ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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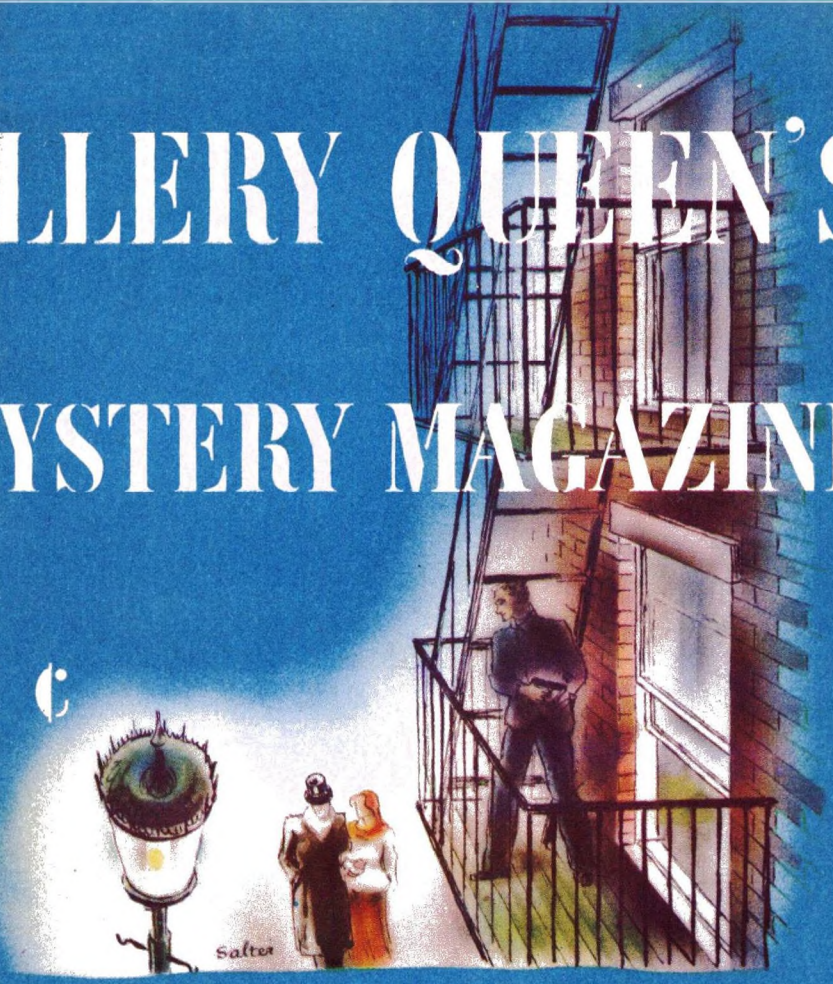

VOLUME THREE *SPRING 1942*

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

PUBLISHER
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VOLUME THREE *SPRING 1942*

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THANK YOU

IN OUR FOREWORD to Volume One, dated Fall 1941, we explained why we were launching "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine," set down certain beliefs about detection literature based on years of writing, study, and criticism, and concluded by saying: "Our belief that a large public exists which impatiently awaits such a publication can only be confirmed by that public."

You have confirmed it by your encouraging response. Thank you. We are accordingly laying plans for the future. We shall do everything within the limitation of our powers to justify your enthusiasm and earn your continued support. You can help us further by introducing the magazine to your friends and neighbors.

The present industrial crisis has complicated certain of our problems. For example, we were unable for Volume Two to procure the same superior grade of book paper on which Volume One had been printed. Paper for Volume Three, however, is similar to that for Volume One. We hope that we can continue to get the best book paper regularly but we cannot be as sure of our paper as of our contents, conditions being what they are. If, therefore, the paper in any future issue is not up to our standard, we ask you to bear with us, with the assurance that we are doing our utmost to give you a publication which you will be pleased to own not only for its contents but for its form.

To the writers of America, may we say that our editorial doors are wide open the clock around for original, hitherto-unpublished short stories of distinction in the field of detective, mystery, and crime fiction.

We intend to print more and more original material. We are eager to give new writers their baptism; we shall be honored to memorialize the work of established writers.

