a Florentine cameo. The little man handed her into a seat and hurried off.

"Isn't the little guy Ollie Stearn, Brown's manager?" asked the Inspector.

"Yes," said Maguire. "Notice the act? Ivy and Mike Brown haven't lived together for a couple of years, and Ollie thinks it's bad publicity. So he pays a lot of attention in public to the champ's wife. What d'ye think of her, Paula? The woman's angle is always refreshing."

"This may sound feline," murmured Miss Paris, "but she's an overdressed harpie with the instincts of a she-wolf who never learned to apply make-up properly. Cheap—very cheap."

"Expensive—very expensive. See, Mike's wanted a divorce for a long time, but Ivy keeps raising the ante. Say, I gotta get to work."

Maguire bent over his typewriter.

The night deepened, the crowd rumbled, and Ellery felt uncomfortable. Specifically, his six-foot body was taut as a violin string. It was a familiar but always sinister sign. It meant there was murder in the air.

The challenger appeared first. He was met by a roar, like the roar of a river at flood-tide bursting its dam.

Miss Paris gasped with admiration. "Isn't he the one!"

Jim Coyle was the one—an almost handsome giant six feet and a half tall, with preposterously broad shoulders, long smooth muscles, and a bronze skin. He rubbed his unshaven cheeks and grinned boyishly at the fans.

His manager, Barney Hawks, followed him into the ring. Hawks was a big man—almost as big as his fighter.

"Hercules in trunks," breathed Miss Paris. "Did you ever see such a body, Ellery?"

"The question more properly is," said Ellery, "can he keep that body off the floor?"

"Plenty fast for a big man," said Maguire. "Faster than you'd think, considering all that bulk. Maybe not as fast as Mike Brown, but Jim's got height and reach in his favor, and he's strong as a bull. The way Firpo was."

"Here comes the champ!" exclaimed Inspector Queen.

A large ugly man shuffled down the aisle and vaulted into the ring. His manager—the little weazened, wrinkled man—followed him and stood bouncing up and down on the canvas, still chewing the unlit cigar.

"Boo-oo-oo!"

"They're booing the champion!" cried Paula. "Phil, why?"

"Because they hate his guts," smiled Maguire. "They hate his guts because he's an ornery, brutal, crooked slob with the kick of a mule and the soul of a pretzel. That's why, darlin'."

Brown stood six feet two inches, anatomically a gorilla, with a broad hairy chest, long arms, humped shoulders, and large flat feet. His features were smashed, cruel. He paid no attention to the hostile crowd or to his taller, bigger, younger opponent.

But Ellery, whose peculiar genius it was to notice minutiæ, saw Brown's powerful jaws working ever so slightly.

And again Ellery tightened.

When the gong clamored for the start of the third round, the champion's left eye was a purple slit, his lips were cracked and bloody, and his simian chest rose and fell in gasps.

Thirty seconds later he was cornered, a beaten animal, above their heads. They could see the ragged splotches over his kidneys, blooming above his trunks like crimson flowers.

Brown crouched, covering up, protecting his chin. Big Jim Coyle streaked forward. The giant's gloves sank into Brown's body. The champion fell forward and pinioned the long bronze merciless arms.

The referee broke them. Brown grabbed Coyle again. They danced.

The crowd began singing *The Blue Danube,* and the referee stepped between the two fighters again and spoke sharply to Brown.

"The dirty double-crosser," smiled Phil Maguire.

"Who? What d'ye mean?" asked Inspector Queen.

"Watch the pay-off."

The champion raised his battered face and lashed out feebly at Coyle. The giant laughed and stepped in.

The champion went down.

"Pretty as a picture," said Maguire admiringly.

At the count of nine, with the bay of the crowd in his flattened ears, Mike Brown staggered to his feet. Coyle slipped in and pumped twelve solid, lethal gloves into Brown's body. The champion's knees broke. A whistling six-inch uppercut to the point of the jaw sent him toppling to the canvas.

This time he remained there.

"But he made it look kosher," drawled Maguire.

The Stadium howled with glee and bloodlust. Paula looked sickish. A few rows away Happy Day jumped up, stared wildly about, then began shoving through the crowd.

"Happy isn't happy any more," sang Maguire.

The ring was boiling with police, handlers, officials. Jim Coyle was half drowned in a wave of shouting people; he was laughing like a boy. In the champion's corner Ollie Stearn worked slowly over the twitching torso of the unconscious man.

"Yes, sir," said Phil Maguire, rising and stretching, "that was as pretty a dive as I've seen, brother, and I've seen some beauts in my day."

"See here, Maguire," said Ellery. "I have eyes, too. What makes you so cocksure Brown just tossed his title away?"

"You may be Einstein on Centre Street," grinned Maguire, "but here you're just another palooka, Ellery."

"Seems to me," argued the Inspector in the bedlam, "Brown took an awful lot of punishment."

"Oh, sure," said Maguire mockingly. "Look, you boobs. Mike Brown has as sweet a right hand as the game has ever seen. Did you notice him use his right on Coyle tonight—even once?"

"Well," admitted Ellery, "no."

"Of course not. Not a single blow. And he had a dozen openings, especially in the second round. And Jimmy Coyle still carries his guard too low. But what did Mike do? Put his deadly right into cold storage, kept jabbing away with that silly left of his—it couldn't put Paula away!—covering up, clinching, and taking one hell of a beating . . . Sure, he made it look good. But your ex-champ took a dive just the same!"

They were helping the gorilla from the ring. He looked surly and tired. A small group followed him, laughing. Little Ollie Stearn kept pushing people aside fretfully. Ellery spied Brown's wife, the curved Ivy, pale and furious, hurrying after them.

"It appears," sighed Ellery, "that I was in error."

"What?" asked Paula.

"Hmm. Nothing."

"Look," said Maguire. "I've got to see a man about a man, but I'll meet you folks in Coyle's dressing room and we'll kick a few gongs around. Jim's promised to help a few of the boys warm up some hot spots."

"Oh, I'd love it!" cried Paula. "How do we get in, Phil?"

"What have you got a cop with you for? Show her, Inspector."

Maguire's slight figure slouched off. Ellery's scalp prickled suddenly. He frowned and took Paula's arm.

The new champion's dressing room was full of smoke, people, and din. Young Coyle lay on a training table like Gulliver in Lilliput, being rubbed down. He was answering questions good-humoredly, grinning at cameras, flexing his shoulder-muscles. Big Barney Hawks was running about with his collar loosened and handing out cigars like a new father.

The crowd was so dense it overflowed into the adjoining shower room. There were empty bottles on the floor and near the shower-room window, pushed into a corner, five men were shooting craps with enormous sobriety.

The Inspector spoke to Barney Hawks, and Coyle's manager introduced them to the champion, who took one look at Paula and said, "Hey, Barney, how about a little privacy?"

"Sure, sure. You're the champ now, Jimmy-boy!"

"Come on, you guys, you got enough pictures to last you a lifetime. What did he say your name is, beautiful? Paris? That's a hell of a name."

"Isn't yours Couzzi?" asked Paula coolly.

"Socko," laughed the boy. "Come on, clear out, guys. This lady and I got some sparring to do. Hey, lay off the liniment, Louie. He didn't hardly touch me."

Coyle slipped off the rubbing table, and Barney Hawks began shooing men out of the shower room, and finally Coyle grabbed

some towels, winked at Paula, and went in, shutting the door. They heard the cheerful hiss of the shower.

Five minutes later Phil Maguire strolled in. He was perspiring and a little wobbly. "Where's the champ?" he shouted.

"Here I am," said Coyle, opening the shower-room door and rubbing his bare, wet chest with a towel. There was another towel draped around his loins. "Hya, Phil-boy. Be dressed in a shake. Say, this doll your Mamie? If she ain't, I'm staking out my claim."

"Come on, come on, champ. We got a date with Fifty-second Street."

"Sure! How about you, Barney? You joining us?"

"Go ahead and play," said his manager in a fatherly tone. "Me, I got money business with the management." He barged into the shower room, emerged with a camel's-hair coat over his arm, waved affectionately at Coyle, and lumbered out.

"You're not going to stay in here while he dresses?" said Ellery petulantly to Miss Paris. "Come on—you can wait for your hero outside."

"Yes, sir," said Miss Paris submissively.

Coyle guffawed. "Don't worry, fella. I ain't going to do you out of nothing. There's plenty of dolls."

Ellery piloted Miss Paris firmly from the room. "Let's meet them at the car," he said in a curt tone.

Miss Paris murmured, "Yes, *sir*."

They walked in silence to the end of the corridor and turned a corner into an alley which led out of the Stadium and into the street. As they walked down the alley, Ellery could see through the shower-room window into the dressing room. Maguire had produced a bottle and he, Coyle, and the Inspector were raising glasses.

Ellery hurried Miss Paris across the street to the parking lot. Cars were slowly driving out. But the big red limousine belonging to Ollie Stearn still stood beside Maguire's open sports car.

"Ellery," said Paula softly, "you're such a fool."

"Now, Paula, I don't care to discuss—"

"What do you think I'm referring to? It's your topcoat, silly. Didn't I warn you someone would steal it?"

Ellery glanced into the car. His coat was gone. "Oh, that. I was going to throw it away, anyway. Now look, Paula, if you think for one instant that I could be jealous of some oversized . . . Paula! What's the matter?"

Paula's cheeks were gray in the brilliant arc-light. She was pointing a shaky forefinger at the blood-red limousine.

"In—in there . . . Isn't that—?"

Ellery glanced quickly into the rear of the limousine. Then he said, "Get into Maguire's car, Paula, and look the other way."

Paula crept into the car, shaking.

Ellery opened the rear door of Stearn's limousine.

Mike Brown tumbled out of the car to his feet, and lay still.

After a moment the Inspector, Maguire, and Coyle strolled up, chuckling over something Maguire was relating in a thick voice.

Maguire stopped. "Say. Who's that?"

Coyle said abruptly, "Isn't that Mike Brown?"

The Inspector said, "Out of the way, Jim." He knelt beside the still body.

Ellery raised his head. "Yes, it's Mike Brown. Someone's used him for a pincushion."

Phil Maguire yelped and ran for a telephone. Paula Paris crawled out of Maguire's car and blundered after him, remembering her profession.

"Is he . . . is he—" began Jim Coyle, gulping.

"The long count," said the Inspector grimly. "Here, help me turn him over."

They turned him over. He lay staring up into the blinding arc-light. He was completely dressed; his hat was still jammed on his head and a gray tweed topcoat was wrapped about his body, still buttoned. He had been stabbed ten times in the abdomen and chest, through his topcoat. There had been a great deal of bleeding; his coat was sticky with it.

"Body's warm," said the Inspector. "This happened just a few minutes ago." He rose from the dust and stared unseeingly at the crowd which had gathered.

"Maybe," began the champion, licking his lips, "maybe—"

"Maybe what, Jim?" asked the Inspector.

"Nothing, nothing."

"Why don't you go home? Don't let this spoil your night, kid."

Coyle set his jaw. "I'll stick around."

The Inspector yelled copper.

Police came, and Phil Maguire and Paula Paris returned, and Ollie Stearn and others appeared from across the street, and the crowd thickened, and Ellery crawled into the back of Stearn's car.

The rear of the red limousine was a shambles. Blood stained the upholstery and the floor-rug, which was wrinkled and scuffed. A large coat button with a scrap of fabric still clinging to it lay on one of the cushions, beside a crumpled camel's-hair coat.

Ellery seized the coat. The button had been torn from it. The front of the coat, like the front of the murdered man's coat, was badly bloodstained. But the stains had a pattern. When Ellery laid the coat on the seat, front up, and slipped the buttons through the buttonholes, the bloodstains met.

The Inspector poked his head in. "What's that thing?"

"The murderer's coat."

"Let's see that!"

"It won't tell you anything about its wearer. Fairly cheap coat, label's been ripped out—no identifying marks. Do you see what must have happened in here, dad?"

"What?"

"The murder took place, of course, in this car, and the killer was wearing this coat."

"How do you know that?"

"Because there's every sign of a fierce struggle, so fierce Brown managed to tear off one of the coat buttons of his assailant's coat. In the course of the struggle Brown was stabbed many times. His blood flowed freely. It got all over not only his own coat but the murderer's as well. From the position of the bloodstains the murderer's coat must have been buttoned at the time of the struggle, which means he was wearing it."

The Inspector nodded. "Left it behind because he didn't want to be seen in a bloody coat. Ripped out all identifying marks."

From behind the Inspector came Paula's tremulous voice. "Could that be *your* camel's-hair coat, Ellery?"

Ellery looked at her in an odd way. "No, Paula."

"What's this?" demanded the Inspector.

"Ellery left his topcoat in Phil's car before the fight," Paula explained. "I told him somebody would steal it, and somebody did. And now there's a camel's-hair coat—in this car."

"It isn't mine," said Ellery patiently. "Mine has certain distinguishing characteristics which don't exist in this one— cigarette burn at the second buttonhole, a hole in the right pocket."

The Inspector shrugged and went away.

"Then your coat's being stolen has nothing to do with it?" Paula shivered.

"On the contrary," said Ellery, "the theft of my coat has everything to do with it."

Ollie Stearn's chauffeur, a hard-looking customer, twisted his cap and said, "Mike tells me after the fight he won't need me. Tells me he'll pick me up on the Grand Concourse. Said he'd drive himself."

"Yes?"

"I was kind of—curious. I had a hot dog at the stand there and I—watched. I seen Mike come over and climb into the back—"

"Was he alone?" demanded the Inspector.

"Yeah. Just got in and sat there. A couple of drunks come along then and I couldn't see good. Only seemed to me somebody else come over and got into the car with Mike."

"Who? Who was it?"

The chauffeur shook his head. "I couldn't see good. I don't know. After a while I thought it ain't my

business, so I walks away. But when I heard police sirens I come back."

"The one who came after Mike Brown," said Ellery, "was that person wearing a coat?"

"I guess so. Yeah."

"You didn't see anything else that occurred?" persisted Ellery.

"Nope."

"Doesn't matter, really," muttered Ellery. "Line's clear. Clear as the sun. Must be that—"

"What are you mumbling about?" demanded Miss Paris in his ear.

Ellery started. "Was I mumbling?" He shook his head.

Then a man from Headquarters came up with a dudish little fellow who babbled he didn't know nothing, he didn't know nothing; and the Inspector said, "Come on, Oetjens. You were heard shooting off your mouth in that bar. What's the dope?"

The little fellow said shrilly, "I don't want no trouble, no trouble. I only said—"

"Yes?"

"Mike Brown looked me up this morning," muttered Oetjens, "and he says to me, 'Hymie,' he says, 'Happy Day knows you, Happy Day takes a lot of your bets,' he says, 'so go lay fifty grand with Happy on Coyle to win by a K.O.,' Mike says. 'You lay that fifty grand for *me*, get it?' he says. And he says, 'If you shoot your trap off to Happy or anyone else that you bet fifty grand for me on Coyle,' he says, 'I'll rip your heart out and break your hands and give you the thumb,' he says, and a lot more. So I laid the fifty grand on Coyle to win by a K.O. and Happy took the bet at twelve to five—he wouldn't give no more."

Jim Coyle growled, "I'll break your neck, damn you."

"Wait a minute, Jim—"

"He's saying Brown took a dive!" cried the champion. "I licked Brown—I beat the hell out of him fair and square!"

"You *thought* you beat the hell out of him fair and square," muttered Phil Maguire. "But he took a dive, Jim. Didn't I tell you, Inspector? Laying off that right of his—"

"It's a lie! Where's my manager? Where's Barney? They ain't going to hold up the purse on this fight!" roared Coyle. "I won it fair—I won the title fair!"

"Take it easy, Jim," said the Inspector. "Everybody knows you were in there leveling tonight. Look here, Hymie, did Brown give you the cash to bet for him?"

"He was busted." Oetjens cringed. "I just laid the bet on the cuff. The pay-off don't come till the next day. So I knew it was okay, because with Mike himself betting on Coyle, the fight was in the bag—"

"I'll cripple you, you creep!" yelled young Coyle.

"Take it easy, Jim," soothed Inspector Queen. "So you knew Mike

was going to take a dive, and then you'd collect a hundred and twenty thousand dollars and give it to Mike, is that it?"

"Yeah, yeah. But that's all, I swear—"

"When did you see Happy last, Hymie?"

Oetjens looked scared and began to back away. His police escort had to prod him a little. But he shook his head stubbornly.

"Now it couldn't be," asked the Inspector softly, "that somehow Happy got wind that you'd laid that fifty grand not for yourself, but for Mike Brown, could it? It couldn't be that Happy found out it was a dive, or suspected it?" The Inspector said sharply to a detective, "Find Happy Day."

"I'm right here," said a bass voice from the crowd; and the fat gambler waded through and said hotly to Inspector Queen, "So I'm the sucker, hey? I'm supposed to take the rap, hey?"

"Did you know Mike Brown was set to take a dive?"

"No!"

Phil Maguire chuckled.

And little Ollie Stearn, pale as his dead fighter, shouted, "Happy done it, Inspector! He found out, and he waited till after the fight, and when he saw Mike laying down he came out here and gave him the business! That's the way it was!"

"You lousy rat," said the gambler. "How do I know you didn't do it yourself? He wasn't taking no dive you couldn't find out about! Maybe you stuck him up because of that fancy doll of his. Don't tell *me*. I know all about you and that Ivy dame."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said the Inspector with a satisfied smile, when there was a shriek and Ivy Brown elbowed her way through the jam and flung herself on the dead body of her husband—for the benefit of the press.

And as the photographers joyously went to work, the Inspector said happily to his son, "Not too tough. A wrap-up. It's Happy Day, all right, and all I've got to do is—"

Ellery smiled and said, "You're wasting your time."

The Inspector ceased to look happy. "What am I supposed to be doing, then? You tell me."

"Find my coat," said Ellery.

"Say what *is* this about your damn' coat?" growled the Inspector.

"Find my coat and I'll find your murderer."

They were all assembled in Jim Coyle's dressing room; there was a noise at the door and they saw Big Barney Hawks, the new champion's manager, standing on the threshold in the company of several officials and promoters.

"What ho," said Barney Hawks with a puzzled glance about. "You still here, champ? What goes on?"

"Plenty goes on," said the champ

savagely. "Barney, did you know Brown took a dive tonight?"

"What? What's this?" said Big Barney, looking around virtuously. "Who says so, the dirty liar? My boy won that title on the up and up, gentlemen!"

"Brown threw the fight?" asked one of the men with Hawks, a member of the Boxing Commission. "Is there any evidence of that?"

"The hell with that," said the Inspector politely. "Barney, Mike Brown is dead."

Hawks began to laugh, then he stopped laughing and sputtered, "What's this? What's the gaggeroo? Brown dead?"

Jim Coyle waved his huge paw. "Somebody bumped him off tonight, Barney. In Stearn's car across the street."

"Well, I'll be," inhaled his manager, staring. "So Mike got his, hey? Well, well. Tough. Loses his title *and* his life. Who done it, boys?"

"Maybe you didn't know my boy was dead!" shrilled Ollie Stearn. "Yeah, you put on a swell act, Barney! Maybe you fixed it with Mike so he'd take a dive so your boy could win the title! Maybe—"

"There's been another crime committed here tonight," said a mild voice, and they all looked wonderingly at Ellery advancing toward Mr. Hawks.

"Hey?" said Coyle's manager, staring stupidly at him.

"My coat was stolen."

"Hey?" Big Barney kept gaping.

"And unless my eyes deceive me, as the phrase goes," continued Ellery, stopping before Hawks, "I've found it."

"Hey?"

"On your arm." And Ellery gently removed from Mr. Hawks's arm a shabby camel's-hair topcoat, unfolded it, and examined it. "Yes. My very own."

Barney Hawks turned green in the silence.

Something sharpened in Ellery's eyes, and he bent over the camel's-hair coat again. He spread out the sleeves and examined the armhole seams. They had burst. As had the seam at the back of the coat. He looked at Mr. Hawks reproachfully.

"The least you might have done," he said, "is to have returned my property in the same condition in which I left it."

"Your coat?" said Barney Hawks damply. Then he shouted, "What the hell is this? That's my coat! My camel's-hair coat!"

"No," said Ellery, "I can prove this is mine. You see, it has a cigarette burn at the second buttonhole, and a hole in the right-hand pocket."

"But—I found it where I left it! It was here all the time! I took it out of here after the fight and went up to the office to talk to these gentlemen and I've been—" The manager stopped, and his complexion

faded from green to white. "Then where's *my* coat?" he asked slowly.

"Will you try this on?" asked Ellery with the deference of a clothing salesman, and he took from a detective the bloodstained coat they had found abandoned in Ollie Stearn's car.

Ellery held the coat up before Hawks; and Hawks said thickly, "All right. It's my coat. I guess it's my coat, if you say so. So what?"

"So," replied Ellery, "someone knew Mike Brown was broke, that he owed his shirt, that not even his champion's share of the purse tonight would be enough to pay his debts. Someone persuaded Mike Brown to throw the fight tonight, offering to pay him a large sum of money, I suppose, for taking the dive. That money no one would know about. That money would not have to be turned over to the clutches of Mike Brown's loving wife and creditors—or to the Internal Revenue Bureau. That money would be Mike Brown's own. So Mike Brown said yes, realizing that he could make even more money by placing a large bet with Happy Day through the medium of Mr. Oetjens. And with this double nest-egg he could jeer at the unfriendly world.

"And probably Brown and his tempter conspired to meet in Stearn's car immediately after the fight for the payoff, for Brown would be insistent about that. So Brown sent the chauffeur away, and sat in the car, and the tempter came to keep the appointment—armed not with the pay-off money but with a knife. And by using the knife he saved himself a tidy sum—the sum he'd promised Brown—and also made sure Mike Brown would never be able to tell the wicked story to the wicked world."

Barney Hawks licked his dry lips. "Don't look at me, Mister. You got nothing on Barney Hawks. I don't know nothing about this."

Ellery went on, "A pretty problem, my friends. You see, the tempter came to the scene of the crime in a camel's-hair coat, and he had to leave the coat behind because it got bloodstained and would have given him away. But in the car next to the murder-car lay my own camel's-hair coat, its only virtue that it was not stained with a man's blood.

"We found a coat abandoned in Stearn's car and my coat stolen. Coincidence? Hardly. The murderer certainly must have taken my coat to replace the coat he was forced to leave behind."

Ellery glanced at Miss Paris, who was staring at him with a soul-satisfying worship. Mind over matter, thought Mr. Queen, remembering with special satisfaction how Miss Paris had stared at Jim Coyle's muscles. Yes, sir, mind over matter.

"Well?" said Inspector Queen. "Suppose this bird did take your coat? What of it?"

"But that's exactly the point," murmured Ellery. "He took my

poor, shabby, worthless coat. Why?"

"Well, I suppose to wear it."

"Precisely." Ellery paused, then murmured, "But why should he want to wear it?"

The Inspector looked angry. "See here, Ellery—" he began.

"No, dad, no. I'm talking with a purpose. There's a point. *The* point. You might say he had to wear it because he'd got blood on his suit under the coat and required a coat to hide the bloodstained suit."

"Sure," said Phil Maguire. "That's it."

"You may be an Einstein in your sports department, Mr. Maguire, but here you're just a palooka. No," said Ellery, shaking his head, "that's not it. He couldn't possibly have got blood on his suit. The coat shows that at the time he attacked Brown he was wearing it *buttoned*. If the topcoat was buttoned, his suit wouldn't catch any of Brown's blood."

"He certainly didn't need a coat because of the weather," muttered Inspector Queen.

"True. It's been warm all evening. You see," smiled Ellery, "what a pretty little problem it is. He'd left his own coat behind, its labels and other identifying marks taken out, unworried about its being found—otherwise he would have hidden it or thrown it away. Such being the case, you would say he'd simply make his escape in the clothes he was wearing *beneath* the coat. But he didn't. He stole another coat, my coat, for his escape." Ellery coughed gently. "So surely it's obvious that if he stole my coat for his escape, he *needed* my coat for his escape? That if he escaped without my coat he would be *noticed*?"

"I don't get it," said the Inspector. "He'd be noticed? But if he was wearing ordinary clothing—"

"Then obviously he wouldn't need my coat," nodded Ellery.

"Or—say! If he was wearing a uniform of some kind—say he was a Stadium attendant—"

"Then he still wouldn't need my coat. A uniform would be a perfect guarantee that he'd pass in the crowd unnoticed. No, there's only one answer to this problem. If the murderer had been wearing clothes —*any* normal body-covering—under the bloodstained coat, he could have made his escape in those clothes. But since he didn't, it can only mean that he *wasn't* wearing clothes."

There was a short silence, and finally Paula said, "Wasn't wearing clothes? A . . . naked man? Why, that's like something out of Poe!"

"No," smiled Ellery, "merely something out of the Stadium. You see, we had a classification of gentlemen in the vicinity tonight who wore no—or nearly no—clothing. In a word, the pugilists . . . Wait!" he said swiftly. "This is an extraordinary case, chiefly because I solved the hardest part of it almost

the instant I knew there was a murder. For the instant I discovered that Brown had been stabbed, and that my coat had been stolen by a murderer who left his own behind, I knew that the murderer could have been *only one of thirteen men* —the thirteen living prizefighters left after Brown was killed. For you'll recall there were fourteen fighters in the Stadium tonight—twelve in the six preliminary bouts, and two in the main bout.

"Which of the thirteen living fighters had killed Brown? That was my problem from the beginning. And so I had to find my coat, because it was the only concrete connection between the murderer and his crime. And now I've found my coat, and now I know which of the thirteen murdered Brown.

"I'm a tall, fairly broad man," continued Ellery. "And yet the murderer, in wearing my coat to make his escape, burst its seams at the armholes and back! That meant he was a much bigger man than I am—much bigger and broader.

"Which of the thirteen fighters on the card tonight were bigger and broader than I? Ah, but it's been a very light card—bantamweights, welterweights, lighweights! Therefore none of the twelve preliminary fighters could have murdered Brown. Therefore only one fighter was left—a man six and a half feet tall, extremely broad-shouldered and broad-backed, a man who had the greatest motive to induce Mike Brown to throw the fight tonight!"

And this time the silence was ghastly with meaning. It was broken by Jim Coyle's lazy laugh. "If you mean me, you must be off your nut. Why, I was in the shower room taking a shower at the time Mike was bumped off!"

"Yes, I mean you, Mr. Jim Coyle," said Ellery clearly, "and the shower room was the cleverest part of your scheme. You went into the shower room in full view of all of us, with towels, shut the door, turned on the shower, grabbed Big Barney Hawks's camel's-hair coat which was hanging on a peg in there, and then ducked out of the shower-room window into the alley. From there it was a matter of seconds to the street and the parking lot across the street. Of course, when you stained Hawks's coat during the commission of your crime, you couldn't risk coming back in it. And you had to have a coat to cover your nakedness for the return trip. So you stole mine, for which I'm very grateful, because otherwise—grab him, will you? My right isn't very good," said Ellery, employing a dainty and beautiful bit of footwork to escape Coyle's sudden homicidal lunge in his direction.

And while Coyle went down under an avalanche of flailing arms and legs, Ellery murmured apologetically to Miss Paris, "After all, darling, he *is* the heavyweight champion of the world."

a new story by

AUTHOR: **HENRY SLESAR**

TITLE: ***Mr. Justice***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: McKelvey

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *His daughter called him "a one-man vigilante committee," and perhaps she was right: once a cop, always a cop.*

EDITORS' FILE CARD

MCKELVEY WAS AWAKE WHEN his daughter let herself into his apartment at seven a.m. He was a bad sleeper; from his youth he had fought sleep as if it were a hoodlum with a blackjack.

He got out of the chair by the window and pulled the shabby bathrobe around his middle, scowling as Anna marched into the kitchen with fanatical determination. He listened to the explicit banging of pots and clatter of dishes and then stomped in after her, his broad face red to the roots of his muddy-gray hair.

"I thought I told you not to come here any more," he said. "You got your own family to worry about."

"Somebody's got to do it," Anna said, plunging her hands into a soapy sink. She was a thinly made girl, with her father's stubbornness compressed into mouth and chin. "You'd live in filth up to your neck if I didn't come by. My God, how can one man dirty up a place so quick?" She dunked a saucepan, and then turned with a quick, forgiving smile. "It's okay, Pop. Laurie knows how to fix her own breakfast, and Charlie can take care of himself."

"I still don't want you coming around. I can get a cleaning woman in once in a while."

"Why pay a cleaning woman?"

"What's the pension money for?"

McKelvey growled. "What the hell have I got to spend money on?"

"I don't know," Anna said. "But you spend it, all right. If I didn't know you better, I'd think you were buying diamonds for some floozy."

"I don't like that kind of talk, Anna."

"I beg your pardon," she frowned. "I forgot who I was talking to, Captain. You going to put the cuffs on me?"..

McKelvey made fists in the torn pockets of his robe and walked out. Anna came after him in a hurry, wiping her hands on a dishtowel.

"I'm sorry, Pop. Let's not fight over everything."

"I'm not fighting. I didn't ask you here."

"I came because I wanted to. I came especially because I wanted to ask you out this week-end. Charlie said I shouldn't take no for an answer."

"The answer's still no."

"Why, what's the matter with us? We got smallpox or something?"

"I'm busy, Anna, I don't have time for week-ends."

"So don't stay for the week-end. Stay for a month, where I can keep my eye on you for a while."

He sat down heavily, and picked up a brown envelope from the debris on the floor. "I said I'm busy. I've been working on something, I haven't got time for anything else."

"Working? Working?" Anna said hotly, her hands on her narrow hips. "Who the heck do you think you are? How long are you going to keep thinking of yourself as a *cop,* for God's sake? I got news for you, Pop. You're a civilian, you know that? For two years now. Can't you forget about those rotten crooks you used to push around?"

"I never pushed anyone around. Nobody who didn't need it."

"Here it comes," Anna groaned. "Mr. Justice himself. It's seven o'clock in the morning, Pop, don't you think it's too early?"

"You got a fresh mouth, Anna."

"Sure, and where did I get it?"

McKelvey almost smiled, but he conquered the impulse. He took the papers out of the envelope—the police bulletins and department memos forwarded to him by obliging buddies on the force—and began to study them with deliberate concentration. Anna glared at him in a confusion of exasperation and tenderness, and then began straightening the room. He peeked out from behind the papers and watched her. She caught him at it, and they both laughed suddenly.

"Oh, Pop," Anna said, bending over him, "why don't you act like a human being? You haven't even *seen* Laurie since she was a year old. What kind of grandpa are you?"

"I'm sorry," he said. "I really got something important to do. I'm expecting a call . . ."

"You've always got an excuse." She kissed him on the cheek. "Okay, officer, I'll go quietly. As soon as I finish the dishes."

She finished at eight, and after leaving a bubbling percolator on the stove she went to her job as a typist in a Wall Street firm. McKelvey didn't have his first cup of coffee until nine; he spent the intervening time pacing the living-room floor and glowering at the silent telephone.

At twenty minutes after ten the phone rang. He knocked the empty cup off the table in his haste to answer.

"Mr. McKelvey?"

"That's right," he said hoarsely. "This Dr. Lang?"

"Yes. Sorry I couldn't call you earlier, but I was with Mrs. Stanley. You'll be glad to know that she's feeling very well indeed."

"Good," McKelvey said. "But that's not all I want to know, Doctor."

"We plan to remove the bandages at two o'clock this afternoon. Is that convenient for you?"

"It's about three-quarters of an hour from the city, right?"

"Yes. So if you started out, say one o'clock, we'll have time for a little chat beforehand. Will you be driving?"

"I'll be driving."

"Look forward to seeing you, Mr. McKelvey."

He reheated the coffee at noon and munched a slice of stale cheese for lunch. Then he dressed, in a shapeless gray suit with shiny elbows and seat. There was a poorly repaired bullet hole in the trouser leg.

The drive out to Milldale, a suburb twenty miles from the city, was scenic and enjoyable in the light afternoon traffic. He drove his nine-year-old sedan at precise legal speed. When he passed the town marker, he asked a strolling citizen where the Blanton Eye Hospital was located. He was in the driveway at twenty minutes of two.

The hospital building was small, square, white, and bordered on three sides by cheerful flowers. Doctor Lang's office was on the first floor. McKelvey had never met the doctor before; they had done their business through letters and telephone calls. The doctor turned out to be a neat, round-faced man with an optimistic smile.

"Please sit down," he said. "It's nice meeting you at last, Mr. McKelvey. I was talking to Mrs. Stanley not ten minutes ago, and she told me some things I didn't know. You've been very generous to her."

"I had my reasons," McKelvey said flatly. He pushed back the chair in front of Lang's desk and sat down. "But I didn't come to talk about me, Doctor. I want to know about the operation.

Lang beamed. "Technically, we can say it was perfect. But as I've

told you, not all corneal transplants are a hundred per cent successful. The burned area was rather extensive in Mrs. Stanley's case."

"Do you think she'll see again?"

"Why guess?" Lang shrugged. "We'll know soon enough."

He got up and sat on the edge of the desk.

"Do you mind if I ask you a question, Mr. McKelvey?"

"Go ahead."

"You're a former police captain, aren't you?"

"That's right."

"Mrs. Stanley told me that much. She also mentioned your financial assistance. Not just for the operation, but for the past—what is it, twenty years?"

"I sent her a few dollars now and then. Nothing to get overwhelmed about. If she told you that part, you probably know that I was the detective assigned to her case when she first got injured."

"Yes. But that still doesn't explain it. I mean, it's still unusual to show so much concern for a—stranger."

"Like I said, doctor, I had my reasons."

"Yes," Lang said, waiting.

"It was winter, 1940," McKelvey went on. "It was a tough, cold winter, and I remember it for three reasons. One was the snow. We had plenty of it, and I liked that. It covered up the dirt and made the tenements look like Christmas cards. The second was my promotion. I was pulled off the street and made a detective. That was a great day for me. The third was Mrs. Stanley.

"She wasn't anybody special. She was just someone on my beat, a woman who ran a small hardware store while her sick husband coughed in the back room. But then she became my first real problem.

"Six thirty one night she was getting ready to shut up the place. It was already dark, a bad, blowy night, not many customers even in the bars. Then this kid walked in. He was about fifteen, maybe sixteen. Blond hair, nice baby face, wearing a plaid windbreaker with snow on the shoulders. He wants a can of lye.

"Mrs. Stanley gets him the can and tells him the cost. He doesn't pay. He pries off the top of the can and holds it up. 'You want this in your face?' he says. 'If you don't, hand over the dough in your cash register.' A real sweet kid.

"She gets scared, of course, but she's angry, too. She starts yelling for her husband. He won't be much help, he's a dying man. But the kid gets frightened, too, and he flings the contents of the can. The lye hits her smack in the face, and it's the last thing she ever sees. The kid runs out.

"She was a mess when she finally got help. The Inspector assigned me to the case because I knew the neighborhood. I knew it, all right.

If I had a bomb that could blow it to hell, I would have thrown it that night.

"When Mrs. Stanley was able to talk, I asked her for a description of the boy. All she could tell me was what I told you. Blond, baby-faced, plaid windbreaker. But it was enough. It rang a bell. To me it said Chicky Newell.

"I knew Chicky from 'way back, from the first cigarette he ever sneaked in a doorway. A tough, mean-hearted kid with one of those innocent stares that makes you want to belt him one. He was a troublemaker, but outside of a few lectures from a juvenile court judge, he had no record.

"But I knew it was Chicky. I knew it the way a corn knows it's going to rain.

"I had Chicky rounded up with a few other local toughs that might fit the description. They were bold as brass, of course. They never went near the hardware store that night, they said. They wouldn't think of hurting a nice lady like Mrs. Stanley, they said. They were all pasting up their stamp collections or enjoying some innocent amusement at the pool hall. As for Chicky, he was at the movies. What picture did you see, Chicky? Who remembers, he says, they're all alike.

"So I put the kid through the paces. Nothing rough, I never worked that way. He played it stiff at first, and then he tried the cry-baby routine. What are you pickin' on *me* for? What did *I* ever do? And Mrs. Stanley lying up there in Bellevue with holes in her face instead of eyes.

"I could have hung that kid with my own hands. Sure, it sounds bad. That's what my daughter's always telling me, that I'm a one-man vigilante committee. You want my opinion? The best cop *feels* his job, the way I used to.

"Well, it wasn't easy. Around midnight, I thought the kid was going to crack until some baldy lawyer storms into the station house and demands his release on a *habeas corpus*. There was nothing to do but let him go.

"About a month later, the eye specialist gives a final verdict on Mrs. Stanley's vision. She's totally blind. Chances of recovery? He couldn't say for sure. Chances of facing Chicky Newell in court and making the identification? Nil. That's the rub—she can't make identification.

"Well, I was wild. When the District Attorney called me and the Inspector into his office and told us there wouldn't be any indictment against the kid, I went off like a firecracker. But the kid's lawyer had us by the short hair. A witness needed eyes, and that's what Mrs. Stanley no longer had.

"But don't think I forgot. I kept in touch with Mrs. Stanley through the years. When her husband died and left her broke, I started send-

ing her a few bucks every month to tide her along. I wasn't being noble. She had something I wanted, something she still has. In her mind, a picture of the kid who did this thing to her. It was the last picture she ever saw and she wasn't bound to forget it. I wanted that identification, no matter how long I had to wait for it."

McKelvey stopped talking. Lang was looking at his wrist watch, and McKelvey checked his own. It was five minutes past two.

"One moment," Lang said. "Before we see Mrs. Stanley, there's still one thing I don't understand. How do you expect to make this identification?"

McKelvey smiled. He took out a chunky wallet and flipped it open; then he slid out the yellowed photograph.

"See this?" he said. "It's the kid's picture. It's twenty years old, but it's him. If Mrs. Stanley can see anything, I want it to be this."

"And you think she can really recall the face? After so long a time?"

"She swears she can. When those bandages come off, I'll have the proof I've been waiting for."

Lang stood up, and went to the door. He turned before opening it, and smiled wanly.

"I just thought of something. Doesn't Justice wear a blindfold, too?"

"Let's go, Doctor," McKelvey said.

There was no color in Mrs. Stanley's darkened room, except the pale blond hue of the sparse furniture. The rest was white. Mrs. Stanley was white, her hair snowy over the gauze mask that covered the upper portion of her face. She was sitting up in a white bed and was wearing a white hospital gown; her colorless hands were folded on each other.

"Dr. Lang?" she said.

"Yes, Mrs. Stanley."

"There are people with you."

"Dr. Spence is with me, and so is Mr. McKelvey."

She smiled, and extended her hand. It was obviously for McKelvey. He flushed and came forward, taking the hand awkwardly. Spence, the young doctor, walked to the window and pulled the already lowered shade down still another inch.

"Thank you," Mrs. Stanley said. "Thank you for everything, Mr. McKelvey. You've been very good to me."

"It's all right," McKelvey said gruffly.

"We're going to remove the bandages now," Lang said. "I want you to sit very quietly when I do, and listen to everything I say."

"Yes, Doctor."

Spence wheeled a tray of instruments toward the bed, and Lang picked up a pair of long scissors. McKelvey detached his hand from the woman's and went to the corner of the room, watching intently.

"All right," Lang sighed. "Let's see what's happening under there."

He began snipping carefully at the edges of the gauze. He was painfully slow about it. When he removed the outer bandages, there were two gauze pads underneath.

He peeled them away. Mrs. Stanley's eyes were closed.

"Now slowly," Lang said, "very slowly, Mrs. Stanley, I want you to open your eyes."

She opened them. The eyes were yellow, discolored, the flesh about them bruised-looking.

She moved her pupils from side to side.

"I can see," she said.

McKelvey grunted, and turned his head to the wall. Lang had no visible reaction, but Dr. Spence grinned in pleasure and relief.

"What can you see, Mrs. Stanley?" Lang asked.

"I can see you," the woman said. "Oh, my God. I can see you, Doctor."

"Don't turn your head, Mrs. Stanley, just keep on looking straight ahead. Can you see how many fingers I'm holding up?"

"Two," the woman said, and began to cry.

"I want you to rest for a while now. I want you to lie quiet with just the pads on your eyes for an hour or so. A little later Mr. McKelvey would like to talk to you about something, but right now I want you to take it easy."

"Yes," Mrs. Stanley said.

It was more than an hour before McKelvey was permitted to return; the sedative which had been administered before the unveiling had taken effect, and Mrs. Stanley had slept peacefully.

When McKelvey walked in, Dr. Lang was at the woman's bedside, talking to her in low tones. He rose and gave McKelvey the chair. Then he walked out, leaving them alone.

McKelvey pulled the chair up.

"I'm sorry to rush you," he said. "I know what you're going through, Mrs. Stanley. But this is important to me. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes," she said. Her eyes flickered as he took the wallet out of his pocket. "It doesn't mean very much to me now. It's so many years ago."

"But you do remember? You've always told me you remembered."

"I remember," she sighed. "It's just that I don't feel the same way I used to. Even before the operation, I changed the way I felt about what happened. I don't hate that boy any more."

"You're wrong. You can't forget something like this. Forgetting isn't the answer."

"But forgiving is. Sometimes."

McKelvey grunted, and handed her the photograph.

"Look carefully, Mrs. Stanley. Take your time."

She brought the photo close to her eyes.

"Can you see it? Clearly?"

"I can see it."

"Is that the boy, Mrs. Stanley? Is that the kid who blinded you?"

She studied it for a long moment, and then leaned back against the pillow.

"No," she said.

"Look again."

"No," the woman said. "It's not the face at all. I never forgot what he looked like, and this isn't him."

"But this is Chicky Newell, the kid we arrested, the one who got off. He's the boy who did it, Mrs. Stanley, isn't he?"

"No," she said wearily. "I don't have any reason to lie. He's not the one."

McKelvey stood up. He took the photo from her hand and shoved it into his coat pocket.

"You're angry with me," the woman said. "You wanted it to be him . . ."

McKelvey didn't answer. He went to the door.