For your reassurance and guidance: We have no taboos outside the natural taboos of poor craftsmanship and questionable taste. We have no editorial "angles." We cater to no single "market."

Our only resolution is to insist, without flagging, upon quality.

— ELLERY QUEEN.

A Dr. Thorndyke story never before published in America. The distinguished inventor of "the inverted detective story" mercilessly dissects a burned corpse and makes some amazing deductions.

PERCIVAL BLAND'S PROXY

by R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

PART I

MR. PERCIVAL BLAND was a somewhat uncommon type of criminal. In the first place he really had an appreciable amount of common sense. If he had only had a little more, he would not have been a criminal at all. As it was, he had just sufficient judgment to perceive that the consequences of unlawful acts accumulate as the acts are repeated; to realise that the criminal's position must, at length, become untenable; and to take what he considered fair precautions against the inevitable catastrophe.

But in spite of these estimable traits of character and the precautions aforesaid, Mr. Bland found himself in rather a tight place and with a prospect of increasing tightness. The causes of this uncomfortable tension do not concern us, and may be dismissed with the remark, that, if one perseveringly distributes flash Bank of England notes among the money-changers of the Continent, there will come a day of reckoning when those notes are tendered to the exceedingly knowing old lady who lives in Threadneedle Street.

Mr. Bland considered uneasily the approaching storm-cloud as he raked over the "miscellaneous property" in the Sale-rooms of Messrs. Plimpton. He was a confirmed frequenter of auctions, as was not unnatural; for the criminal is essentially a gambler. And criminal and auction-frequenter have one quality in common; each hopes to get something of value without paying the market price for it.

So Percival turned over the dusty oddments and his own difficulties at one and the same time. The vital questions were: When would the storm burst? And would it pass by the harbour of refuge that he had been at such pains to construct? Let us inspect that harbour of refuge.

A quiet flat in the pleasant neighbourhood of Battersea bore a name-plate inscribed, Mr. Robert Lindsay; and the tenant was known to the

porter and the charwoman who attended to the flat, as a fair-haired gentleman who was engaged in the book trade as a travelling agent, and was consequently a good deal away from home. Now Mr. Robert Lindsay bore a distinct resemblance to Percival Bland; which was not surprising seeing that they were first cousins (or, at any rate, they said they were; and we may presume that they knew). But they were not very much alike. Mr. Lindsay had flaxen, or rather sandy, hair; Mr. Bland's hair was black. Mr. Bland had a mole under his left eye; Mr. Lindsay had no mole under his eye — but carried one in a small box in his waistcoat pocket.

At somewhat rare intervals the cousins called on one another; but they had the very worst of luck, for neither of them ever seemed to find the other at home. And what was even more odd was that whenever Mr. Bland spent an evening at home in his lodgings over the oil shop in Bloomsbury, Mr. Lindsay's flat was empty; and as sure as Mr. Lindsay was at home in his flat so surely were Mr. Bland's lodgings vacant for the time being. It was a queer coincidence, if anyone had noticed it; but nobody ever did.

However, if Percival saw little of his cousin, it was not a case of "out of sight, out of mind." On the contrary; so great was his solicitude for the latter's welfare that he not only had made a will constituting him his executor and sole legatee, but he had actually insured his life for no less a sum than three thousand pounds; and this will, together with the insurance policy, investment securities and other necessary documents, he had placed in the custody of a highly respectable solicitor. All of which did him great credit. It isn't every man who is willing to take so much trouble for a mere cousin.

Mr. Bland continued his perambulations, pawing over the miscellaneous raffle from sheer force of habit, reflecting on the coming crisis in his own affairs, and on the provisions that he had made for his cousin Robert. As for the latter, they were excellent so far as they went, but they lacked definiteness and perfect completeness. There was the contingency of a "stretch," for instance; say fourteen years penal servitude. The insurance policy did not cover that. And, meanwhile, what was to become of the estimable Robert?

He had bruised his thumb somewhat severely in a screw-cutting lathe, and had abstractedly turned the handle of a bird-organ until politely requested by an attendant to desist, when he came upon a series of boxes containing, according to the catalogue, "a collection of surgical instruments

the property of a lately deceased practitioner." To judge by the appearance of the instruments, the practitioner must have commenced practice in his early youth and died at a very advanced age. They were an uncouth set of tools, of no value whatever excepting as testimonials to the amazing tenacity of life of our ancestors; but Percival fingered them over according to his wont, working the handle of a complicated brass syringe and ejecting a drop of greenish fluid on to the shirtfront of a dressy Hebrew (who requested him to "point the dam thing at thomeone elth nectht time"), opening musty leather cases, clicking off spring scarifiers and feeling the edges of strange, crooked-bladed knives. Then he came upon a largish black box, which, when he raised the lid, breathed out an ancient and fish-like aroma and exhibited a collection of bones, yellow, greasy-looking and spotted in places with mildew. The catalogue described them as "a complete set of human osteology"; but they were not an ordinary "student's set," for the bones of the hands and feet, instead of being strung together on cat-gut, were united by their original ligaments and were of an unsavoury brown colour.

"I thay, misther," expostulated the Hebrew, "shut that bocth. Thmellth like a blooming inquetht."

But the contents of the black box seemed to have a fascination for Percival. He looked in at those greasy remnants of mortality, at the brown and mouldy hands and feet and the skull that peeped forth eerily from the folds of a flannel wrapping; and they breathed out something more than that stale and musty odour. A suggestion — vague and general at first, but rapidly crystallising into distinct shape — seemed to steal out of the black box into his consciousness; a suggestion that somehow seemed to connect itself with his estimable cousin Robert.

For upwards of a minute he stood motionless, as one immersed in reverie, the lid poised in his hand and a dreamy eye fixed on the half-uncovered skull. A stir in the room roused him. The sale was about to begin. The members of the knock-out and other habitués seated themselves on benches around a long, baize-covered table; the attendants took possession of the first lots and opened their catalogues as if about to sing an introductory chorus; and a gentleman with a waxed moustache and a striking resemblance to his late Majesty, the third Napoleon, having ascended to the rostrum bespoke the attention of the assembly by a premonitory tap with his hammer.

How odd are some of the effects of a guilty conscience! With what absurd self-consciousness do we read into the minds of others our own undeclared intentions, when those intentions are unlawful! Had Percival Bland wanted a set of human bones for any legitimate purpose — such as anatomical study — he would have bought it openly and unembarrassed. Now, he found himself earnestly debating whether he should not bid for some of the surgical instruments, just for the sake of appearances; and there being little time in which to make up his mind — for the deceased practitioner's effects came first in the catalogue — he was already the richer by a set of cupping-glasses, a tooth-key, and an instrument of unknown use and diabolical aspect, before the fateful lot was called.

At length the black box was laid on the table, an object of obscene mirth to the knockers-out, and the auctioneer read the entry:

"Lot seventeen; a complete set of human osteology. A very useful and valuable set of specimens, gentlemen."

He looked around at the assembly majestically, oblivious of sundry inquiries as to the identity of the deceased and the verdict of the coroner's jury, and finally suggested five shillings.

"Six," said Percival.

An attendant held the box open, and, chanting the mystic word "Loddlemen!" (which, being interpreted, meant "Lot, gentlemen") thrust it under the rather bulbous nose of the smart Hebrew; who remarked that "they 'ummed a bit too much to thoot him" and pushed it away.

"Going at six shillings," said the auctioneer, reproachfully; and as nobody contradicted him, he smote the rostrum with his hammer and the box was delivered into the hands of Percival on the payment of that modest sum.

Having crammed the cupping-glasses, the tooth-key and the unknown instrument into the box, Percival obtained from one of the attendants a length of cord, with which he secured the lid. Then he carried his treasure out into the street, and, chartering a four-wheeler, directed the driver to proceed to Charing Cross Station. At the station he booked the box in the cloak-room (in the name of Simpson) and left it for a couple of hours; at the expiration of which he returned, and, employing a different porter, had it conveyed to a hansom, in which it was borne to his lodgings over the oil-shop in Bloomsbury. There he, himself, carried it, unobserved, up the stairs, and, depositing it in a large cupboard, locked the door and pocketed the key.

And thus was the curtain rung down on the first act.