"Please," the woman said. "I haven't really thanked you—"

"You've thanked me," McKelvey said.

He got into his car, but he didn't drive back to the city. Instead, he took the cross-country parkway to the eastern suburbs, to the town of Colton, where his daughter lived. He had been there only once before, and couldn't find his way through the twisting streets and rustic avenues.

By the time he arrived, it was seven in the evening, and there were lights in the picture window of the small, tidy split-level. There was a car already in the driveway, so he parked on the road outside, and went to the door.

Charlie answered his knock, and his mouth fell open when he saw his father-in-law.

"Well, for Pete's sake," he said. He grinned, and shouted toward the living room. "Hey, get out the fatted what-do-you-call-it, guess who's here."

When Anna saw him, she whooped in delight and threw her arms around him. She brought him inside and began firing questions. Laurie, their four-year-old, trotted in to join them, and McKelvey, reddening, did Anna's bidding and gave the girl a shy kiss.

"Are you going to stay, Pop?" she said, her eyes shining. "You going to stay with us for a while?"

"Long as you can stand me," McKelvey said. "A week, maybe."

Charlie said, "Make it a month, huh? I need some male companionship around this harem. Hey, how about a drink? I've got a bottle in the cellar I've been saving for special company."

"I wouldn't mind."

"Eep, my dinner!" Anna said. "I better put some more meat in the pot." She hurried off to the kitchen, with Laurie trailing after her and Charlie heading for the cellar.

When McKelvey was alone, he

looked around the cozy room, and then went to the bookshelves. There was a black photograph album on the lowest shelf, the gold letters on its soft cover reading: FAMILY.

McKelvey opened the thick volume, and took the wallet from his pocket. Then he slipped the photo between the pages, where it was lost among the rest of his son-in-law's boyhood and manhood faces.

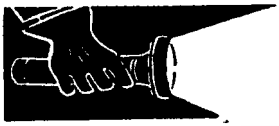
CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE	
Eberhart, Mignon	ENEMY IN THE HOUSE	Random House, Inc.	$3.50	9/6/62	O
Fenisong, Ruth	DEAD WEIGHT	Doubleday & Company, Inc.	3.50	8/3/62	O
Fleming, Joan	WHEN I GROW RICH	Ives Washburn	3.50	8/22/62	O
Highsmith, Patricia	THE CRY OF THE OWL	Harper & Row	3.95	8/15/62	O
Johns, Avery	TRAFFIC WITH EVIL	Doubleday & Company, Inc.	2.95	8/17/62	O
Upfield, Arthur	DEATH OF A SWAGMAN	British Book Centre	3.25	8/1/62	R
York, Jeremy	TWO FOR THE MONEY	Doubleday & Company, Inc.	2.95	8/3/62	O

O – ORIGINAL R – REPRINT

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Armstrong, Charlotte	THE CHOCOLATE COBWEB	Ace Books, Inc.	50¢	8/10/62
Armstrong, Charlotte	WHO'S BEEN SITTING IN MY CHAIR	Ace Books, Inc.	50¢	8/10/62
Daniels, Harold R.	FOR THE ASKING	Gold Medal	35¢	7/31/62
Gonzales, John	SOMEONE'S SLEEPING IN MY BED	Gold Medal	35¢	7/31/62
The Gordons	CAPTIVE	Bantam Books, Inc.	40¢	7/30/62
Prather, Richard S.	WAY OF A WANTON	Gold Medal	35¢	7/31/62



BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

No one has yet set down a more perceptive history of the growth and change of the crime novel than Julian Symons' THE DETECTIVE STORY IN BRITAIN (British Book Centre, 65¢). Mr. Symons, as fine a critic as he is a creator, presents the precise shape of that history with unparalleled accuracy and taste; and his bibliography provides an excellent checklist for future reading.

★★★★ **CORMORANT'S ISLE, by Allan MacKinnon** (Crime Club, $3.50)
Rousing and colorful outdoor adventure in the noblest Buchan-Hitchcock tradition makes the year's most satisfactory thriller.

★★★★ **HOW LIKE AN ANGEL, by Margaret Millar** (Random, $3.50)
A smalltown scandal and a strange religious sect furnish material for another faultless Millar novel of character and surprise.

★★★★ **THE GRAVESIDE COMPANION, edited by J. Francis McComas** (Obolensky, $4.50)
California writers (including EQMM regulars Stuart Palmer and Miriam Allen deFord) in admirable regional studies of true murders.

★★★ **SEANCE, by Mark McShane** (Crime Club, $2.95)
Deftly ironic story achieves unprecedently successful blend of crime and detection with the paranormal and supernatural.

★★★ **MURDER BY PROXY, by Brett Halliday** (Torquil-Dodd, Mead, $3.50)
Devious deceptive murder puzzle in the grand (and almost lost) manner, quite out of the common run of Michael Shayne's cases.

My praise last month of Jorge Luis Borges' LABYRINTHS should have extended to his FICCIONES (Grove, $3.50); each collection offers some stories not in the other. Further volumes of "mainstream literature" containing distinguished crime stories include Graham Greene's 21 STORIES (Viking, $3.95) and Muriel Spark's delightfully individual VOICES AT PLAY (Lippincott, $4). The 17th annual BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR, edited by Brett Halliday (Dutton, $3.95), offers a selection somewhat brighter than last year's from EQMM's rivals on the newsstands.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HUGH PENTECOST**

TITLE: ***Cop's Job To Know***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Lieutenant Mac Hannah

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *"A good cop has to be himself and not an imitation of some other good cop." Mac learned that the hard way when he took over the Seventh Precinct . . .*

PATROLMAN JENNINGS TURNED IN the alarm a few minutes before midnight. He had been walking his regular beat in the Seventh Precinct, when he rounded the corner onto Spruce Street, right opposite the Edgemont Hotel. A young fellow and a girl, returning home after a date, were pointing excitedly at the hotel.

Patrolman Jennings looked up. There was a ledge about three feet wide running around the building at the tenth floor. Standing outside an open window on that ledge was a man. He was bareheaded and dressed in full formal attire except for his shoes—tails, white tie, white waistcoat.

Patrolman Jennings froze for a minute, watching. The man raised his arms and pointed them outward, hands together, like a diver about to take off from a high tower.

"He's going to jump!" the girl screamed, and buried her face against the chest of her young man.

Patrolman Jennings raced back to the corner call box and rang the precinct police station. A moment later he sprinted across Spruce Street and into the Edgemont's lobby. It was deserted. The Edgemont had long since lost any class it ever had. The desk clerk looked up from the late evening paper.

"There's a crazy galoot about to take a dive off the tenth floor ledge

facing the street!" Jennings shouted. "Tall, dark hair, full-dress suit —"

"Holy smoke!" the clerk said. "That'd be Tony Ferrari. He just came in about ten minutes ago. Carrying a package, he was. Must be some kind of a gag!"

"Come on. Bring a passkey!" Jennings ordered.

Lieutenant Mac Hannah sat in the dining alcove of his two-and-a-half-room apartment four blocks from the Edgemont Hotel, staring darkly into the cold remains of a cup of coffee. The ashtray in front of him was overflowing with butts. His wife, Beatrice was finishing up the supper dishes in the kitchenette.

They hadn't spoken for a long time. There are times when a man's troubles are such that talk won't help. All Bea Hannah could do was let her man know by her very silence that she loved him and was with him all the way, no matter what. Mac was a stubborn, complex guy and he had to think out his problems in his own stubborn way.

A month ago Mac Hannah had been on top of the world. Captain Dan Weatherly, for ten years in charge of the Seventh Precinct, had reached retirement age. The logical thing was for someone in the precinct to get the promotion. Instead, the commissioner had reached out and picked Lieutenant Mac Hanna a man from another precinct, to take over as acting captain of the Seventh. It meant the commissioner had had his eye on Mac Hannah.

"The Seventh has been the quietest precinct in our city," the commissioner told Mac. "Old Dan Weatherly is a special kind of cop. He's run the Seventh like you might run a small town. He's been a friend to the people. He's trusted them and they've trusted him. There have been fewer recorded violations in the Seventh than in any other precinct in the city. The kids haven't turned sour. It's pretty near ideal, Hannah. The people there think of the law as a friend, not an enemy.

"Take the protection racket we've been fighting all over the city: not a single merchant has dared come forward to testify against these goons—except in the Seventh. They approached an old guy named Simon Adler—runs a delicatessen on Pine. They approached him, and an hour later he'd spilled the whole thing to Dan Weatherly. They believe in cops in the Seventh, Hannah."

The commissioner shifted in his chair. "You're wondering why I'm bringing you in from the outside to take Dan Weatherly's job. The logical thing, you might think, would be to promote Sergeant Teliski, who's been Old Dan's right hand man for years. The reason I'm not is because Teliski would try to be like Dan, and Teliski is Teliski and Dan is Dan. A good cop has to be himself and not an imitation of

some other good cop. The Seventh is yours, Hannah. Good luck—and be yourself!"

That had been a month ago. Late this afternoon, Mac Hannah had been told just how the people of the Seventh felt about him after four weeks. He had been told by someone who knew—Father Kane, the priest who was loved by people of all colors and all creeds in the district.

"I don't want to do anything," Father Kane had said, sitting across Mac's desk from him in the precinct house, "until I've given you the full load and you've had a chance to shift it to your other shoulder."

"I'm listening," Mac Hannah said harshly. He hadn't Weatherly's gift for turning a complaint into a social clambake.

"We have learned to live in peace and friendship with the law in the Seventh," the priest said. "One week after you took over, Lieutenant, over fifty summonses for petty violations were handed out in the restaurants and bars of the area."

"Violations of laws designed to protect the public health, Father."

"Those violations could have been corrected without arrests, Lieutenant."

"They were not corrected in the past," Mac Hannah said. "Those violations had become a habit. People took advantage of Dan Weatherly's trust."

"Over two hundred parking tickets have been handed out," he priest said, his gray eyes patient.

"Private vehicles were illegally parked," Mac Hannah said. "This forced delivery trucks, oil trucks, other legitimate business vehicles to double-park."

The priest seemed to ignore him. "You threw sixty-two women out of work in the dress factory on River Street for a week."

Mac Hannah's voice rose angrily. "Would you prefer to wake up some morning, Father, and read that sixty-two women had been roasted to death because of long-standing violations of the fire law? There were no proper exits. No proper fire escapes."

"That could have been rectified without closing the shop," the priest said. "Repairs and renovations could have been made while work went on. A heavy fine against the owner only jeopardized jobs. He's not a rich man."

Mac Hannah rose from his desk. "I'm sorry, Father. I'm a cop. I have to do my job as a cop as I see it, or quit."

"There's one more thing," the priest said. "Young Ferrari."

A muscle twitched in Mac Hannah's jaw, but he was silent.

"There's never been a narcotics case in the Seventh," Father Kane said. "But for some reason you arrested him and charged him with peddling dope. You had no case, Lieutenant, and God knows what you've done to that boy."

"We had reason to suspect him," Mac Hannah said. "We had him tailed. We saw him pass a cigarette to a man on the street and we caught him with a hundred-dollar bill in his hand the man had given him for that cigarette."

"But you didn't catch the man or produce the cigarette," the priest said. "All you found on the boy was a package of innocent brand-name cigarettes. You didn't believe his story about someone repaying a debt, but you couldn't prove otherwise. You can't make many mistakes like that, Lieutenant, and survive in the Seventh. Nor anywhere else in this city's police force, I'm thinking."

"I'm a cop," Mac Hannah said grimly. "I have to play it like a cop."

The priest rose. "When you walk home along Front Street tonight, Lieutenant, count the number of people who speak to you or greet you. Count the number of storekeepers who have a little present for your wife. Count the number of kids who salute you with respect. Then think about your way of doing things, Lieutenant."

Mac Hannah was still thinking about his way of doing things when his phone rang. He heard the cold, unfriendly voice of Sergeant Teliski.

"I thought I better call you, Lieutenant. Fellow's threatening to take a dive off the ledge on the Edgemont Hotel. We've got the fire company there and the street roped off. Half the people in the precinct are there watching. Father Kane and Captain Weatherly are trying to talk the man back into his room. No luck so far."

"Captain Weatherly!"

"He happened to be around," Teliski said drily.

Mac Hannah knew. Old Dan Weatherly had never left the precinct. He lived there, gossiped with his old friends, sympathized with their grievances. Old Dan hadn't made things any easier.

"Know who this psycho is?" Mac Hannah said Teliski.

"Yeah, we know," Teliski said, and there was a note of accusation in his voice. "It's young Tony Ferrari."

"I'll be there in five minutes," Mac Hannah said, and jammed the receiver back on its cradle. He could hear Father Kane's voice, still fresh in his memory: *"And God knows what you've done to that boy!"*

A huge crowd had collected behind the ropes at either end of the block where the Edgemont Hotel stood on Spruce Street. The fire company truck was there and a crew of men were holding a net, staring up at the tenth-floor ledge.

Elbowing through the crowd, Mac Hannah looked up at Tony Ferrari, walking speculatively along the ledge. They'd set up searchlights, and the scene was bright as a movie set.

Mac Hannah hadn't changed

back into his uniform. He'd strapped on his gun harness under the jacket of his gray flannel suit. He stared for a minute at the figure in tails and white tie, with the white shoes. Then he elbowed his way through the crowd.

He heard a woman say, "His name is Ferrari . . . plays the piano in a night club somewhere . . . got into trouble recently . . . false arrest, they say, but it must have preyed on his mind."

Mac Hannah worked his way out into the open and headed for the hotel. He went up to the tenth floor in the elevator.

The door of Tony Ferrari's room was open and he went in. Old Dan Weatherly was at the window, speaking to Ferrari in a gentle voice, pleading with him to come in. Father Kane was at Old Dan's shoulder. but when he heard Mac Hannah come into the room he turned. At sight of the lieutenant his face paled with anger.

"You'd better stand back, Lieutenant. If the boy sees or hears you, it may trigger him into jumping. Let us pray you don't have that on your conscience, too!"

Mac Hannah's pale blue eyes were narrowed to angry slits, but he didn't speak. Instead, he turned to the bed and picked up a pair of patent-leather evening shoes that had been placed by the foot of it. He turned them over and looked at the soles.

Then he went to the closet and examined three other pairs of shoes that were there. He came out into the room again, scowling. Then he crossed to the desk and took a piece of colored wrapping paper out of the wastebasket. He studied it for a moment, folded it up, and stuffed it into his jacket pocket.

He started out of the room without a word to Father Kane or to Old Dan Weatherly, who had turned from the window to watch him. He stoped abruptly by the dresser. An open package of cigarettes lay there. He took the pack, dropped it into his pocket, and went out.

Old Dan Weatherly's lined, kindly face had a grim look on it. "That's the kind of a guy he is, Father," he said. "Steal a pack of butts from a dying man, you might say."

Out on the empty street the firemen still held their net, watching Tony Ferrari, moving with him as he slowly paced up and down the ledge. Sergeant Teliski and Patrolman Jennings came out of the crowd as they saw Hannah emerge from the hotel.

"Like to ask your permission to try something, Lieutenant," Teliski said, in his cold, unfriendly voice.

"Well?"

"Jennings here used to be a construction worker before he joined the force. He's used to heights. He —"

"The firemen have some grappling hooks on the truck," Jennings

broke in. "I could lower myself down from a couple of floors up and maybe grab him."

"No," Mac Hannah said, and started to move away.

"But, Lieutenant—"

Mac Hannah turned back. "I'm not risking the life of a good cop to save any cheap punk of a psycho."

"Yeah, but—"

"Anyway, he won't jump, Jennings," Mac Hannah said. "You can bet your week's pay on that!"

"Now he's a mental expert!" Teliski muttered as Hannah walked away.

Mac Hannah shouldered his way through the crowd and deserted the center of excitement. He walked west on Walnut and then south on Pine. Teliski had been right. It seemed as though the whole Seventh Precinct had gathered outside the Edgemont. Streets were deserted. Bars were empty.

As he approached the three-hundred block, Hannah slowed his pace. A dark sedan was parked at the far end of the street. He turned briskly east on Locust. Once he was out of sight of the car he ducked down an alley to the yard of a house that faced on Pine.

He scaled the back fence. He jumped three times before he caught the uplifted iron steps of the fire escape. He climbed to the third floor and stood outside a window opening off the escape. He lifted it slowly, noiselessly, and stepped over the sill into a darkened kitchen. Pale, yellow light came from the half-closed door of a room beyond —pale, yellow light, and the sound of moaning. Then a voice.

"We better mark him up a little, Al, so the neighbors'll know he didn't just fall."

Mac Hannah took two quick steps down the corridor and kicked open the door to the room beyond. An old man lay tied to an iron bed. He was dressed, but his feet were bare. There was an unpleasant smell of burning flesh.

Two punks were bending over the old man, one of them with a glowing cigar clenched between his teeth. The other had taken a switchblade knife from his pocket.

Mac Hannah grabbed the punk with the knife by the back of his coat and pulled him away. The cigar smoker was tugging for a gun in a shoulder holster.

Mac Hannah kicked him viciously in the groin and he went down, screaming. He gave the arm of the knife merchant a twist, and then brought it down on his knee, snapping it like a man breaking kindling. He picked up the knife and bent over the old man, cutting him free.

"You hurt bad, Mr. Adler?" he asked, quite gently.

"Only my feet," old Simon Adler said. "That cigar . . . But you got here just in time, Lieutenant. I might be dead, or blind, or maybe my tongue cut out. How did you

happen to come? How did you know?"

"Cop's job to know," Mac Hannah said.

Twenty minutes later Mac Hannah was back at the Edgemont. Tony Ferrari still prowled the tenth-story ledge. Teliski and Jennings approached.

"He nearly took off a couple of times," Jennings said.

"But he didn't," Mac Hannah said. "Now, I want this crowd broken up. Jennings, tell the firemen to go home."

Teliski's voice shook. "You ordering that net away?"

"He won't jump," Mac Hannah said. "You come with me, Teliski."

Teliski followed silently into the hotel, up to the tenth floor, into Tony Ferrari's room. Old Dan Weatherly was still pleading hoarsely, Father Kane at his elbow.

"All right, Father—you, Mr. Weatherly—the show's over." Mac Hannah said. "The crowd's going home."

"He ordered them to take the net away!" Teliski burst out.

Mac Hannah's face was a granite block. "You two gents leave me alone now."

"I countermand that order," Old Dan Weatherly said.

"I give the orders around here," Mac Hannah said. "Put 'em out, Teliski."

"I'll get to the commissioner at once!" Father Kane said.

When he was alone, Mac Hannah went to the window and leaned out. He looked straight into the pale face of Tony Ferrari. "I got to Simon Adler in time," he said. "The two mugs that were sent to take care of him are in the hospital. You can come in or you can jump, whichever you please."

Mac Hannah moved away from the window. Then Tony Ferrari's dark head ducked in through the window and he jumped down into the room. He stood staring with a kind of disbelief at Mac Hannah.

"How did you figure it?" he asked.

From behind Mac Hannah there was an exclamation of surprise. Sergeant Teliski had come back into the room.

"You're a narcotics addict," Mac Hannah said coldly. "You play the piano in Martin Jansen's Starlight Club in the Ninth Precinct. That's a hangout for the boys who run the protection racket. Two and two make four. You'd do what they told you. You'd have to. You were attracting attention? Why? Why should the boys in the Ninth want a fuss like that in the Seventh? What or who would they be interested in over here? It didn't take a genius to think of Simon Adler. He testified against them. They can't have anyone get away with a thing like that or others would get up the courage. They had to settle with Simon Adler. So how? So stage a show that will attract every cop in

the precinct, ready to save your rotten neck. It figured. I got to Adler in time."

"But how did you know it was a show, Lieutenant?" There was awe in Teliski's voice—awe and a new respect. "How did you know he wouldn't jump?"

Mac Hannah pointed down at the white rubber-soled sneakers Ferrari was wearing with his formal evening clothes. "The clerk saw him coming in not long ago carrying a package. I found the wrappings in the wastebasket. Donovan's Shoe Store. It stays open late on a Saturday night. Does a guy who's thinking of jumping bother to buy himself a new pair of sneakers to do the job in? The only reason he'd buy a new pair of rubber-soled shoes for such an act would be because he had no intention of falling, for real or by accident."

Tony Ferrari took a silver cigarette case from his white vest. Then, as if as an afterthought, he looked quickly at the bureau.

"I picked up that package you left there," Mac Hannah said. "Pretty careless to leave 'em lying around loose like that, wasn't it? Enough dope to supply a regiment."

Ferrari shook his head. "I figured it was safer to leave 'em lying out loose like that. I thought you might look in hideaway places, but lying out loose like that . . ."

"You been reading detective stories or something?" Mac Hannah asked. Then: "Take him in, Teliski."

Father Kane handed the copy of Mac Hannah's report back to the police commissioner. He shook his head slowly. "I don't know what to say, Commissioner. All the time I thought he was a villain he was being a first-rate cop."

"A rough diamond, you might call him," the commissioner said.

"I don't know what to say."

"Well, whatever you say, Father, say it to him. He's had a pretty tough month."