The second act opened only a couple of days later, the office of call-boy — to pursue the metaphor to the bitter end — being discharged by a Belgian police official who emerged from the main entrance to the Bank of England. What should have led Percival Bland into so unsafe a neighbourhood it is difficult to imagine, unless it was that strange fascination that seems so frequently to lure the criminal to places associated with his crime. But there he was within a dozen paces of the entrance when the officer came forth, and mutual recognition was instantaneous. Almost equally instantaneous was the self-possessed Percival's decision to cross the road.

It is not a nice road to cross. The old-fashioned horse-driver would condescend to shout a warning to the indiscreet wayfarer. Not so the modern chauffeur, who looks stonily before him and leaves you to get out of the way of Juggernaut. He knows his "exonerating" coroner's jury. At the moment, however, the procession of Juggernauts was at rest; but Percival had seen the presiding policeman turn to move away and he darted across the fronts of the vehicles even as they started. The foreign officer followed. But in that moment the whole procession had got in motion. A motor omnibus thundered past in front of him; another was bearing down on him relentlessly. He hesitated, and sprang back; and then a taxi-cab, darting out from behind, butted him heavily, sending him sprawling in the road, whence he scrambled as best he could back on to the pavement.

Percival, meanwhile, had swung himself lightly on to the footboard of the first omnibus just as it was gathering speed. A few seconds saw him safely across at the Mansion House, and in a few more, he was whirling down Queen Victoria Street. The danger was practically over, though he took the precaution to alight at St. Paul's, and, crossing to Newgate Street, board another west-bound omnibus.

That night he sat in his lodgings turning over his late experience. It had been a narrow shave. That sort of thing mustn't happen again. In fact, seeing that the law was undoubtedly about to be set in motion, it was high time that certain little plans of his should be set in motion, too. Only, there was a difficulty; a serious difficulty. And as Percival thought round and round that difficulty his brows wrinkled and he hummed a soft refrain.

"Then is the time for disappearing,
Take a header — down you go —."

A tap at the door cut his song short. It was his landlady, Mrs. Brattle; a civil woman, and particularly civil just now. For she had a little request to make.

"It was about Christmas Night, Mr. Bland," said Mrs. Brattle. "My husband and me thought of spending the evening with his brother at Hornsey, and we were going to let the maid go home to her mother's for the night, if it wouldn't put you out."

"Wouldn't put me out in the least, Mrs. Brattle," said Percival.

"You needn't sit up for us, you see," pursued Mrs. Brattle, "if you'd just leave the side door unbolted. We shan't be home before two or three; but we'll come in quiet not to disturb you."

"You won't disturb me," Percival replied with a genial laugh. "I'm a sober man in general; but 'Christmas comes but once a year.' When once I'm tucked up in bed, I shall take a bit of waking on Christmas Night."

Mrs. Brattle smiled indulgently. "And you won't feel lonely, all alone in the house?"

"Lonely!" exclaimed Percival. "Lonely! With a roaring fire, a jolly book, a box of good cigars and a bottle of sound port — ah, and a second bottle if need be. Not I."

Mrs. Brattle shook her head. "Ah," said she, "you bachelors! Well, well. It's a good thing to be independent," and with this profound reflection she smiled herself out of the room and descended the stairs.

As her footsteps died away Percival sprang from his chair and began excitedly to pace the room. His eyes sparkled and his face was wreathed with smiles. Presently he halted before the fireplace, and, gazing into the embers, laughed aloud.

"Damn funny!" he said. "Deuced rich! Neat! Very neat! Ha! Ha!" And here he resumed his interrupted song:

"When the sky above is clearing,
When the sky above is clearing,
Bob up serenely, bob up serenely,
Bob up serenely from below!"

Which may be regarded as closing the first scene of the second act.

During the few days that intervened before Christmas, Percival went abroad but little; and yet he was a busy man. He did a little surreptitious shopping, venturing out as far as Charing Cross Road; and his purchases

were decidedly miscellaneous. A porridge saucepan, a second-hand copy of "Gray's Anatomy," a rabbit skin, a large supply of glue and upwards of ten pounds of shin of beef, seems a rather odd assortment; and it was a mercy that the weather was frosty, for otherwise Percival's bedroom, in which these delicacies were deposited under lock and key, would have yielded odorous traces of its wealth.