It had been nearly dawn when Mac Hannah finished his report. He went home and slept. It was almost noon when he started walking down Front Street, in uniform, for the precinct house. He had learned in the last month to keep his eyes straight ahead, looking neither to right nor left. It was better than seeing the hostility on the faces of the people of the Seventh.

"Hi, Lieutenant!"

Mac Hannah stopped as though someone had poked a gun in his ribs. He turned. It was the little Italian named Luigi who ran the flower shop at the corner of Third. He was grinning at Mac Hannah now.

Mac Hannah's jaw muscles relaxed and he tried a smile. "Hi, yourself," he said.

"Great job you did last night," Luigi said.

"Thanks, Luigi." Mac Hannah moved slowly toward the store. "How much are those tulips? I want to buy my wife some."

"Anniversary?"

"No," Mac Hannah said. "Just a present for a good dame who knows when to keep her mouth shut. How much?"

"Not today," Luigi said. "Today is free. I don't think you pay for anything in the Seventh today. Today is free."

"Thanks. Thanks a million," Mac Hannah said gruffly. He started out and stopped abruptly in the doorway.

"That's your car, Luigi?"

"Sure."

"That's a parking violation."

"Oh!" Luigi's voice was a soft wail.

Mac Hannah hesitated and then he pointed his finger at the florist. "That's the only warning I'm going to give you, Luigi."

Luigi's grin reappeared. "Yes, sir, Lieutenant!"

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

As you know, one of your Editors still conducts a class in Creative Writing . . . From time to time we like to give you a progress report —in the form of examples of the work being done by students. Here, then, are three very short stories from Queen's Workshop.

The first two (the 235th and 236th "first stories" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine) are by Mrs. Joan S. Richter. Two "first stories" by the same writer? Well, Mrs. Richter presented us with a problem. She worked and reworked on both stories simultaneously—so that we not only couldn't decide which story, in its final version, came first, we couldn't even make up our mind which story we preferred. So we cut the Gordian knot by doing something we have never done before—we called both stories "firsts"! (Needless to admit, there really can't be two "first stories" by one writer—but anything strange and unusual can happen in EQMM, and usually does.)

The author was born and raised in New York City, and received her B.A., in English, from Hunter College in 1951. She has two children, both boys, and her husband is a TV news writer for CBS. Her hobbies: sewing, gardening, reading, and going to the theater.

Now, read Mrs. Richter's two "first stories" and ask yourself: which one do you like better? Whichever one it is, we think you will agree with us that both are interesting and provocative and exceptionally fine efforts for a new writer.

TWO "FIRST STORIES"

1: *The Lavender Ones Taste Better*

by JOAN S. RICHTER

MRS. HENKIN WAS A SMALL birdlike creature of 58, with a thin bow of a mouth and soft, powdered skin. Her brown eyes shone brightly, perhaps too brightly, as she flitted about her garden, pinching off the withered pansies, collecting the seed-filled portulaca cups for next spring's planting, and loosening the crusted earth with her hand-trowel. In the apple tree that shaded her dooryard a chickadee chattered.

She chattered back. "You're a hungry one—and lazy too." From the pocket of her crisply starched morning dress she withdrew a plump sunflower seed and extended it on her open palm.

The bird lighted on her thumb and looked up at her with its bright beady eyes, then snatched the seed in its beak and flew back into the tree.

Mrs. Henkin smiled. If it weren't for the birds she fed during the four seasons, she would be lonely, quite lonely, especially now that Charles was gone. What prettier sound was there than the call of a towhee high in the treetops; what lovelier sight than a gilt-winged hummingbird hovering over an amaryllis—or a cardinal, red against the snow, like fresh blood on a man's white shirt.

She sighed and walked over to the bed of pansies. They were such an unruly flower, always tumbling and tangled. But Charles had liked them. She bent down and with the shears that hung from a satin ribbon about her waist snipped back the straying shoots, the click of the scissors a precise metallic sound in the soft afternoon. Then she stood up and saw a neat mounded rectangle with barely a flower raising its head higher than its neighbor. She smiled, quite pleased with her handiwork.

She minced over to a clump of bleeding heart and gently parted the leafy veil of foliage to peek at the quiet form of a mother rabbit nesting. The cottontail's brown nose twitched and Mrs. Henkin could see its rhythmic heartbeat quicken and swell under the fur.

"Nice bunny," she said. "But you must stop eating my pansies." She put out a hand and stroked the soft fur. The dark eyes looked straight ahead, frightened and still; the little heart pounded.

Mrs. Henkin's hand lay heavily on the swollen animal; her brow was wrinkled and her eyes scolding. "I can't have you eating my pansies. When your babies come they'll want to eat them too, and that won't do at all."

The rabbit quivered under her hand and struggled to get free. Heavily, it ran across the flagstone walk and hid among the iris fronds.

"Remember now," Mrs. Henkin called, "I've warned you. I've warned you."

The next day Mrs. Henkin was up before the sun had fully risen, and donning a pair of rubbers as protection against the heavy dew she slipped out into the cool morning. She inspected the amaryllis and decided it would be another day before it bloomed; she filled the bird bath and set out a fresh salt lick for the deer that chanced to pass through her woods-encircled garden.

Then she walked over to the mound of pansies and with a deft snip of her shears lopped off two erring blossoms. Her thin lips

formed a faint smile and she slowly shook her head. She would never understand why, of all flowers, Charles had liked pansies best.

"All the lavender ones are gone," she said aloud. "I wonder if they taste better than the others."

Quietly, almost stealthily, she crept over to the bleeding heart and with a swift jerk of her hand lifted its weeping leaves.

"So you're hiding!" she cried. "I'll find you. I'll find you and then you'll be sorry you've eaten my pansies."

She ran over to the bed of irises and looked among their fanned blades. "You're not here either. But I'll find you—just as I found Charles."

Her brown eyes were bright and darting. Her small hands fingered the smooth satin of the ribbon from which her shears dangled.

The sweet call of the cardinal reached her and her eyes saw the subtle colors of the female in the branches of the wild cherry tree.

"Where is your mate?" she said. "Where is he? He is so lovely against winter's snow."

Each morning for two weeks Mrs. Henkin checked her pansies and each morning she found some of them eaten. But as often as she searched she could not find the rabbit's new nesting place.

"I could set a trap for you," she said. "I could spray the pansies with poison. If you don't stop eating my pansies, I will. Yes, I will."

Then one night Mrs. Henkin could not sleep. She missed Charles next to her in the big fourposter bed. She went to the window and looked out at her moonlit garden and at the pansy-covered mound. On the lawn she saw the rabbit—no longer swollen—nibbling at the white clumps of clover. Her eyes darted back to the pansies. Among them, hidden by the half light, were two baby cottontails.

Mrs. Henkin stood quietly at the window and watched. "I warned you," she whispered, "I warned you." She stayed there until the moon began to descend and the light of the waking sun sent up a glow over the horizon. Her bright eyes never left the two young cottontails.

When it was almost light, she saw them hop out of the pansies and join their mother. Mrs. Henkin watched them closely, straining to see in the twilight of the dawn. Finally they scampered off across the lawn and disappeared under a low-spread yew.

"So that's where you've been hiding. I told you I would find you. I told you."

Mrs. Henkin did not go back to bed. She dressed herself for the day and went downstairs to her kitchen and prepared breakfast. By the time she had eaten and the dishes were done, the sun was already up.

She put on her rubbers and went out into the garden. The amaryllis

had three orange flowers. The bird bath needed refilling. The salt lick had a slight groove worn in its once smooth surface.

The pansy mound was stripped of all its lavender flowers.

"The lavender ones *must* taste better," she said, as she picked up a large wooden bucket and carried it over to the pump. Her eyes were especially bright.

When the bucket was two-thirds full she lifted it from the pump spout, and adjusting her stance so that she could carry it without spilling, Mrs. Henkin walked quietly across the lawn. She set the bucket down in front of the yew and pushed aside its lowest branch.

Her hands moved swiftly and surely. In each she grasped a baby rabbit. "I warned you," she said, fixing her eyes on the mother rabbit. "I warned you to stop eating my pansies. But you wouldn't listen."

The mother rabbit sat crouched and trembling.

Mrs. Henkin submerged her catch in the wooden bucket.

"Charles wouldn't listen either," she said and looked with a certain sadness toward the pansy-covered mound. "He kept on seeing her, even after I warned him."

Mrs. Henkin picked up the bucket, and with her small brown eyes shining brightly, looked at the quivering mother rabbit. "Nice bunny," she said. "Clover is *much* better for you than pansies."

II: *The White Elephant*

"Get rid of it," her husband said.

"I can't. I just can't."

"You're tormenting yourself having it around."

"But I've got to find out—I've got to try . . ."

"How?" he said with annoyance. "You've told me all you can remember—I don't know how many times—all your little girl memories —and there's nothing that should make you . . ."

"I know. I know," she cried, putting her hands up to her white face. "But there must be something! Something I've forgotten. The doctor said it probably happened a long time ago—something I wouldn't let myself remember, but that I want to now . . ."

"Well, you can't go on like this. I don't care what the psychiatrist said—just get it out of the house."

"But that won't do any good."

"Of course it will! Without it around to keep reminding you—"

She laughed hysterically. "Remind me? Of what? That's just it. If I could only remember—no matter how awful it is, it would be better to know." She buried her face in the arm of the chair. "Oh, please, please help me remember."

He waited until her shoulders stopped shaking and her crying became subdued. He leaned toward her across the living room. "All right—just this once more. Tell me again."

She sucked in her lower lip and let out a tremulous sigh. "I was buying some things at the church bazaar when I noticed the 'white elephant' table. I was thinking they should do away with all that junk—cracked vases and chipped cups—when I saw it."

"Saw what?" he asked.

"A big black bowl made of cast iron—and a pounder, shaped like a sawed-off baseball bat."

She smiled faintly. "My grandmother had one just like it—a mortar and pestle. She used to sit in front of the blue-enamel coal stove with the mortar between her knees, pounding all sorts of sweet-smelling spices for cookies and cakes. I used to beg to help with the pounding, but my grandmother said the pestle was too heavy for me."

"Was it?"

"I thought I could do it, but everyone—even my grandfather—said the pestle was so heavy it could break a man's foot if it fell on it. I always wanted to try it when no one was around, but I never did."

She looked up from her armchair by the window and frowned. "I was going over to the white elephant table to see how heavy the pestle really was—when it happened."

"What happened?"

"I was reaching out for the pestle when suddenly I was afraid. It was a pounding kind of fear. It felt as if there were a hand tight around my throat and my mouth was dry as chalk."

She put her hands to her temples. "The woman behind the table said something to me—something about the mortar and pestle. . . . She said they use them for ashtrays now—drop the cigarettes into the mortar and grind them out with the pestle."

"What did you say to that?"

"I said my grandmother wouldn't like that if she were alive."

"Then what?"

"I gave her two dollars for it and brought it home."

"When did you first touch the mortar and pestle?"

"When I carried it out to the car."

"Were you afraid then?"

"No—just aware of how heavy it was."

"Have you been afraid since?"

"Not really. But the feeling is never far away. Sometimes I purposely think about it, hoping I can catch hold of it and perhaps having got it, see past it. But I never can."

He sighed impatiently. "Why did you decide to put it in the kitchen?"

"Because that's where it belongs."

"Why not use it for an ashtray?"

"I just couldn't."

"How about a flowerpot?"

"I suppose so, but then what would I do with the pestle?"

He shrugged. "Are you going to pound any spices?"

"No, they come in cans now."

"Then why did you buy it?" he said angrily.

"Because I had to know."

He got up and turned on the light.

"Did you have nightmares as a child?"

"I must have, but I don't remember."

"Do you remember ever feeling the same kind of fear you did at the bazaar?"

She frowned. "I don't know. There was something familiar about it—especially the peculiar tight feeling in my throat and the dryness of my mouth."

"What were you afraid of when you were a little girl?"

"Well, the coal bin—it was so dark and cold. I always thought someone was hiding . . . and then there were Saturday nights when my grandfather closed the grocery store and went around locking all the windows and pulling down all the shades. He never said why, but I knew there must be someone outside he didn't want to get in."

"What did he do after the shades were down?"

"He'd put the bags of money from the store on the kitchen table. I'd sit across from him while he counted it. Sometimes he'd let me help—I'd make a tower of nickels, a tower of dimes. My grandmother would sit mending in the rocker in the corner by the stove."

"Where did your grandmother keep her mortar and pestle when she wasn't using it?"

"On the counter next to the stove."

He stood up and walked around the living room nervously.

"How did your grandparents die?" he said suddenly.

"In a flu epidemic—both of them."

"All right," he said, and slapped the arm of her chair. "That does it! We've spent the whole evening on this and I've had enough."

He strode toward the kitchen. She jumped up and ran after him.

He switched on the kitchen light and pointed to the mortar standing on the counter. "If you want to use it for a flowerpot, fine! Fill it with geraniums! But this thing," he said picking up the pestle. "is good for nothing."

He hefted it. "I'll say it'd break a man's foot!" Then he lifted it above his head. "Do a good job of crushing his skull too."

He turned toward her, the pestle still above his head, and saw that the color had drained from her face. Her pale blue eyes, fixed on the pestle, were blank with terror.

"A man . . ." she whispered hoarsely. "He'd been hiding in the coal bin. His face and his hands were black with coal dust. He came up the back stairs and crept behind my grandfather as he was counting the money."

She shook her head. "It was horrible . . . I was so afraid . . . he had a gun. I remember wanting to scream, but I couldn't—it felt as if there were a hand tight around my throat and my mouth was like chalk." She covered her face with her hands, sobbing.

"Don't stop now," he urged her gently. "Go on."

"I can't!" she cried.

"Yes, you can—you've got to!"

She choked back her tears. "The man hadn't seen my grandmother in the corner by the stove. She came up behind him quietly and hit him —hit him with the pestle. He fell onto the table, crashing down my towers of nickels and dimes."

She pressed her hands against her face and closed her eyes.

"It's all right," he said softly.

She looked at him and sighed. Her hand trembled as she reached for the pestle and placed it in the mortar.

"Yes, it's all right," she said. "Now we can get rid of it."

Mrs. M. Brett-Surman's "first story" (the 237th to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine) is altogether different from Mrs. Richter's two stories—it is bright and breezy and a fine change of pace; it also demonstrates that stories about Halloween do not have to be scary . . .

The author was born in Canada, but raised in Washington, D.C. and Virginia. Before her marriage she worked for the U. S. Government—in the American Embassy in Bogota, Colombia, in the U.S. Consulate in French West Africa (now Mali), and in the American Embassy in Paris. She married an Englishman, who is now an American citizen. Mrs. Brett-Surman has also lived in Kenya and Madagascar and has traveled extensively throughout Africa . . . (So why have we not seen some stories from you with African backgrounds?)

NOT A BIT LIKE TELEVISION

by M. BRETT-SURMAN

WILL I HAVE A DRINK? HARRY, I'll have doubles after what's happened today. I'm still shaking. What happened? Harry, I told you our place was robbed today—the place where I work, Schramblin's Variety Store, where else? Yes, Harry, I'll fix supper as

soon as I finish this drink. What do you mean you didn't have any lunch—were you out at the track again, Harry?

And, Harry, it wasn't at all like television. No, I wasn't there. I was coming back from my lunch hour. I had just bought a new dress at the La Mode Shoppe. Now don't explode, Harry. I need that new dress. You don't want your wife to go out week after week in the same old dress, do you?

What do I mean it wasn't like television? Well, Harry, when I was coming back from lunch to the store, I saw cops everywhere. They were all over the place. I didn't know this town had that many cops. Here's what I mean. You know how it is on those detective shows on TV. The cops burst in on the scene full of beans and know exactly what to do. Well, today they must have had every rookie cop on the force there. They were running around like chickens, their eyes big as saucers, and looking scared—just plain scared.

And Mr. Schramblin, the owner of the store. Did he act like they do on those TV shows? Did he tell the cops, "Yes, the robber was five foot ten and a half, wore a natty pin-stripe blue suit, medium complexion, clean-shaven, and escaped in a light-blue 1959 Pontiac convertible."

Harry, all Mr. Schramblin said, with tears streaming down his face, was, "They took everything." A cop asked him how many were there? Mr. Schramblin just said, "They took everything." One of them asked him, "Just what did they take?" and still with tears streaming down his face, he said, "They took everything." The cops were so exasperated they didn't know what to do next.

Yes, Harry, I haven't forgotten I have to fix dinner. But I'm beat, real beat. Freshen this drink up for me, will you, dear?

Harry, I'm really beat. I'm handling three counters now, you know—men's toiletries, birthday and party accessories, and kitchenware. Honestly, I'm handling more sales than any girl in the store.

Honestly, when I think of the guff we put up with at that store. Believe me, if it weren't for the fact that it's only two blocks from here and so convenient, I'd have quit long ago. Before the store opens in the morning, we all assemble in the main aisle of the first floor and sing the store's pep song:

Boost up your sales.
Charge straight ahead.
Speed your transactions;
Get out the lead.

all to the tune of the *The Caissons Go Rolling Along*. It's enough to make you—

Gosh, this drink is good, Harry. Makes me feel so warm and so relaxed. Why don't we just drink our supper?

The robbery—oh, yes, the robbery at good old Schramblin's and,

believe you me, it never happened to a more deserving guy. Penny-pinching, tight-fisted, beady-eyed Mr. Schramblin. Samuel J. Schramblin. I wonder if he's stopped crying yet.

Yes, Harry, he was robbed on his way to the bank at ten minutes to one. You know, Harry, Mr. Schramblin goes to the bank every day at exactly ten to one. He's been doing it for years—regular as clockwork. He goes out the back way to the parking lot, locks the rear entrance, then walks across the parking lot to his car. And he always carries the money in a brown paper bag to fool any would-be robbers. Boy, he sure fooled them today!

How did the robber do it? Well, Harry, I thought they'd never pull it out of old man Schramblin. He just kept crying like a baby and wringing his hands. Then the cops closed the front door so they could conduct their investigation. Mr. Schramblin was running around telling them not to close the doors because it was Halloween and he'd be losing business. He said he was loaded up to here with trick-or-treat stuff.

Harry, if ever the cops could've used a rubber hose that would have been the time. The police lieutenant—Lomax, his name was—got pretty burned up and said that Mr. Schramblin was hampering the investigation and that they hadn't gotten one shred of useful information out of him.

Well, Harry, Mr. Schramblin finally calmed down and started to tell what happened. It seems he was locking the rear door, like always, when someone came up from behind and stuck a gun in the back of his neck and told him to hand over the bag. Mr. Schramblin couldn't see who it was. The robber told him to start walking towards the parking lot and not to look back or he'd shoot and so would his partner.

Lieutenant Lomax wanted to know if Mr. Schramblin saw the other man, but Mr. Schramblin said all he knew was what he heard the robber say.

Then Lieutenant Lomax wanted to know what the man's voice was like and Mr. Schramblin said the man sounded as if he were talking through a Halloween mask—his voice was muffled, sort of.

You know, Harry, I kind of felt sorry for Mr. Schramblin at that point. He looked sort of sad—like he'd lost everything he owned and with no hope of ever getting any of it back.

That's all there was to it, Harry. Lieutenant Lomax snapped his book shut in a resigned sort of way and said he'd take another look around. Then Mr. Schramblin suddenly said, "I remember something," and ran back into the supply room. The Lieutenant followed him and they stayed there a couple of minutes. Then the Lieutenant came out and told us all to get back

to our counters and he opened the front doors.

What, Harry? No, I don't think it was anything. The cops didn't act like they'd found out anything new. No, Harry, they haven't got a thing to go on—no description, not a clue. They don't know if the robber was tall or short, fat or thin, or even if there was two of them.

Harry, isn't that the front door? Answer it, will you? I just can't move a muscle.

Lieutenant Lomax? Well, yes, Harry, have him come in. Lieutenant, this is my husband, Harry. Lieutenant, I thought I answered all your questions today at the store. I don't know what I could add to what I already said.

Did I ever bring things home from the store? Well, sure, we get a ten per cent discount but after all how many apple corers and egg-beaters do I need? Now if it were a dress shop, that would be different.

Did Mr. Schramblin ever give me anything to take home? Lieutenant, you've got to be kidding. Mr. Schramblin wouldn't give anybody the—oh, yes, there was one thing—a bottle of after-shaving lotion. It was a new line we were trying out. The customers started screaming about it and returned it —every single bottle. They said it stank but, what the heck, I brought it home anyway and gave it—

Mind if you look around? You mean you *have* looked around? Were here this afternoon while there was no one in the house? Look here, have you got a warrant, Lieutenant?

What's that? You found it on our bathroom shelf? Yes, that's the lotion I brought home. Lieutenant, are you trying to say that the man who robbed Mr. Schramblin used that shaving lotion—*that* was what Mr. Schramblin remembered?

Harry, I guess I was right after all. Like I said, it wasn't a bit like television. On television the schnook who's guilty never turns out to be your very own husband.

★★★★★

FIRST REVIEW OF *THE QUINTESSENCE OF QUEEN*

By *James Sandoe*

Anthony Boucher's exemplary introduction is at once apologia and review for THE QUINTESSENCE OF QUEEN (Random House, $5.95) a volume extraordinary in itself and testimony to the extraordinary accomplishment of Ellery Queen and "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine." It was Boucher's challenge to select thirty of the stories to which EQMM awarded prizes during its first twelve years of publication (it is now a hardy 22 years old) and the consequence is a book as rich and as entertaining as a book can be. Much more seriously it is testimony to that superlative editorial acumen which through half a lifetime has made EQMM indispensable to any one interested in mystery and suspense. Even this selective volume marks the range of mystery at its best from William Faulkner and Roy Vickers to such splendid companions as John Dickson Carr, Charlotte Armstrong and Helen McCloy. As a volume it is no substitute for the full backfiles of EQMM but elegant a selection as it is, it is already indispensable.

—*New York Herald Tribune*

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **BEN HECHT**

TITLE: ***Miracle of the Fifteen Murderers***

TYPE: Medical Mystery

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: During World War II

COMMENTS: *The fifteen murderers of The X Club were the medical peerage of our time. Their meetings were always held in absolute secrecy, behind locked doors, and they revealed the most perfect of "perfect crimes"; but in these revelations lay one of the hopes for a better world.*

THERE IS ALWAYS AN AURA OF mystery to the conclaves of medical men. One may wonder whether the secrecy with which the fraternity surrounds its gathering is designed to keep the layman from discovering how much it knows or how much it doesn't know. Either knowledge would be unnerving to that immemorial guinea pig who submits himself to the abracadabras of chemicals, scalpels, and incantations under the delusion he is being cured rather than explored.

Among the most mysterious of medical get-togethers in this generation have been those held in New York City by a group of eminent doctors calling themselves The X Club. Every three months this little band of healers have hied them to the Walton Hotel overlooking the East River and, behind locked doors and beyond the eye of even medical journalism, engaged themselves in unknown emprise lasting till dawn.

What the devil had been going on in these conclaves for twenty years no one knew, not even the ubiquitous head of the American Medical Association, nor yet any of the colleagues, wives, friends, or dependents of The X Club's members. The talent for secrecy is highly developed among doctors who,

even with nothing to conceal, are often as close mouthed as old-fashioned bomb throwers on their way to a rendezvous.

How then do I know the story of these long-guarded sessions? The answer is—the war. The war has put an end to them, as it has to nearly all mysteries other than its own. The world, engaged in re-examining its manners and its soul, has closed the door on minor adventure. Nine of the fifteen medical sages who comprised The X Club are in uniform and preside over combat zone hospitals. Deficiencies of age and health have kept the others at home—with increased labors.

"Considering that we have disbanded," Dr. Alex Hume said to me at dinner one evening, "and that it is unlikely we shall ever assemble again, I see no reason for preserving our secret. Yours is a childish and romantic mind and may be revolted by the story I tell you. You will undoubtedly translate the whole thing into some sort of diabolical tale and miss the deep human and scientific import of The X Club. But I am not the one to reform the art of fiction, which must substitute sentimentality for truth and Cinderella for Galileo."

And so on. I will skip the rest of my friend's all-knowing prelude. You may have read Dr. Hume's various books, dealing with horseplay of the subconscious. If you have, you know this bald-headed master mind well enough. If not, take my word for it he is a genius.

There is nobody I know more adept at prancing around in the solar plexus swamps out of which most of the world's incompetence and confusion appear to rise. He has, too, if there is any doubt about his great talent, the sneer and chuckle which are the war whoop of the super-psychologist. His face is round and his mouth is pursed in a chronic grimace of disbelief and contradiction. You can't help such an expression once you have discovered what a scurvy and detestable morass is the soul of man. Like most subterranean workers, my friend is almost as blind as a bat behind his heavy glasses. And like many leading psychiatrists, he favors the short and balloon-like physique of Napoleon.

The last dramatic meeting of The X Club was held on a rainy March night. Despite the hostile weather, all fifteen of its members attended, for there was an added lure to this gathering. A new member was to be inducted into the society.

Dr. Hume was assigned to prepare the neophyte for his debut. And it was in the wake of the round-faced soul fixer that Dr. Samuel Warner entered the sanctum of The X Club.

Dr. Warner was unusually young for a medical genius—that is, a recognized one. And he had never received a fuller recognition of his

wizardry with saw, axe, and punch hole than his election as a member of The X Club. For the fourteen older men who had invited him to be one of them were leaders in their various fields. They were the medical peerage.

This does not mean necessarily that any layman had ever heard of them. Eminence in the medical profession is as showy at best as a sprig of edelweiss on a mountain top. The war, which offers its magic billboards for the vanities of small souls and transmutes the hunger for publicity into sacrificial and patriotic ardors, has not yet disturbed the anonymity of the great medicos. They have moved their bushels to the front lines and are busy under them spreading their learning among the wounded.

The new member was a tense and good-looking man with the fever of hard work glowing in his steady dark eyes. His wide mouth smiled quickly and abstractedly, as is often the case with surgeons who train their reactions not to interfere with their concentration.

Having exchanged greetings with the eminent club members, who included half of his living medical heroes, Dr. Warner seated himself in a corner and quietly refused a highball, a cocktail, and a slug of brandy. His face remained tense, his athletic body straight in its chair as if it were poised for a sprint rather than a meeting.

At nine o'clock Dr. William Tick ordered an end to all the guzzling and declared the fifty-third meeting of The X Club in session. The venerable diagnostician placed himself behind a table at the end of the ornate hotel room and glared at the group ranged in front of him.

Dr. Tick had divided his seventy-five years equally between practicing the art of medicine and doing his best to stamp it out—such, at least, was the impression of the thousands of students who had been submitted to his irascible guidance. As Professor of Internal Medicine at a great Eastern medical school, Dr. Tick had favored the education-by-insult theory of pedagogy. There were eminent doctors who still winced when they recalled some of old bilious-eyed, arthritic, stooped Tick's appraisals of their budding talents, and who still shuddered at the memory of his medical philosophy.

"Medicine," Dr. Tick had confided to flock after flock of students, "is a noble dream and at the same time the most ancient expression of error and idiocy known to man. Solving the mysteries of heaven has not given birth to as many abortive findings as has the quest into the mysteries of the human body. When you think of yourselves as scientists, I want you always to remember that everything you learn from me will probably be regarded tomorrow as the naive confusions of a pack of medical aborigines. Despite all our toil and pro-

gress the art of medicine still falls somewhere between trout casting and spook writing."

"There are two handicaps to the practice of medicine," Tick had repeated tenaciously through forty years of teaching. "The first is the eternal charlatanism of the patient who is full of fake diseases and phantom agonies. The second is the basic incompetence of the human mind, medical or otherwise, to observe without prejudice, acquire information without becoming too smug to use it intelligently, and most of all, to apply its wisdom without vanity."

From behind his table Old Tick's eyes glared at the present group of "incompetents" until a full classroom silence had arrived, and then turned to the tense, good-looking face of Dr. Warner.

"We have a new medical genius with us tonight," he began, "one I well remember in his pre-wizard days. A hyperthyroid with kidney disfunction indicated. But not without a trace of talent. For your benefit, Sam, I will state the meaning and purpose of our organization."

"I have already done that," said Dr. Hume, "rather thoroughly."

"Dr. Hume's explanations to you," Tick continued coldly, "if they are of a kind with his printed works, have most certainly left you dazed if not dazzled."

"I understood him quite well," Warner said.

"Nonsense," Old Tick said. "You always had a soft spot for psychiatry and I always warned you against it. Psychiatry is a plot against medicine."

Dr. Hume smiled archly at this.

"You will allow me," Tick went on, "to clarify whatever the learned Hume has been trying to tell you."

"Well, if you want to waste time." The new member smiled nervously and mopped his neck with a handkerchief.

Dr. Frank Rosson, the portly and distinguished gynecologist, chuckled. "Tick's going good tonight," he whispered to Hume.

"Senility inflamed by sadism," said Hume.

"Dr. Warner," the pedagogue continued, "the members of The X Club have a single and interesting purpose in their meeting. They come together every three months to confess to some murder any of them may have committed since our last assembly.

"I am referring, of course, to medical murder. Although it would be a relief to hear any one of us confess to a murder performed out of passion rather than stupidity. Indeed, Dr. Warner, if you have killed a wife or polished off an uncle recently and would care to unbosom yourself, we will listen respectfuly. It is understood that nothing you say will be brought to the police or the A.M.A."

Old Tick's eyes paused to study the growing tension in the new member's face.

"I am sure you have not slain any of your relatives," he sighed, "or that you will ever do so except in the line of duty. The learned Hume," he went on, "has undoubtedly explained these forums to you on the psychiatric basis that confession is good for the soul. This is nonsense. We are not here to ease our souls but to improve them. Our real purpose is scientific. Since we dare not admit our mistakes to the public and since we are too great and learned to be criticized by the untutored laity and since such inhuman perfection as that to which we pretend is not good for our weak and human natures, we have formed this society. It is the only medical organization in the world where the members boast only of their mistakes.

"And now"—Tick beamed on the neophyte—"allow me to define what we consider a real, fine professional murder. It is the killing of a human being who has trustingly placed himself in a doctor's hands. Mind you, the death of a patient does not in itself spell murder. We are concerned only with those cases in which the doctor by a wrong diagnosis or by demonstrably wrong medication or operative procedure has killed off a patient who, without the aforesaid doctor's attention, would have continued to live and prosper."

"Hume explained all this to me." the new member muttered impatiently and then raised his voice. "I appreciate that this is my first meeting and that I might learn more from my distinguished colleagues by listening than by talking. But I have something rather important to say."

"A murder?" Tick asked.

"Yes," said the new member.

"Very good," he said. "We shall be glad to listen to you. But we have several murderers in the docket ahead of you."

The new member was silent and remained sitting bolt-upright in his chair. It was at this point that several, including Hume, noticed there was something more than stage fright in the young surgeon's tension. The certainty filled the room that Sam Warner had come to his first meeting of The X Club with something violent and mysterious boiling in him.

Dr. Philip Kurtiff, the eminent neurologist, put his hand on Warner's arm and said quietly, "There's no reason to feel badly about anything you're going to tell us. We're all pretty good medical men and we've all done worse—whatever it is."

"If you please," Old Tick demanded, "we will have silence. This is not a sanatorium for doctors with guilt complexes. It is a clinic for error. And we will continue to conduct it in an orderly, scientific fashion. If you want to hold Sam Warner's hand, Kurtiff, that's your privilege. But do it in silence."

He beamed suddenly at the new member.

"I confess," he went on, "that I'm as curious as anybody to hear how so great a know-it-all as our young friend Dr. Warner could have killed off one of his customers. But our curiosity will have to wait. Since five of you were absent from our last gathering, I think that the confessions of Dr. James Sweeney should be repeated for your benefit."

Dr. Sweeney stood up and turned his lugubrious face and shining eyes to the five absentees.

"Well," he said in his preoccupied monotone, "I told it once, but I'll tell it again. I sent a patient to my X-ray room to have a fluoroscopy done. My assistant gave him a barium meal to drink and put him under the fluoroscope. I walked in a minute later and when I saw the patient under the ray I observed to my assistant, Dr. Kroch, that it was amazing and that I had never seen anything like it. Kroch was too overcome to bear me out. What I saw was that the patient's entire gastro-intestinal tract from the esophagus down was apparently made out of stone. And as I studied this phenomenon I noticed it was becoming clearer and sharper. The most disturbing factor in the situation was that we both knew there was nothing to be done. Dr. Kroch, in fact, showed definite signs of hysteria. Even while we were studying him the patient showed symptoms of death. Shortly afterward he became moribund and fell to the floor."

"Well, I'll be damned," several of the absentees cried in unison, Dr. Kurtiff adding, "What the hell was it?"

"It was simple," said Sweeney. "The bottom of the glass out of which the patient had drunk his barium meal was caked solid. We had filled him up with plaster of Paris. I fancy the pressure caused an instantaneous coronary attack."

"Good Lord!" the new member said. "How did it get into the glass?"

"What, if anything, was the matter with the patient before he adventured into your office?" Dr. Kurtiff inquired.

"The autopsy revealed chiefly a solidified gastro-intestinal tract," said Sweeney. "But I think from several indications that there may have been a tendency to pyloric spasm which caused the belching for which he was referred to me."

"A rather literary murder," said Old Tick. "A sort of Pygmalion in reverse."

The old professor paused and fastened his red-rimmed eyes on Warner.

"By the way, before we proceed," he said, "I think it is time to tell you the full name of our club. Our full name is The X-Marks-the-Spot Club. We prefer, of course, to use the abbreviated title as being a bit more social-sounding."

"Of course," said the new member, whose face now appeared to be getting redder.

"And now," announced Old Tick, consulting a scribbled piece of paper, "our first case on tonight's docket will be Dr. Wendell Davis."

There was silence as the elegant stomach specialist stood up. Davis was a doctor who took his manner as seriously as his medicine. Tall, solidly built, gray-haired and beautifully barbered, his face was without expression—a large, pink mask that no patient, however ill and agonized, had ever seen disturbed.

"I was called late last summer to the home of a workingman," he began. "Senator Bell had given a picnic for some of his poorer constituency. As a result of this event, the three children of a steamfitter named Horowitz were brought down with food poisoning. They had overeaten at the picnic. The Senator, as host, felt responsible, and I went to the Horowitz home at his earnest solicitation. I found two of the children very sick and vomiting considerably. They were nine and eleven. The mother gave me a list of the various foods all three of them had eaten. It was staggering. I gave them a good dose of castor oil.

"The third child, aged seven, was not as ill as the other two. He looked pale, had a slight fever, felt some nausea—but was not vomiting. It seemed obvious that he too was poisoned, but to a lesser degree. Accordingly I prescribed an equal dose of castor oil for the youngest child—just to be on the safe side.

"I was called by the father in the middle of the night. He was alarmed over the condition of the seven-year-old. He reported that the other two children were much improved. I told him not to worry, that the youngest had been a little late in developing food poisoning but would unquestionably be better in the morning, and that his cure was as certain as his sister's and brother's. When I hung up I felt quite pleased with myself for having anticipated the youngest one's condition and prescribed the castor oil prophylactically. I arrived at the Horowitz home at noon the next day and found the two older children practically recovered. The seven-year-old, however, appeared to be very sick indeed. They had been trying to reach me since breakfast. The child had 105° temperature. It was dehydrated, the eyes sunken and circled, the expression pinched, the nostrils dilated, the lips cyanotic, and the skin cold and clammy."

Dr. Davis paused. Dr. Milton Morris, the renowned lung specialist, spoke.

"It died within a few hours?" he asked.

Dr. Davis nodded.

"Well," Dr. Morris said quietly, "it seems pretty obvious. The child was suffering from acute appendi-

citis when you first saw it. The castor oil ruptured its appendix. By the time you got around to looking at it again, peritonitis had set in."

"Yes," said Dr. Davis slowly, "that's exactly what happened."

"Murder by castor oil," Old Tick cackled. "I have a memo from Dr. Kenneth Wood. Dr. Wood has the floor."

The noted Scotch surgeon, famed in his college days as an Olympic Games athlete, stood up. He was still a man of prowess, large-handed, heavy-shouldered, and with the purr of masculine strength in his soft voice.

"I don't know what kind of a murder you can call this," Dr. Wood smiled at his colleagues.

"Murder by butchery is the usual title," Tick said.

"No, I doubt that," Dr. Morris protested, "Ken's too skillful to cut off anybody's leg by mistake.

"I guess you'll have to call it just plain murder by stupidity," Dr. Wood said softly.

Old Tick cackled.

"If you'd paid a little more attention to diagnosis than to shot putting you wouldn't be killing off such hordes of patients," he said.

"This is my first report in three years," Wood answered modestly. "And I've been operating at the rate of four or five daily, including holidays."

"My dear Kenneth," Dr. Hume said, "every surgeon is entitled to one murder in three years. A phenomenal record, in fact—when you consider the temptations."

"Proceed with the crime."

"Well"—the strong-looking surgeon turned to his hospital colleague, the new member—"you know how it is with these acute gall bladders, Sam."

Warner nodded abstractedly.

Dr. Wood went on. "Brought in late at night. In extreme pain. I examined her. Found the pain in the right upper quadrant of the abdomen. It radiated to the back and right shoulder. Completely characteristic of gall bladder. I gave her opiates. They had no effect on her, which, as you know, backs up any gall bladder diagnosis. Opiates never touch the gall bladder."

"We know that," said the new member nervously.

"Excuse me," Dr. Wood smiled. "I want to get all the points down carefully. Well, I gave her some nitroglycerine to lessen the pain then. Her temperature was 101. By morning the pain was so severe that it seemed certain the gall bladder had perforated. I operated. There was nothing wrong with her damn gall bladder. She died an hour later."

"What did the autopsy show?" Dr. Sweeney asked.

"Wait a minute," Wood answered. "You're supposed to figure it out, aren't you? Come on—you tell me what was the matter with her."

"Did you take her history?" Dr. Kurtiff asked after a pause.

"No," Wood answered.

"Aha!" Tick snorted. "There you have it! Blind man's buff again."

"It was an emergency." Wood looked flushed. "And it seemed an obvious case. I've had hundreds of them."

"The facts seem to be as follows," Tick spoke up. "Dr. Wood murdered a woman because he misunderstood the source of a pain. We have, then, a very simple problem. What besides the gall bladder can produce the sort of pain the eminent surgeon has described?"

"Heart," Dr. Morris answered quickly.

"You're getting warm," said Wood.

"Before operating on anyone with so acute a pain and in the absence of any medical history," Tick went on, "I would most certainly have looked at the heart."

"Well, you'd have done right," said Wood quietly. "The autopsy showed an infraction of the descending branch of the right coronary artery."

"Murder by a sophomore," Old Tick pronounced wrathfully.

"The first and last," said Wood quietly. "There won't be any more heart-case mistakes in my hospital."

"Good, good," Old Tick said. "And now, gentlemen, the crimes reported thus far have been too infantile for discussion. We have learned nothing from them other than that science and stupidity go hand in hand, a fact already too well known to us. However, we have with us tonight a young but extremely talented wielder of the medical saws. And I can, from long acquaintance with this same gentleman, assure you that if he has done a murder it is bound to be what some of my female students would call 'a honey.' He has been sitting here for the last hour, fidgeting like a true criminal, sweating with guilt and a desire to tell all. Gentlemen, I give you our new and youngest culprit, Dr. Samuel Warner."

Dr. Warner faced his fourteen eminent colleagues with a sudden excitement in his manner. The older men regarded him quietly and with various degrees of irritation. They knew without further corroboration than his manner that this medico was full of untenable theories and half-baked medical discoveries. They had been full of such things themselves once. And they settled back to enjoy themselves.

There is nothing as pleasing to a graying medicine man as the opportunity of slapping a dunce cap on the young of science. Old Tick, surveying his colleagues, grinned. They had all acquired the look of pedagogues holding a switch behind their backs.

Dr. Warner mopped his neck with his wet handkerchief and smiled knowingly at the medical peerage. What he knew was that this same critical and suspicious at-

tention would have been offered him were he there to recite the tale of some miraculous cure rather than a murder.

"I'll give you this case in some detail," he said, "because I think it contains as interesting a problem as you can find in practice."

Dr. Rosson, the gynecologist, grunted, but said nothing.

"The patient was a young man, or rather a boy," Warner went on eagerly. "He was seventeen and amazingly talented. In fact, about the most remarkable young man I've ever met. He wrote poetry. That's how I happened to meet him. I read one of his poems in a magazine and, by God, it was so impressive I wrote him a letter."

Dr. Kurtiff frowned at this unmedical bahvior.

"Rhymed poetry?" Dr. Wood asked, with a wink at Old Tick.

"Yes," said Warner. "I read all his manuscripts. They were sort of revolutionary. His poetry was a cry against injustice. Every kind of injustice. Bitter and burning."

"Wait a minute," Dr. Rosson said. "The new member seems to have some misconception of our function. We are not a literary society, Warner."

"I know that," said Warner, working his jaw muscles and smiling lifelessly.

"And before you get started," Dr. Hume grinned, "no bragging. You can do your bragging at the annual surgeons' convention."

"Gentlemen," Warner said, "I have no intention of bragging. I'll stick to murder, I assure you. And as bad a one as you've ever heard."

"Good," Dr. Kurtiff said. "Go on. And take it easy and don't break down."

"I won't break down," Warner said. "Don't worry. Well, the patient was sick for two weeks before I was called."

"I thought you were his friend," Dr. Davis said.

"I was," Warner answered. "But he didn't believe in doctors."

"No faith in them, eh?" Old Tick cackled. "Brilliant boy."

"He was," said Warner eagerly. "I felt upset when I came and saw how sick he was. I had him moved to a hospital at once."

"Oh, a rich poet," Dr. Sweeney said.