But it was in the long evenings that his industry was most conspicuous; and then it was that the big cupboard with the excellent lever lock, which he himself had fixed on, began to fill up with the fruits of his labours. In those evenings the porridge saucepan would simmer on the hob with a rich lading of good Scotch glue, the black box of the deceased practitioner would be hauled forth from its hiding-place, and the well-thumbed "Gray" laid open on the table.

It was an arduous business though; a stiffer task than he had bargained for. The right and left bones were so confoundedly alike, and the bones that joined were so difficult to fit together. However, the plates in "Gray" were large and very clear, so it was only a question of taking enough trouble.

His method of work was simple and practical. Having fished a bone out of the box, he would compare it with the illustrations in the book until he had identified it beyond all doubt, when he would tie on it a paper label with its name and side — right or left. Then he would search for the adjoining bone, and, having fitted the two together, would secure them with a good daub of glue and lay them in the fender to dry. It was a crude and horrible method of articulation that would have made a museum curator shudder. But it seemed to answer Percival's purpose — whatever that may have been — for gradually the loose "items" came together into recognisable members such as arms and legs, the vertebrae — which were, fortunately, strung in their order on a thick cord — were joined up into a solid backbone, and even the ribs, which were the toughest job of all, fixed on in some semblance of a thorax. It was a wretched performance. The bones were plastered with gouts of glue and yet would have broken apart at a touch. But, as we have said, Percival seemed satisfied, and as he was the only person concerned, there was nothing more to be said.

In due course, Christmas Day arrived. Percival dined with the Brattles at two, dozed after dinner, woke up for tea, and then, as Mrs. Brattle, in purple and fine raiment, came in to remove the tea-tray, he spread out on the table the materials for the night's carouse. A quarter of an hour later,

the side-door slammed, and peering out of the window, he saw the shopkeeper and his wife hurrying away up the gas-lit street towards the nearest omnibus route.

Then Mr. Percival Bland began his evening's entertainment; and a most remarkable entertainment it was, even for a solitary bachelor, left alone in a house on Christmas Night. First, he took off his clothing and dressed himself in a fresh suit. Then, from the cupboard, he brought forth the reconstituted "set of osteology," and, laying the various members on the table, returned to the bedroom, whence he presently reappeared with a large, unsavoury parcel which he had disinterred from a trunk. The parcel, being opened, revealed his accumulated purchases in the matter of shin of beef.

With a large knife, providently sharpened beforehand, he cut the beef into large, thin slices which he proceeded to wrap around the various bones that formed the "complete set"; whereby their nakedness was certainly mitigated though their attractiveness was by no means increased. Having thus "clothed the dry bones," he gathered up the scraps of offal that were left, to be placed presently inside the trunk. It was an extraordinary proceeding, but the next was more extraordinary still.

Taking up the newly-clothed members one by one, he began very carefully to insinuate them into the garments that he had recently shed. It was a ticklish business, for the glued joints were as brittle as glass. Very cautiously the legs were separately inducted, first into underclothing and then into trousers, the skeleton feet were fitted with the cast-off socks and delicately persuaded into the boots. The arms, in like manner, were gingerly pressed into their various sleeves and through the arm-holes of the waistcoat; and then came the most difficult task of all — to fit the garments to the trunk. For the skull and ribs, secured to the back-bone with mere spots of glue, were ready to drop off at a shake; and yet the garments had to be drawn over them with the arms enclosed in the sleeves. But Percival managed it at last by resting his "restoration" in the big, padded armchair and easing the garments on inch by inch.

It now remained only to give the finishing touch; which was done by cutting the rabbit-skin to the requisite shape and affixing it to the skull with a thin coat of stiff glue; and when the skull had thus been finished with a sort of crude, makeshift wig, its appearance was so appalling as even to disturb the nerves of the matter-of-fact Percival. However, this was no

occasion for cherishing sentiment. A skull in an extemporised wig or false scalp might be, and in fact was, a highly unpleasant object; but so was a Belgian police officer.