"No," said Warner. "I paid his expenses. And I spent all the time I could with him. The sickness had started with a severe pain on the left side of the abdomen. He was going to call me but the pain subsided after three days, so the patient thought he was well. But it came back after two days and he began running a temperature. He developed diarrhea. There was pus and blood, but no amoeba or pathogenic bacteria when he finally sent for me. After the pathology reports I made a diagnosis of ulcerative colitis. The pain being on the left side ruled out the appendix. I put the patient on sulfaguanidin and

unconcentrated liver extract and gave him a high protein diet—chiefly milk. Despite this treatment and constant observation the patient got worse. He developed generalized abdominal tenderness, both direct and rebound, and rigidity of the entire left rectus muscle. After two weeks of careful treatment the patient died."

"And the autopsy showed you'd been wrong?" Dr. Wood asked.

"I didn't make an autopsy," said Warner. "The boy's parents had perfect faith in me. As did the boy. They both believed I was doing everything possible to save his life."

"Then how do you know you were wrong in your diagnosis?" Dr. Hume asked.

"By the simple fact," said Warner irritably, "that the patient died instead of being cured. When he died I knew I had killed him by a faulty diagnosis."

"A logical conclusion," said Dr. Sweeney. "Pointless medication is no alibi."

"Well, gentlemen," Old Tick cackled from behind his table, "our talented new member has obviously polished off a great poet and close personal friend. Indictments of his diagnosis are now in order."

But no one spoke. Doctors have a sense for things unseen and complications unstated. And nearly all the fourteen looking at Warner felt there was something hidden. The surgeon's tension, his elation and its overtone of mockery, convinced them there was something untold in the story of the dead poet. They approached the problem cautiously.

"How long ago did the patient die?" Dr. Rosson asked.

"Last Wednesday," said Warner. "Why?"

"What hospital?" asked Davis.

"Saint Michael's," said Warner.

"You say the parents had faith in you," said Kurtiff, "and still have. Yet you seem curiously worried about something. Has there been any inquiry by the police?"

"No," said Warner. "I committed the perfect crime. The police haven't even heard of it. And even my victim died full of gratitude." He beamed at the room. "Listen," he went on, "even you people may not be able to disprove my diagnosis."

This brash challenge irritated a number of the members.

"I don't think it will be very difficult to knock out your diagnosis," said Dr. Morris.

"There's a catch to it," said Wood slowly, his eyes boring at Warner.

"The only catch there is," said Warner quickly, "is the complexity of the case. You gentlemen evidently prefer the simpler malpractice type of crime, such as I've listened to tonight."

There was a pause, then Dr. Davis inquired in a soothing voice, "You described an acute onset of pain before the diarrhea, didn't you?"

"That's right," said Warner.

"Well," Davis continued coolly,

"the temporary relief of symptoms and their recurrence within a few days sounds superficially like ulcers—except for one point."

"I disagree," Dr. Sweeney said softly. "Dr. Warner's diagnosis is a piece of blundering stupidity. The symptoms he has presented have nothing to do with ulcerative colitis."

Warner flushed and his jaw muscles moved angrily.

"Would you mind backing up your insults with a bit of science?" he said.

"Very easily done," Sweeney answered calmly. "The late onset of diarrhea and fever you describe rules out ulcerative colitis in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. What do you think, Dr. Tick?"

"No ulcers," said Tick, his eyes studying Warner.

"You mentioned a general tenderness of the abdomen as one of the last symptoms," said Dr. Davis smoothly.

"That's right," said Warner.

"Well, if you have described the case accurately," Davis continued, "there is one obvious fact revealed. The general tenderness points to a peritonitis."

"How about a twisted gut?" Dr. Wood asked. "That could produce the symptoms described."

"No," said Dr. Rosson. "A vulvulus means gangrene and death in three days. Warner says he attended him for two weeks and that the patient was sick for two weeks before he was called. The length of the illness rules out intussusception, vulvulus, and intestinal tumor."

"There's one other thing," Dr. Morris said. "A left-sided appendix."

"That's out, too," Dr. Wood said quickly. "The first symptom of a left-sided appendix would not be the acute pain described by Warner."

"The only thing we have determined," said Dr. Sweeney, "is a perforation other than ulcer. Why not go on with that?"

"Yes," said Dr. Morris. "Ulcerative colitis is out of the question, considering the course taken by the disease. I'm sure we're dealing with another type of perforation."

"The next question," announced Old Tick, "is, what made the perforation?"

Dr. Warner mopped his face with his wet handkerchief and said softly, "I never thought of an object perforation."

"You should have," Dr. Kurtiff smiled.

"Come, come," Old Tick interrupted. "Let's not wander. What caused the perforation?"

"He was seventeen," Kurtiff answered, "and too old to be swallowing pins."

"Unless," said Dr. Hume, "he had a taste for pins. Did the patient want to live, Warner?"

"He wanted to live," said Warner grimly, "more than anybody I ever knew."

"I think we can ignore the suicide theory," said Dr. Kurtiff. "I am certain we are dealing with a perforation of the intestines and not of the subconscious."

"There you are, Warner," Old Tick said. "We've narrowed it down. The spreading tenderness you described means a spreading infection. The course taken by the disease means a perforation other than ulcerous. And a perforation of that type means an object swallowed. We have ruled out pins and chicken bones. Which leaves us with only one other normal guess."

"A fish bone," said Dr. Sweeney.

"Exactly," said Tick.

Warner stood listening tensely to the voices affirming the diagnosis. Tick delivered the verdict.

"I think we are all agreed," he said, "that Sam Warner killed his patient by treating him for ulcerative colitis when an operation removing an abscessed fish bone would have saved his life."

Warner moved quickly across the room to the closet where he had hung his hat and coat.

"Where you going?" Dr. Wood called after him. "We've just started the meeting."

Warner was putting on his coat and grinning.

"I haven't got much time," he said, "but I want to thank all of you for your diagnoses. You were right about there being a catch to the case. The catch is that my patient is *still alive!* I've been treating him for ulcerative colitis for two weeks and I realized this afternoon that I had wrongly diagnosed the case—and that he would be dead in twenty-four hours unless I could find out what really was the matter with him."

Warner was in the doorway, his eyes glittering.

"Thanks again, gentlemen, for the consultation and your diagnosis," he said. "It will enable me to save my patient's life."

A half hour later the members of The X Club stood grouped in one of the operating rooms of St. Michael's Hospital. They were different-looking men from those who had been playing a medical Halloween in the Walton Hotel. There is a change that comes over doctors when they face disease. The oldest and the weariest of them draw vigor from a crisis. The shamble leaves them and it is the straight back of the champion that enters the operating room. Confronting the problem of life and death, the tired, red-rimmed eyes become full of greatness and even beauty.

On the operating table lay the naked body of a Negro boy. Dr. Warner in his surgical whites stood over him, waiting. The anesthetist finally nodded. The dark skin had turned ashen and the fevered young Negro lay unconscious.

The fourteen members of The X Club watched Warner operate. Wood nodded approvingly at his

speed. Rosson cleared his throat to say something, but the swift-moving hands of the surgeon held him silent. No one spoke. The minutes passed. The nurses quietly handed instruments to the surgeon. Blood spattered their hands.

Fourteen great medical men stared hopefully at the pinched and unconscious face of a colored boy who had swallowed a fish bone. No king or pope ever lay in travail with more medical genius holding its breath around him.

Suddenly the perspiring surgeon raised something aloft in his gloved fingers.

"Wash this off," he muttered to the nurse, "and show it to the gentlemen."

He busied himself placing drains in the abscessed cavity and then powdered some sulfanilamide into the opened abdomen to kill the infection.

Old Tick stepped forward and took the object from the nurse's hand.

"A fish bone," he said.

The X Club gathered around it as if it were a treasure indescribable.

"The removal of this small object," Tick cackled softly, "will enable the patient to continue writing poetry denouncing the greeds and horrors of our world."

That, in effect, was the story Hume told me, plus the epilogue of the Negro poet's recovery three weeks later. We had long finished dinner and it was late night when we stepped into the war-dimmed streets of New York. The headlines on the newsstands had changed in size only. They were larger in honor of the larger slaughters they heralded.

Looking at them you could see the death-strewn wastes of battles. But another picture came to my mind—a picture that had in it the hope of a better world. It was the hospital room in which fifteen famed and learned heroes stood battling for the life of a Negro boy who had swallowed a fish bone.

a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**URSULA CURTISS**
TITLE:	***Tiger by the Tail***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Hugh Trainor
LOCALE:	New England
TIME:	1959
COMMENTS:	*A gripping story in which terror—yes, terror—lurks behind every word, every phrase, every thought . . . a story with "the subtle crawl of skin" in it . . .*

CONJURING. ALWAYS BEFORE, IN Hugh Trainor's mind, the term had been surrounded vaguely by witch doctors, drums, evil-faced little dolls. After that July, it brought up a sun-stilled country morning at a hospital.

The ivy-grown white building looked more like a home than a hospital—so he and Julia had said when they drove by it two days before on their way to the shore cottage they had rented for two weeks, leaving their house and three small children in the care of a housekeeper.

"Let's have a swim as soon as we get there, before this weather can change its mind," Julia had said as they neared the cottage.

But they didn't, quite. Towel over his shoulder, Trainor paused on the tiny porch to light a cigarette while Julia ran impatiently ahead. She had no time for the conspicuous sign at the top of the steps leading down to the beach: *CAUTION. SLIPPERY STEPS. PLEASE USE HANDRAIL.*

Trainor heard her sharp gasp, and then a single violent echo of weight on wood. When he got there she lay queerly twisted in the sand, stunned with pain and shock, face

stark against the yellow of her rubber cap. Julia had broken her back, or, according to the doctor at the hospital two hours later, that was what it amounted to.

When Trainor went in to see her, his heart gave an appalled bang at the sharp vixen face that turned on the pillow, eyes flaming at him like a caged eagle's, until he realized that there hadn't been a private room vacant and Julia's bed was on the other side of the drawn pink curtain.

He tiptoed around it, surprising a nurse in the act of leaving. Julia was asleep. She looked broken and punished, the bones of her face thrusting against the skin, as though the unfelt pain was taking its toll in some secret way.

On the other side of the curtain, the vixen's voice said demandingly, "That your wife?"

"Yes."

"Pretty bad shape," the vixen remarked.

Trainor could have struck her, even though his ear recognized the accents of the professional ghoul. She couldn't have been more than 35 or so, but she had false teeth which gave an aggressive clash to everything she uttered. And perhaps she wasn't even a ghoul; the sharp face, the flatness of the body under the hospital spread, the cynical eyes could very well be reflections of her own pain.

Trainor said temperately, "Not too bad, according to the doctor," and she summed up all doctors and husbands with a look of pitying scorn. Trainor had left . . .

The doctor had said Julia would be drowsy that night, and she was. The next morning her eyes were clear; she had put on lipstick and, with the nurse's help, tied back her shiny taupe-colored hair with a ribbon.

Trainor could not put a finger on what had shocked him about her appearance, just as he could never have defined what gave her face its peculiar and head-turning charm. Was it the faintly sculptured look about her eyelids, the tiny curl of her mouth corners, the spirit of which she had an almost daunting amount?

Whatever it was, it was missing. She said in a flat voice, "It's not as bad as it looks, really, but there goes your vacation. I could kick myself."

"Think so?" said Trainor, and then, "I haven't found a library yet, but I brought you some magazines."

Julia's finger strayed to the top of the pile and dropped away. She said, "Maybe it's lying in this position but I don't feel particularly like reading. Mrs. Emilio could probably use some of these."

"Mrs. Emilio sure could," said the voice from around the curtain, and Trainor left his chair and took her the magazines. He had a depressed feeling that she would listen to every word they said anyway,

and an even more depressed feeling that they wouldn't say anything the whole hospital couldn't hear. Julia was listless as well as remote—a hangover from the drugs? Physical shock, or the subtler shock to her confidence?

She said when he came back, "I hope you didn't give up the cottage."

"Of course I did—it's over an hour's drive from here."

"But you paid the whole two weeks," said Julia, with her first glimmering of reaction.

"They settled for half, and it doesn't matter anyway. I've taken a room within walking distance of here."

The normal Julia, fascinated with people and places, would have asked instantly, "Where? Who with? What's it like?" But instead she said without interest, "I suppose it is easier for you, not having to drive back and forth. But what a way to spend . . ."

Her voice would have trailed off even if the nurse had not brought her breakfast just then, Trainor thought. While Julia fiddled with scrambled eggs, looked blankly at her toast, and sipped at the coffee she usually drained with zest, he watched her with a deepening anxiety. If she would only complain about the food, or make one of her indescribable faces in the direction of Mrs. Emilio's bed; if she would only launch into a spirited attack about being wakened at dawn, as she must have been, to be washed and thermometered and then left to wait interminably for breakfast and morning visiting hours . . .

But she did not, and the docility frightened him almost as much as the injury had.

Beyond the dividing curtain Mrs. Emilio's visitors had arrived in a babble of greetings, a scraping of chairs, a final settling of feet. They were a man and woman, their voices hoarse and vivid, pointing up Julia's—not boredom, because boredom was a positive thing—total lack of interest. She didn't give Trainor the rapt look he expected; instead, her gaze moved absently away and she asked him for a cigarette.

He said as he lit it, "I called Mrs. Castle in case she tried to get us at the cottage. The kids are fine, and it seems we have a pet toad to look forward to."

Julia smiled flickeringly, and he was encouraged.

"They're currently on the trail of some garbage to put out to catch flies for the toad, but Mrs. Castle said nothing doing."

"Killjoy," said Julia, but the brief spark had gone out.

There couldn't be any damage to her nervous system, or the doctor would have told him. Was it reaction to the terrifying fall, some unfaced fear about getting on her feet again, an instinctive recoil from even mental effort? Or simply a natural depression at having their

long-awaited vacation spoiled. If there was only something to distract her mind.

Unbidden, but unerring after eight years of marriage to Julia, Trainor's own mind supplied him with the something.

He said very casually to Julia's window-gazing face and aimlessly plucking forefinger, "I've landed with a queer pair of birds." His conscience smote him, but not very hard. "More than queer, if you ask me."

It was as simple as that. In bird-twittered sunlight, without witch doctors or drums or evil-faced little dolls, the thing was done.

Hearteningly, in the second before he bent to kiss her goodbye Julia's glance was wakened and thoughtful . . .

Trainor went swimming, feeling callous about it, and lunched on steamed clams and cold beer at a small waterside restaurant. Any smallest contrition he felt on behalf of the Kingsleys he put instantly out of his head. They would never know they had been presented to Julia like a tangle of wool to be unraveled. Julia would start to puzzle alertly over the problem, and everybody would benefit.

He telephoned the hospital after lunch and found that Julia would be having x-rays during the afternoon visiting hour, which left the day suddenly open. His small room at the top of the Kingsleys' maple-darkened house held no appeal. In the end he took himself to an air-conditioned horror movie.

The director, he found himself thinking in the popcorn-crunching dark, had none of Julia's subtlety in this direction. The villains here were forthright, and everybody knew at a glance that these waxen, stiffly-walking characters were not the best of citizens. Julia's villains, on the contrary, were always sterling members of society.

When he reached the hospital the warm night was black. Julia was better, and his heart lifted at once. The indefinable quality was back, the thing that made people turn to look at her; it was as though she had come out from under an eclipse.

She said, "It's not as bad as they thought, and the doctor thinks I'll be able to go home in a week. I'll have to wear some sort of contraption at first, and we'll have to keep Mrs. Castle on for a while . . . but what about these people you're with? What's their name?"

"Kingsley."

"How did you happen to land there?"

And she was back. She had been gone, but she was back.

Trainor kept his elation to himself. He explained that as there was no hotel most of the houses in the neighborhood of the hospital had a room or rooms to rent; he had been to five, all bespoken by relatives of patients, before a woman told him

to try the Kingsleys. "They don't rent as a rule, but they have the room and I'm sure they wouldn't turn you away under the circumstances. I'm Mrs. Stuart—tell Mrs. Kingsley I gave you her name."

Trainor would certainly not have got in without that talisman. The house Mrs. Stuart had indicated was set back from the street, tall and white, its inelegant lines, in a landscape full of graceful houses, partly concealed by maples and pines.

The woman who opened the door at his ring was prepared to be firm; Trainor could see her gathering breath for it. He said at once and disarmingly, "Blame Mrs. Stuart, she sent me here," and after a considering moment the door opened wider.

Mrs. Kingsley was disconcerting in every respect. She was perhaps 60, short, heavy, and shapeless, but she had an air of hauteur in a faded housedress and slippers. Her face was baggy and wrinkled inside its short, sparse lavender hair, but there again a pair of very pale, shrewd, green eyes belied the countrywoman appearance. Her voice was the most startling thing of all —alto, almost aggressively educated, and set at the next-to-breaking pitch in which accomplished singers speak a song rather than sing it.

She listened attentively to the tale of Julia's misfortune, although her gaze had long since summed Trainor up and decided. She said when he had finished, "You poor young man. Of course I'll have to ask Mr. Kingsley, so if you'll excuse me for just a minute . . ."

Mrs. Kingsley said a little later as she led the way up the stairs, "You may not like the room at all, Mr. Trainor. It's a converted attic —" they were on a second and shorter flight of stairs now, and she had begun to puff "—and there's no use saying you won't get the heat under the roof, because you will. That's why we don't usually consider it a room to rent, and then too—" she had opened a door now, and preceded Trainor inside with an odd air of challenge "—it was our boy's."

Something about her tone precluded any kind of polite inquiry, and Trainor took refuge in an attentive turning-around inspection of the small steep-ceilinged room. There was only one window, letting in leafy light on a bed and bureau and straight chair. A microscope stood on the bureau top— "I'd rather you didn't touch it—you see it's focused just so," said Mrs. Kingsley firmly—and a camp banner and baseball glove hung limply from one wall.

The sun seethed down from the roof.

"Twenty dollars a week," Mrs. Kingsley said at length, and managed to combine firmness, apology, and scorn for the $20 all in one breath.

"Done," said Trainor. He regret-

ted it faintly even as he produced his wallet. The room was small and hot and hung pervasively with memories; but he was tired and anxious to have a base of operations . . .

Julia listened with wide attentive eyes. These were malefactors after her own heart, quiet people, immensely cunning, who paid their taxes and water bills promptly, and probably belonged to civic organizations. "What does Mr. Kingsley do?"

"He's a retired C.P.A., I gather, gone into real estate. There's a discreet sign on the lawn, behind several pines."

"And what makes you think . . .?"

"Ah," said Trainor deeply. He had been expecting this, and had thought of a number of dramatic peculiarities with which to endow Kingsley; but he fell back on a suddenly-remembered truth. "For one thing, he drove up in the small hours of the morning with his headlights off. He could hardly have been showing houses at about three a.m., and why no headlights?"

"Because he's afraid of his wife," said Julia dampeningly. "He'd been playing poker or having a few drinks with some old cronies, and hoped to sneak in."

"No, because they had a long talk after he came in. They're not under me—there's an empty room there," Trainor's brow wrinkled briefly; "but Mrs. Kingsley has a carrying voice and I'd have heard any kind of argument. She was obviously up and expecting him. Anyway, he went downstairs again afterward. It must have been three-thirty or so."

"And when did he come up?"

"I fell asleep."

"Idiot," said Julia tenderly. "I wouldn't have fallen asleep. I'd have been up there chafing my wrists or slapping my cheeks as the case might be. What about this boy she mentioned? Is he dead, do you suppose?"

Trainor thought back to the challenging, oddly pitched voice and frowned again. "I'd think yes from the way she spoke, but the fact that they keep that room as it is . . ."

"He'd be a good thirty at least by now," said Julia practically, "and hardly interested in the baseball bat or whatever it is, or the microscope. If there were really anything going on, any middle-of-the-night business they couldn't afford to have anyone see, they wouldn't have let you have the room in the first place."

"They'd have had to unless they wanted to call attention to themselves," said Trainor without conscious thought.

"Odd that they put the boy at the top of the house when there's a vacant room on the second floor—or is it? No," said Julia, obviously to herself, "it isn't. Boys like rooms like that . . ."

On the other side of the pink curtain Mrs. Emilio's visitors arrived with cries of greeting and cracklings of wrapping paper. Trainor's horrified ear presented him suddenly with the memory of a complete and attentive silence before that. It was one thing to spin tales for Julia's entertainment; it was another to spread gossip and suspicion about people who lived in the town.

Julia's grimace showed him she had thought of the same thing; hastily, although their voices were now covered, she began to talk about something else. But she was still thinking about the Kingsleys when Trainor left—he knew that bright absorbed look. Had he, he wondered half-amusedly, a tiger by the tail?

Guilt pursued him down the hill and through the warm night to the Kingsley house. A long glistening car was parked in front of it, and the lawn was lavish with light.

Trainor would hardly have known Mrs. Kingsley in smart black and white silk, her wayward lavender hair waved and subdued under a small white hat. He was introduced to a pleasant tanned woman and her genial, gray-haired husband; he half expected an introduction to the tall white-coated military-looking man with them until he realized that it was Kingsley, shorn of his shamble and his gardening clothes. They were going out for an evening of bridge. Mrs. Kingsley left a single lamp burning in the living room and then they were gone, the Kingsleys' car following the other car.

Trainor mounted the stairs to his room and undressed. The Kingsleys certainly had nothing to hide, or they would not have left him, a total stranger, in sole possession of the house. The thought passed seriously through Trainor's mind until he recognized it for one of Julia's and threw it out with irritation.

It came back. He realized that, law-abiding though he was, he had a strong sense of privacy and he would have hesitated to leave a stranger at liberty in his own home.

On the heels of that came the thought that if he *had* something to hide, and wanted to test the stranger, he would do exactly as the Kingsleys had done: drive trustingly away, allow time for temptation to take hold—and then drive quietly back.

Knowing himself to be ridiculous—he would be as bad as Julia soon—Trainor turned off his light. The street was mainly an access to the hospital, and quiet at this hour; the passing cars were infrequent and noticeable. It was perhaps 15 minutes before his suspicions became truth. Then, silent as a cruising shark, the shadow-gray Chrysler, only its parking lights on, returned.

The passenger window rolled down and Mrs. Kingsley's large face emerged, a pale blur tilted up

toward the window of Trainor's room. He was instantly back from the sill in a movement which, he realized later, was like the instinctive ducking from a flung stone.

Moments went by before he took a craning step forward. As soundlessly as it had crept up, the Chrysler was slipping away; again and unpleasantly, Trainor was reminded of something searching expertly for prey. He pulled down the shade, turned on the light, and got dressed.

In the morning Mrs. Kingsley had reverted. She was in a shapeless old cotton dress and carpet slippers, her sparse hair disarranged, when Trainor was leaving for the hospital.

"Good morning, Mr. Trainor, and it is a good one, isn't it? Did you sleep well? I hope we didn't disturb you—we had a little trouble with the car and got delayed."

"I didn't hear you at all," lied Trainor, "so your reputation is safe with me."

"It was two ten," said Mrs. Kingsley, looking at him with disconcerting clarity. "I wonder—" She put down the straw basket she carried and lifted from it a bunch of dew-wet, very pale pink roses, "I wonder if you would take these to your wife?"

Julia was abashed too, but said with an innocent air, "Did Mr. Kingsley come back late last night?"

"Yes. They both did."

"With the headlights off?"

"Yes."

"Hugh, if you're going to tell me that you fell asleep again—"

"I didn't." Trainor glanced with automatic caution under the pink curtain that divided the room. With a warning face at Julia he left out names.

"He went down to the cellar. I could see the light on the grass. She came right upstairs, and he came up about five minutes later."

"The cellar," said Julia, spellbound. Thoughts of an earthen floor, or newly laid concrete, drifted visibly across her face. "You don't suppose . . .?"

"No," said Trainor hastily. "You don't imagine he'd come home with a different one every night?"

"It might be," said Julia delicately, "in—you know—installments, so to speak."

The gentle sex, thought Trainor, mentally gaping. An arm here, this charming wife of his was thinking, a leg there, perhaps a bit of torso to come. "It's nothing like that—but I did find out something about the boy . . ."

Trainor could not have explained his own mixture of feelings after he had turned on the light and got dressed the night before. Shock was foremost, perhaps because of the stealthy return of the Kingsley's car, perhaps because they had followed his own thoughts with such uncanny precision.

In the wake of that came the outrage that arises from motives correctly suspected. They thought he would prowl around the house, did they? Furthermore, he hadn't a front-door key—Mrs. Kingsley had explained they were always in and it wouldn't be necessary—which meant that unless he left the house open to the night he was stuck here, without so much as a timetable to read.

Virtuously, Trainor told himself there might be an old magazine tucked away somewhere in the room, and in that case he would not have to go downstairs at all.

There was nothing on the closet shelf. The top bureau-drawer held a slingshot and a piece of petrified wood with a fading legend: "Souvenir of Arizona, 1945." In the second drawer—they ought not to have left it here if they didn't want it looked at—was a round leather studbox, torn in places, obviously a discard. Trainor opened it without a qualm and looked at a faded newspaper clipping.

The dateline was New Mexico, and the story was terse. "As an army helicopter hovered above Toros Peak today, hope grew fainter for a 16-year-old boy missing on the mountain since Thursday. Stephen Kingsley, son of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Kingsley, Oak Park Place, had gone on a lone camping trip with supplies for only 48 hours. According to search authorities, heavy rains and sharply falling temperatures have lessened the boy's chances for survival on the desolate peak.

"Police here are currently investigating the anonymous telephone call which informed Kingsley's parents the boy was hurt and the caller would lead them to him after $2,000 in small bills had been left in an agreed rendezvous. Mr. Kingsley told reporters he left the money and waited in vain for the message. Mrs. Harriet Kingsley, 49, collapsed and is under a doctor's care."

Trainor dropped the clipping back into the box with a feeling of finality. Small wonder the Kingsleys were suspicious after that cruel maneuver; small wonder that, all the way across the country, they had hung up the glove and the camp banner. Hope sprang eternal, and barring the recovery of their son's body, they would always leave that particular door open.

He was stretched on his bed in darkness, chastened, when a tiny detail came to nag at him. Once again, he turned on the light and opened the bureau drawers.

The slingshot and piece of petrified wood wore a faint, even coating of dust. The leather studbox was shiningly free of it. So—the conclusion came laboriously because there seemed so little point to it—the leather box with the clipping in it had been put there for Trainor to find . . .

"They want you to know about the boy," said Julia, "but they can't

bring themselves to talk about him . . .? No?"

There were so many arguments against that—chief among them, the fact that people so sensitive on the subject would never have rented that particular room—that Trainor only shook his head. The Kingsleys had obviously accepted the fact of their son's death or they would not have moved nearly 3,000 miles away from the scene of his disappearance—but then why, in showing him the room, had Mrs. Kingsley said, "It was our boy's"? Had she meant a comparable room in another house, or could grief and the unchangingly boyish possessions have deluded her into a belief that Stephen Kingsley had, in fact, once occupied the room?

Julia said recallingly, "Hugh," and he realized with surprise that he had stepped back a day in time, when she was so frighteningly withdrawn and the night outside the hospital had looked, because of a ceiling of green-gold leaves overhead, more like the jungle than safe, quiet New England.

Something else had happened in the interim. Mrs. Emilio had two visitors. Crackling went on, as of paper bags, and presently the pink curtain between the beds gave an imperative twitch.

"Here," said Mrs. Emilio's voice commandingly, and as neither woman could move in bed, Trainor poked his head around the curtain, said, "Thanks very much" to a man with a dark, disarming monkey-face, and accepted a small wax-papered square.

Unwrapped, it was a rissole of some sort. They talked about the children as they ate and it was not until Trainor stood up to leave that Julia said suddenly, "The thing to do is get into the cellar. If he goes down there after those trips, that's where it is."

"And I could always say," said Trainor dryly, "that I was passing the cellar window and thought I'd drop in."

Julia was unruffled. "She's a sociable soul, according to you, and if he even makes a pretense of being in the real estate business, he must be out sometimes. You could say you'd smelled smoke, or oil—"

"Or something fishy." Trainor bent to kiss her, and Julia reminded him in a murmur to give Mrs. Emilio the roses on his way out. She didn't glance at the arched and pearly heads. "All of them," she said.

There was a telephone booth in the downstairs lobby, and Trainor stopped on impulse and called Mrs. Castle. It was a lengthy, cops-and-robberish call, and he ought to have been faintly embarrassed about it but—so well had he done his original work—he was not.

There was some kind of theory that advised the puzzler to strip the puzzle down to the known facts, because whatever conclusion they pointed to, however unlikely, was

the true one. Trainor, walking down the hill from the hospital, concerned himself with this.

The central fact was that the Kingsleys wanted him to know not that they had had a son—Mrs. Kingsley had volunteered that before he even took the room—but what had happened to the boy.

Why, when they had never seen Trainor before and, after the space of a few days, would in all probability never see him again?

Try it subjectively instead of objectively. In this light the Kingsleys wanted to be established as the bereaved and cruelly tricked parents of a son. But as before, why? Trainor began to speculate, and forced himself back to known facts.

The Kingsleys did not rent rooms as a rule; the neighbor who had directed him there had been positive about that.

Although they had moved from the southwest to New England, they had hung in one small room—a room he had never been in—their son's boyish trophies. Again Trainor wondered why that did not strike him as pitiful but subtly unpleasant.

Twice to his knowledge their car had returned surreptitiously and late, only its parking lights to guide it. On the second occasion it had circled back to check up on Trainor: there could be no other explanation for that noiseless approach, that thrusting of Mrs. Kingsley's face up at his darkened window.

Those were the facts. Also a fact was that people who took pains to plant an impression usually did so for a very real reason—the reason being that the truth was a total variance with the appearance of truth.

Kidnaping—the suggestion that no parent is ever totally armored against—floated through Trainor's mind and vanished. It wasn't a tribute to the Kingsleys but a conviction that, in this close and gossipy neighborhood, it would be impractical. Some fringe of the notion lingered like a mosquito, however; there were innumerable histories of people warped by grief who made a life work of trying to make society pay for an individual loss.

Or else, thought Trainor, the Kingsleys were merely eccentric and that was the explanation.

The sun shone gently, shadows flowed over mown lawns, the Kingsleys could not possibly have turned into an evil pair simply because he had spun a mystery for Julia. And where had that horrifying notion come from?

Once again, he was obscurely relieved to find visitors at the Kingsleys', this time in a handsome dove-and-deep-gray station wagon. The front seat was occupied; a trim elderly woman dressed for golf was being handed into the back by a genial sports-coated man, leather-elbowed, who might have stepped out of a whiskey ad.

It took Trainor a moment to realize that he had just looked at the third aspect of the Kingsleys. They were not two identities, but six—the slippered housewife and the shambling gardener, the precisely groomed woman and the military man, the casual golfer and the tweedy country squire—and how many more?

Trainor reminded himself over his instant thump of shock that Julia, embroiled with the children, wearing a few badges of strawberry jam or most of the baby's bath water, could somehow disappear for half an hour and reappear looking as though she had never washed a dish or changed a diaper in her life.

But—and the difference was hard to define, even to himself—she had been Julia throughout, her gestures and bearing and whole identity unaltered by what she wore or what she was doing.

Whereas, near as he had been to them, intent though he was, he had not at first recognized either of the Kingsleys.

"I'm a golf widower today," said Kingsley pleasantly as the station wagon drove off. If his own plans had been changed by Trainor's appearance on the scene, there was no sign of it. The long rubbery face that had gazed morosely at the floor when Trainor had first seen it now sprang readily into attitudes of amiability; the tufty gray brows moved up and down as though controlled by invisible strings, imparting a keen and twinkling air to the cold gaze beneath. "How is Mrs. Trainor this morning?"

"Much better, thanks." They were sauntering up the walk now, entering the house. "As a matter of fact, the doctor thinks she'll be able to leave the hospital in about a week. Of course, she'll have to have help with the children just at first."

"Oh, of course. Three young children . . . keep her hopping, I imagine."

Was Kingsley very faintly British today?

"We thought," said Trainor, "that the children might be more easily managed—new interests and so forth—in a cottage or some place here. Would you have any summer rentals we could fit into? There'd be my wife and me and the children and a housekeeper . . ."

He ended up, as planned, in Kingsley's office on the other side of the small front hall. It was as tree-darkened as the living room, with desk and file cabinets suspended in gloom. There was a phone on the desk, and a memo pad and pen were neatly aligned on the blotter; but it was impossible to believe that many real-estate transactions went on here.

The files were genuine enough. With an air of recollection that suggested he hadn't looked at them in some time, Kingsley pursed his lips, meditated, drew out cards. "Most of the summer rentals are

gone, you understand, but occasionally there's a cancellation, or a tenant isn't satisfactory . . ."

Trainor found fault, apologetically, with everything listed. The place was too close to the water, too far from the water, there wasn't a porch, a back yard was absolutely essential for the children. The phone he kept staring at was as malevolently silent as though the wires had been cut.

"Well, that's it, I'm afraid," said Kingsley at last. "Unless—wait now, I have a few inactive files, people who had withdrawn their properties from the market . . ."

Where the devil was Mrs. Castle's call? Of course she was busy with the children—or she might have forgotten. She might not even have understood.

". . . and might reconsider," said Kingsley, standing, and the phone rang.

Trainor devoted himself to his cigarette. He didn't need to glance at Kingsley's face to measure the man's sharp interest; the whole room was taut with attention.

"Governor's Lodge Inn at twelve," repeated Kingsley, after an interval of listening. Trainor caught the automatic motion of the lifted wrist watch. "Yes indeed, Mrs. Dunnington. I have two properties in mind, and both have servants' quarters and stables. One has a view of the water that I think you'll—"

Mrs. Castle was playing her part nobly; she cut him off there. Kingsley said eagerly, "Until twelve, then. Thank you, Mrs. Dunnington."

He hung up and wrote busily. Trainor said with an immersed air, "On the whole, I think this three-bedroom place is the—"

"I wonder if you'll excuse me, Mr. Trainor?" Kingsley was already out from behind the desk, plucking cards from a file, pocketing them, adjusting his meticulous tie. "I have a chance to move a really large country estate here and I have—" nobody knew it better than Trainor "—over an hour's drive to make. I'll be free later this afternoon," he was at the door now, "and we can look at whatever properties you'd like to see."

"I could look at this place in the meantime," said Trainor idly. "Drive by it, see if it's what we'd be interested in."

Kingsley's eyes changed—or had a pine bough moved in front of a window, changing the light? "In that case," he said, glancing at his watch again and then very steadily at Trainor, "I'll just give them a ring to let them know you're coming. A little warning, you know."

Within three quarters of an hour Trainor was back. He was careful not to go too rapidly through Mrs. McGovern's bayside cottage, as Kingsley would check up, but he drove like the wind both ways. When he walked back into the house the mantel clock in the living room said 11:40.

He said loudly, "Mrs. Kingsley?" but the noticeable tick of the clock, a spaced drip from one of the kitchen faucets, were answers in themselves.

Trainor progressed to the kitchen, found the door to the cellar, closed it carefully behind him, and went down the stairs.

Dampness and coolness wrapped around him like a skin, along with the concrete-and-wood-and-oiled-rag fragrance common to cellars. Trainor resisted the temptation to pull an inviting light string and took a comprehensive if shadowy look around.

The cellar was square, except for the corner containing the oil burner, and very tidy. Along the wall to his right was a well-equipped workbench; Kingsley evidently did a lot of his own carpentry and repairs.

Directly ahead, under the small cobwebby window, were some files.

Something creaked, and Trainor froze involuntarily, staring at the ceiling. An old beam? An enterprising mouse? At this point Julia would have squirted a small stream of oil from a can she had foresightedly brought with her, managing to conceal it, or even chew it up and swallow it.

The sound was not repeated. Trainor crossed the concrete floor and pulled out file drawers, A to J, K to O, P to Z. The inactive files Kingsley had mentioned.

But how neat they were, how dustless, for records relegated to the cellar. Trainor took a second and closer look at A to J.

The cards weren't typed, like the listings in the office files, but carefully handwritten. Each card bore a name and an address and a number of symbols which Trainor stared at blankly. Typical of them was "Bright, Mr. and Mrs. Holton M., Worcester, d 16, 3/22/58, 1500" and "Fox, James K., Springfield, s 24, 7/12/59, 2500." Another card, beginning "Hissop, Mrs. Celeste," was crossed out indecipherably after that.

Trainor stood suddenly and transfixedly still—7/12/59 was only eight days ago.

Above him, on the peculiar knife-edge of sound that divides harshness from musicality, Mrs. Kingsley said, "Is that you, Mr. Trainor?"

What was there about this woman that even the dim shape of her face in darkness, and now the heavy ankles in wrinkled stockings and carpet slippers which were all he could see, sent an immediate and primitive alarm to the senses?

Trainor controlled his impulse to slam the file drawer shut and made himself say in an absent way, "Yes," and pull out another file drawer and bend and sniff. He said alertly over his shoulder, "Smell it?" and walked over to the oil burner.

"Smell what?" Mrs. Kingsley's slippers made soft shuffling noises on the stairs, a lisping sound on the concrete.

"Smoke," said Trainor, sniffing again like a beagle, turning at last to meet the icily pale green eyes. "At least, I could have sworn—"

"I don't smell anything," said Mrs. Kingsley slowly. Her gaze didn't flicker; it seemed to cut a cold straight path through the shadowy light. An elderly woman, heavy, slow-moving, sparse-haired, she was at this moment indescribably menacing. "Do you mean to say you smelled smoke in your room, Mr. Trainor?"

"No. When I came in just now. I'd been to look at a cottage your husband thought might suit us for the rest of the summer, and—" Trainor shrugged apologetically "—having had a fire in my house not so long ago I guess I smell smoke even when there isn't any. I'm sorry, I must have startled you, turning up down here."

"Oh, it was very kind of you," said Mrs. Kingsley. Something about her had relaxed very subtly. "If there had been a spark somewhere, and Mr. Kingsley and I both away—goodness, one doesn't dare think what might have happened."

She was bland again as they emerged from the stairs into the kitchen, and except for his body chemistry Trainor could almost have smiled at the suggestion that, only moments ago, she had constituted danger. "And how is Mrs. Trainor today" she asked.

"Much better, thanks . . ."

But she wasn't. Trainor arriving at the hospital on the dot of two o'clock found that they had changed Julia's cast and given her something to deaden the resulting pain, so that when he went in Mrs. Emilio held up an arm to warn him off. She conveyed in whispers that Julia was asleep and had better be left that way. Trainor tiptoed obediently around the curtain.

He wished he hadn't. Julia was sleeping, but in a tormented way: he could almost see the seethe of dreams inside her down-turned head. While he watched she flung out a restless hand, grasped at the bedclothes, and drew them close as though something she loved had almost escaped her and been recaptured just in time.

Trainor returned to the Kingsleys'. The Chrysler was back, Kingsley having reached the Governor's Lodge Inn to find the preplanned message that Mrs. Dunnington's car had broken down en route and she would have to make it another day.

Trainor did not go in. He got into his car and drove 20 miles to the nearest newspaper office. It was the Baysville *Weekly Courier,* but the masthead announced it served all the shore towns.

Things were dull at the *Courier* when Trainor arrived, and a pretty blonde college girl waved him to a table in the corner of the office and brought him the *Courier* for July 12.

Trainor had expected to have to

dig for any connection between James Fox of Springfield and July 12, but there it was on page 2, with a two-column headline over the furry indistinct picture of a young man in a private's uniform. The headline said, "Springfield Attorney Reveals Disappearance, Fears Accident to Son, 24."

S 24. Son, twenty-four? In that case D 16, noted on Kingsley's file card, was a 16-year-old daughter.

Trainor skipped rapidly through the newspaper account. James Fox Jr., son of—etc., etc., had borrowed the family car to take his girl to a movie. Engine trouble having developed on the way, he had left the girl in the car and started walking back to a garage he remembered passing about a mile behind. He had never reached the garage; somewhere along that stretch of heavily traveled highway he had dropped completely out of sight.

But not out of mind—not out of Kingsley's mind. Kingsley had neatly filed his name and address and date of disappearance, and followed that with figure, 2500.

$2,500?

The newspaper he was staring at dimmed suddenly for Trainor and became another chronicle of disappearance, this time a yellowed clipping. There was a figure here, too: on the instructions of an anonymous telephone caller, the Kingsleys had paid $2,000 for information that would lead them to their vanished son.

But that had been 14 years ago and nearly 3,000 miles away. And in any case—

The society editor blinked through her glasses and the pretty blonde came hurrying across the room when the man who had asked so quietly for a back issue pushed his chair back with jarring violence and walked out without a word.

It was close to 6:00 when Trainor parked in the Kingsleys' driveway, got out of the car, and walked scrutinizingly around it, kicking at a rear tire, bending to sight along the wheels as though he were worried about the alignment.

And there, at the back of the Kingsley garage that this view afforded him, were the newspapers he had thought he remembered from a chance glimpse on the day of his arrival. Stacks of them, neatly baled, secured not with twine but, from a random striking of light from a side window, wire.

He could hear the Kingsleys talking in the kitchen when he entered the house. ". . . dwarf dahlias," Mrs. Kingsley was saying, "for that bed under your office window." Kingsley only grunted. Mrs. Kingsley said pursuingly, "Sophia has a whole border of them, and she says . . ." and Trainor went on up to his room, shaken.

He wasn't shaken long. The subtle crawl of his skin drove him to the bureau drawers again, and al-

though he had half expected the studbox to be gone, it was still there. So were the mementoes in the drawer above it. Trainor stood there for a long time, staring, thinking, finally knowing . . .

"What?" repeated Julia at shortly after 8:00 that evening. "Hugh dear, one of us has been drinking, or—say it again."

Trainor repeated his question. "What did your brothers keep in their rooms at sixteen?"

Julia started to say something, glanced cautiously at his face, and stopped in thought. "You mean aside from laundry and unmade beds? Well, let's see, it's hard to . . . Oh, stolen signs, you know the kind. Cut-out girls they pretended to think were hilarious. Nick had a crush on a girl who had a crush on a football player, and he borrowed a set of barbells from somewhere and hid them under his bed for months. Bill—"

"No slingshots?" interrupted Trainor. "No baseball gloves or camp banners?"

Julia gazed at him in perplexity. "Hugh, you know yourself most boys that age would sooner be caught dead . . . oh." She had remembered his room at the Kingslys', hung with boyish trophies—but they weren't the trophies of a boy of 16. She said with scrupulous fairness, "If it had been a girl they might easily have kept a doll. That doesn't necessarily—"

"A doll, yes. But also her first dance program, or—" Because his own daughter was only nine months old, Trainor foundered there. The Hissop entry in Kingsley's cellar files slid darkly into his mind. *Finished,* said the black cancelling line run through the rest of the information. Dead, gone.

He said to Julia, "What I mean is that parents keeping up a sort of memorial wouldn't . . . freeze a child at well below the age he disappeared at, would they?"

The perturbation of her drug-bound dreams earlier that day touched Julia's face, dimming the bloom and the confidence. She said with a shudder, "I don't know. I wouldn't think so, but I'm nothnig to go by as I don't think I could do it at all."

The wet rustle of rain intruded briefly.

"I don't think the Kingsleys did it either," said Trainor.

The telephone summons he had heard from his room had obviously been for Kingsley, because a few minutes later Trainor watched him pause by the Chrysler, shuffle through cards he drew from his inside pocket, and drive away. He was clearly on his way to show a house or houses.

Mrs. Kingsley remained, and after that interlude in the cellar Trainor was sure she would not leave the house while he was in it. He showered and dressed, listening to

the first heavy plopping of raindrops on the maple leaves, and presently the sound of a horn in the street below.

A light-blue Cadillac stood there. While Trainor watched, the passenger window rolled down and a woman's voice called, "Hi. I wasn't sure you were home. Anything I can do for you downtown?"

Mrs. Kingsley came into view, sheltering her head with a newspaper. Her voice floated eerily from under it. "No, thanks, Alice, but come in, won't you?"

She reached the car and stood leaning in; it was evidently one of those can't-stay, won't-go situations. The raindrops thickened and quickened, and after a moment the ignition was switched off, the door opened invitingly, and Mrs. Kingsley got in and closed the door lightly behind her.

After one all-important pause, Trainor was out of his room and running down the stairs. Mrs. Kingsley would have heard the rush of his shower in the pipes; she couldn't know how rapidly he had dressed. If only she hadn't left something on the stove—

She hadn't. Trainor took the cellar stairs at a reckless pace, counting on the fact that most women lost track of the minutes in conversation. He needed not much more than a minute now that he knew what to look for. Bright, Fox, Hissop—he simply hadn't gone far enough into the files before.

And here it was, expected but inexpressibly shocking in black and white.

"Kingsley, Mr. and Mrs. R., Oak Park, N.M., s 16. 9/4/45, 2000."

Julia said in a whisper, "He wasn't their son?"

"I would bet," said Trainor grimly, "they aren't the Kingsleys. I would bet they're a pair of extortionists living on other people's grief. They don't even have to lift a finger—just read the papers and pounce."

Unconsciously, Julia grasped at something, anything, to resist the truth. "Then what were all these mysterious night trips?"

Trainor shrugged. "Telephone calls to victims, I imagine, from points a safe number of miles from here. All-night diners or gasoline stations . . . even if the call were traced it could never come back to the Kingsleys. And of course they had to keep picking up the money somewhere."

"But—" Julia was still stunned "—people would call the police right away, wouldn't they?"

"Not while there was a chance the tip was genuine. These weren't kidnapings, remember. How could a family be sure they wouldn't land a son or daughter in even deeper trouble by calling in the police? Besides, our friends were very careful. Nobody seems to have been tapped more than once."

"Still—" began Julia, and stopped.

Trainor could tell from her pallor that she was realizing how she herself would react if one of the children was missing and she were given a chance to buy information that would find him. She said after a moment, "Why all that business about decorating a boy's room? Why bring up disappearances at all by leaving that clipping in your room? It seems the very last thing they'd do, unless they're completely mad."

"I know," said Trainor slowly. "That's the thing I can't figure out. Except . . . the last man they fleeced was a lawyer. He might have kept his head more than the others; he might have told them that if he were tricked he had ways of tracking them down. And then I turned up out of the blue. What better argument, in case I or anyone else was suspicious, than that they'd lost a boy and been fleeced themselves? What looks more pathetic than an elderly couple furnishing a room for a boy who's obviously been dead for years?"

"Oh, God," said Julia softly, and Trainor knew from her evasive glance that she had begun to blaze with apprehension, that her attention had shot miles through the rainy night to her own sleeping children. "Hugh, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know," said Trainor. He suddenly felt tired. He shook off the lassitude with an effort, along with a feeling that the Kingsleys would defeat him in the end and go right on gardening and playing bridge and preying on the victims of disaster.

He said, "They're hard to get at. They've entrenched themselves here, and without actual proof we're just summer people making a nuisance as usual. God knows where the real Kingsleys are—abroad, I'd say, otherwise these people wouldn't have dared it. I suppose the thing to do is call Fox, as he's the latest victim, and hear what he has to say. And then try and convince the local police that the cellar file has nothing to do with real estate."

"Suppose they destroy the file, or burn what's in it and substitute a lot of other cards?"

"I got the camera out of the car," said Trainor, "and propped up a few of the cards and took flash shots." He could still remember his own wince at the two lavender-white bursts of light—visible from the street, through the little cellar window?—that were all he had dared take time for. "I don't know what I got, but the police can do wonders with—"

He had read about the blood draining from people's hearts, and thought it a figure of speech. It wasn't. A kind of automatic caution reasserted itself too late, and he glanced under the pink curtain that divided Julia from Mrs. Emilio.

A pair of thick wrinkle-stock-

inged ankles uncrossed themselves and a pair of sedate black oxford ties moved out of sight.

Mrs. Kingsley's ankles, Mrs. Kingsley's shoes.

Mrs. Kingsley had been there all the time.

Julia mustn't know. Trainor stood up in the thunder of his blood, all of it concentrated in his throat. He managed to glance at his watch, to say, "Oh, Lord, I told Mrs. Castle I'd call at 8:00 and it's nearly 8:30. Be right back . . ."

Mrs. Emilio's pain-sharp face turned on the pillow as he passed the foot of her bed. Distractedly, Trainor recalled a low nonstop murmur on the other side of the curtain. The murmur covering his voice from all but the fiercest concentration . . .

Trainor must have run to the other end of the corridor, because he ended up breathing fast at the floor nurse's discreetly lighted desk. He gestured at the phone although she wasn't looking at him. "Is that an outside line?"

The nurse continued writing on a sheaf of papers; she said absently, "You'll find a public phone booth in the lobby, sir," and only glanced up when the phone was raked to the edge of her desk, the receiver snatched up, the dial spun.

"I'm sorry, but you can't use this phone." Apology turned to outrage as Trainor gave the operator his home number, holding the instrument well away from her outstretched arm. "I'm sorry, this phone is for emergencies!"

Trainor didn't answer her. He didn't see her. He saw his house miles away, lamplit in the rain, the children asleep. John and Gregory in the room they shared, Mary in her crib. Mrs. Castle mending something, or looking at television . . .

The line was busy.

The floor nurse had advanced courageously around the desk. Trainor crashed the receiver down and ran for the stairs.

He recalled the night Mrs. Kingsly had drawn him in for a highball, the polite questions about his family. Two boys and a girl, wasn't that lovely?

Trainor had reached the lobby. There was only one telephone booth, and Mrs. Kingsley, sedate in lavender and white chiffon, was now emerging from it.

In the outer lobby she put on her raincoat and plastic hood, and produced a small plaid umbrella.

She was walking. Of course she was walking; the Chrysler was elsewhere.

She waited on the stone steps for Trainor with an air of gravity.

"Really, Mr. Trainor, you shouldn't have done that, you know. Give me the film, please."

"I'll give it to Kingsley or whatever his name is," said Trainor over the pound in his throat.

"You'll give it to me. Mr. Kingsley—" she was severe over the name "—is at your home, helping Mrs.

Castle get the children dressed in response to your urgent message that they be brought to see their mother at once. Wait," said Mrs. Kingsley at the harsh movement of Trainor's body. "If I call my husband and tell him that I have the film, he'll let you know at once where to pick up Gregory and John and the other one. If you do any telephoning at all . . . oh, I beg your pardon."

She stepped courteously back, gathering her raincoat skirt close as a man and woman emerged from the lobby, while Trainor stared at her, caught in an unreasoning terror by that careless "the other one."

Through a storm of rage and fear Trainor heard Mrs. Kingsley's voice, repeating something from the edged quality of it. "I'm waiting, Mr. Trainor. I'd advise you to hurry up."

Gone was the bland bearing, the almost musical tone of the odd and penetrating voice. Mrs. Kingsley had curbed herself long enough. She was on the verge of trembling, and she seemed, as she had in the cellar, as dangerous as a bared knife.

Trainor stepped silently into the rain, Mrs. Kingsley beside him. They looked, moving off into the darkness, like any pair of hospital visitors—aunt and nephew perhaps.

Trainor suddenly stopped short. "My wife expects me back."

"You can call the hospital from the house and leave a message," Mrs. Kingsley said in a sharp implacable voice. They had reached a street light, and with a deliberate gesture she lifted her wrist to peer at her watch.

He remembered nothing of that silent walk through the rain; all his consciousness was in the tight-closed circle of Julia and the children.

He was so tight that his body had begun to ache by the time they arrived at the Kingsley's front door. Inside, making Mrs. Kingsley fumble sharply with her key, the phone was ringing.

The sound—just beginning, or about to end?—had for Trainor the perilous quality of an ambulance siren. Just as his clenched hands were losing control, Mrs. Kingsley had the door open, was past him into the dim living room, had snatched up the receiver.

She was not at all an absurd figure for nightmare in her shapeless raincoat and rain-splattered plastic hood. Although she must have been out of breath she marshalled her usual voice to say after an endless pause, "Oh, I see . . . I'll have him —wait, hold on a minute, I believe he's just coming in."

She turned to face Trainor, the receiver a negligent few inches away from her mouth, so that it carried her voice but could not transmit the pale savage gaze above it. "Oh, Mr. Trainor, the floor nurse

at the hospital is on the phone. Your wife seems to be upset about you personally."

The receiver changed hands. Trainor stared blindly at the mantel opposite him and said, knowing in a hopeless way that Mrs. Emilio would hear the message at the same time, that everything was fine. There had been some sort of error on Julia's admission form and that had kept him in the office until visiting hours were over; but he would see her first thing in the morning. If you'd just give her that message, and thank you, nurse.

He hung up and turned toward her. "The Kingsleys are dead, aren't they?"

Mrs. Kingsley looked at her watch again. "Get the film, Mr. Trainor. You're going to have quite a drive as it is to collect your—offspring, and until I telephone my husband you won't have the slightest notion of where to go. I'm afraid we hadn't bargained on the rain, so it's possible they'll be somewhat damp. There's nothing to stop you from hitting an old woman over the head, but . . . think of poor Julia."

With Mrs. Kingsley rustling along behind him, he went obediently through the kitchen door to the back lawn.

There was a row of upturned flowerpots under a bench at the side of the house. Trainor's memory had presented them to him when he stood in his room earlier that evening, breathing hard from his race up the stairs and wondering where to keep the film until morning and the re-opening of the town's only camera shop. Not in his room, obviously, and not on his person, because if these people were what he thought, removal of the film could be too easily arranged.

The drenched grass drank up their footsteps; the bench, half in and half out of the waver of light from the kitchen door, was streaming with rain. Trainor bent and reached under the third flowerpot from the left, and there was the film, dry and safe.

Hand it over, because there was nothing else to do. Learn to live with the memory of this cylinder in his hand whenever he turned a newspaper page on a report of extortion ("Mrs. Harriet Kingsley, 49, collapsed and is under a doctor's care.") and remind himself that his children, and through them his wife, had hung in the balance. But what if . . . *what if*—

His left hand, replacing the flowerpot, brushed against another object. He picked it up without sound and straightened in the rain-blurred dark, film in his right hand, and Mrs. Kingsley's arm came out like a striking snake. "I'll take that."

"Wait a minute. You'll call Kingsley right away?"

"Of course. I told you he's been waiting."

With the film in her hand, her voice had lost its cruel edge; she

was conciliatory, almost wheedling. That would fit with the wild notion that had just shot through his head—it would fit exactly.

Back into the light from the kitchen, now, with the order reversed: Mrs. Kingsley walking ahead, leaving a wake of triumph; Trainor following, dry-mouthed.

And if he had been right so far, he must be right all the way.

These people weren't killers, but scavengers; not lions, but jackals.

Mrs. Kingsley preceded him through the kitchen into the living room. She seemed oddly hesitant on her way to the telephone there, and she was unprepared for the swift hard seizing of her wrists, the bending upward and backward, so that the film fell to the floor and rolled.

"Call Kingsley, from this number?" said Trainor softly. "Not very likely, is it? Call Kingsley, traceably, at a kidnap rendezvous? Because it would have to be long-distance, wouldn't it? And then you two want a head start, naturally—"

Trainor used his other hand to lay the receiver on the telephone table, dial operator, pick up the receiver again.

She was peculiarly silent as he gave the number of his house, and in the line-drawling silence against his ear it flashed across Trainor's mind that she had won; that they had been forced into a deviation from their usual pattern and he had, ruinously, banked against it. Then Mrs. Castle's serene voice said, "Hello? Oh, Mr. Trainor. The children asked before they went to bed if you were going to call—"

The darkness on the stairs, the reason for Mrs. Kingsley's silence, solidified in a rush that rocked the receiver out of Trainor's hand and onto the floor. The base tumbled after it, landing with a crash and a sharp ping of alarm. Kingsley, a gray-headed mask of light and shadow, was armed with something that moved too rapidly for identification—a table leg?

The little curve-clawed cultivator he had picked up beside the flowerpots sprang into Trainor's hand—a weapon as primitive as his own transition from terror for his children to rage at this monstrous pair. When it had once bitten into Kingsley's corded hand and remained ready at the diving face, Kingsley drew back, panting.

The doorbell rang into the harsh-breathing silence, and rang again. Trainor, who had kept Mrs. Kingsley warily on the edge of his vision, turned his head and saw her pressed against the wall, hair straggling over her wrinkled face.

He said as the doorbell pealed even more insistently, "Come, you have company," and his voice seemed to ricochet around the dim living room. No one, he realized, had spoken a word since Kingsley had sprung out of hiding on the stairs.

But they had been gathering themselves, assessing the danger, finding it real; behind their rigid attitudes and laboring breath they had been consulting each other.

Kingsley hurled the heavy table leg at Trainor's face and lunged for the dining room in what seemed to be one motion. Trainor, twisting his head instinctively and not quite in time, nearly missed the point of the diversion. He got to the film which still lay on the floor just before Mrs. Kingsley's lightning reach, and perhaps because his head was ringing with pain from the glancing blow, he heard with bewilderment a man's voice, evidently raised at Kingsley: "Just a minute, sir!"

The caller had tired of ringing the doorbell, and forced his way in. Mrs. Kingsley's face was a bad color. Trainor turned his head with some difficulty (what in hell was that stick made of?) and looked at a policeman, who was now saying with caution, "There seems to be some trouble here?"

Mrs. Kingsley said with instant indignation, "Officer, this man . . ." and Trainor stopped listening and sat gravely down on a chair, struggling with a wild amusement.

Julia and her midnight hot pastrami, smuggled in by Mrs. Emilio's myriad relatives and friends, and the nurse they had suborned among them. What it came down to was smuggled-in food, smuggled-out message—to this uniformed policeman whom Trainor had last met in a dapper blue suit, bowing around Mrs. Emilio's bed-curtain, at her behest, to convey a rissole to Julia.

Fox, the Springfield attorney who had been the Kingsleys' most recent victim, had a wide political acquaintance. When he had identified Kingsley as the telephone caller who had promised information about his missing son in return for a sum of money, phones were lifted, teletypes busied, newspaper and police files dug into. Fourteen years and 2,500 miles were peeled patiently back—to the death by exposure of a boy on a mountain peak.

There were details which would remain obscure forever unless the elderly couple now held for extortion chose to explain them, and they showed no sign of doing so. The inquiry was further complicated by the fact that the real Kingsleys had lived very much to themselves even before the death of their son drove them into deeper retreat. It was known that Mrs. Kingsley had distant relatives in England and therefore assumed, when the house was suddenly closed that they had gone abroad.

Certainly no one asked questions; all the questions had been asked weeks earlier in the search for the telephone caller who had precipated Mrs. Kingsley's collapse. Kingsley had no enemies, and as the boy's disappearance had been widely

publicized throughout the state, the inquiry hadn't much hope of success.

Now, 14 years later, the housekeeper who had known the Kingsleys better than anyone else confirmed the fact that they had no enemies; she added, not surprisingly, that they had had no real friends either. There had been a childhood friend of Mrs. Kingsley's (duly checked out and found to be living blamelessly in Bryn Mawr) and a classmate of Mr. Kingsley's at college. Down on his luck, so that Kingsley helped him and his wife financially from time to time.

The housekeeper had been struck by the husband's resemblance to Kingsley: tall, a little stooped when he forgot to straighten his shoulders, beginning to go gray . . .? Dowd, that was it, Francis Dowd, and his wife's name was Laura . . .

It was three weeks before Trainor stopped feeling like a sorcerer's apprentice, and Julia, so she said, like a West Point cadet in her various straps and harnesses. By that time two skeletons had been dug up from beneath the floor of a fishing cabin in the mountains above Santa Fe, and the man and woman whom Trainor had known as the Kingsleys had been definitely established as Francis and Laura Dowd. It seemed unlikely, in view of the mounting file on the Dowds, that they would ever be free to pursue any further career.

The summer deepened. The children's toad succumbed to an overdose of peanut butter, and the house next door was bought by people named Hathaway. The Dowds disappeared first from the newspaper, then from daily conversation, and finally from Trainor's consciousness.

Until a night in late August.

The darkness sang with locusts, but there was something else—a muffled and rhythmic sound to which Julia, head turned toward the open living-room window, listened alertly.

"Hathaway," she said after a brooding moment, "banging away on that boat of his—or at least he says it's a boat. It sounds more like an armada."

An expression Trainor was familiar with crossed her reflectively tilted face. She said slowly, "Come to think of it, I met him in the lane the other night, just as it was geting dark, and I happened to think —"

No, thought Trainor; not just yet. It was the sheerest nonsense to imagine even for an instant that conjecture could turn into fact by some black and secret process, and what he felt on the back of his neck was undoubtedly a draft. Still . . . not just yet.

"—what a very open clean-cut upstanding fellow Hathaway really is," said Julia rapidly, meeting his eye. "In fact, let's have a drink on it, shall we, Hugh?"

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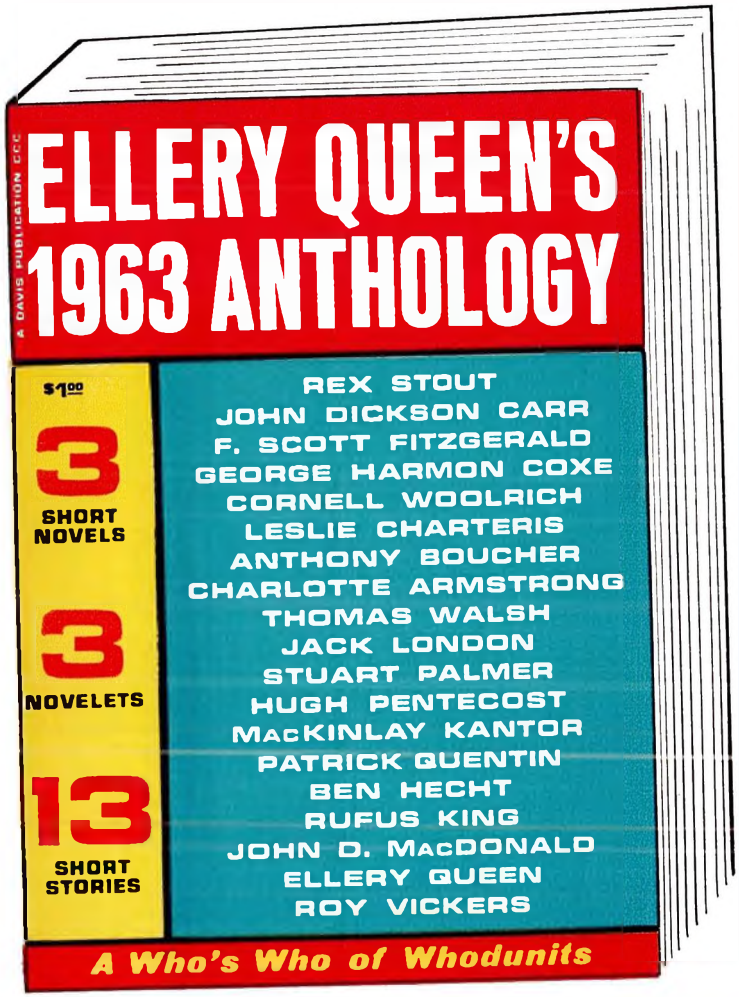

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