Having finished the "restoration," Percival fetched the water-jug from his bedroom, and, descending to the shop, the door of which had been left unlocked, tried the taps of the various drums and barrels until he came to the one which contained methylated spirit; and from this he filled his jug and returned to the bedroom. Pouring the spirit out into the basin, he tucked a towel round his neck and filling his sponge with spirit, proceeded very vigorously to wash his hair and eyebrows and as, by degrees, the spirit in the basin grew dark and turbid, so did his hair and eyebrows grow lighter in colour until, after a final energetic rub with a towel, they had acquired a golden or sandy hue indistinguishable from that of the hair of his cousin Robert. Even the mole under his eye was susceptible to the changing conditions, for when he had wetted it thoroughly with spirit, he was able with the blade of a penknife, to peel it off as neatly as if it had been stuck on with spirit-gum. Having done which, he deposited it in a tiny box which he carried in his waistcoat pocket.

The proceedings which followed were unmistakable as to their object. First he carried the basin of spirit through into the sitting-room and deliberately poured its contents on to the floor by the arm-chair. Then, having returned the basin to the bedroom, he again went down to the shop, where he selected a couple of galvanised buckets from the stock, filled them with paraffin oil from one of the great drums and carried them upstairs. The oil from one bucket he poured over the arm-chair and its repulsive occupant; the other bucket he simply emptied on the carpet, and then went down to the shop for a fresh supply.

When this proceeding had been repeated once or twice the entire floor and all the furniture were saturated, and such a reek of paraffin filled the air of the room that Percival thought it wise to turn out the gas. Returning to the shop, he poured a bucketful of oil over the stack of bundles of fire-wood, another over the counter and floor and a third over the loose articles on the walls and hanging from the ceiling. Looking up at the latter he now perceived a number of greasy patches where the oil had soaked through from the floor above, and some of these were beginning to drip on to the shop floor.

He now made his final preparations. Taking a bundle of "Wheel" fire-

lighters, he made a small pile against the stack of fire-wood. In the midst of the fire-lighters he placed a ball of string saturated in paraffin; and in the central hole of the ball he stuck a half-dozen diminutive Christmas candles. This mine was now ready. Providing himself with a stock of fire-lighters, a few balls of paraffined string and a dozen or so of the little candles, he went upstairs to the sitting-room, which was immediately above the shop. Here, by the glow of the fire, he built up one or two piles of fire-lighters around and, partly under the arm-chair, placed the balls of string on the piles and stuck two or three bundles in each ball. Everything was now ready. Stepping into the bedroom, he took from the cupboard a spare overcoat, a new hat and a new umbrella — for he must leave his old hats, coat and umbrella in the hall. He put on the coat and hat, and, with the umbrella in his hand, returned to the sitting-room.

Opposite the arm-chair he stood awhile, irresolute, and a pang of horror shot through him. It was a terrible thing that he was going to do; a thing the consequences of which no one could foresee. He glanced furtively at the awful shape that sat huddled in the chair, its horrible head all awry and its rigid limbs sprawling in hideous, grotesque deformity. It was but a dummy, a mere scarecrow; but yet, in the dim firelight, the grisly face under that horrid wig seemed to leer intelligently, to watch him with secret malice out of its shadowy eye-sockets, until he looked away with clammy skin and a shiver of half-superstitious terror.

But this would never do. The evening had run out, consumed by these engrossing labours; it was nearly eleven o'clock, and high time for him to be gone. For if the Brattles should return prematurely he was lost. Pulling himself together with an effort, he struck a match and lit the little candles one after the other. In a quarter of an hour or so, they would have burned down to the balls of string, and then —

He walked quickly out of the room; but, at the door, he paused for a moment to look back at the ghastly figure, seated rigidly in the chair with the lighted candles at its feet, like some foul fiend appeased by votive fires. The unsteady flames threw flickering shadows on its face that made it seem to mow and gibber and grin in mockery of all his care and caution. So he turned and tremblingly ran down the stairs — opening the staircase window as he went. Running into the shop, he lit the candles there and ran out again, shutting the door after him.

Secretly and guiltily he crept down the hall, and opening the door a few

inches peered out. A blast of icy wind poured in with a light powdering of dry snow. He opened his umbrella, flung open the door, looked up and down the empty street, stepped out, closed the door softly and strode away over the whitening pavement.

PART II

It was one of the axioms of medico-legal practice laid down by my colleague, John Thorndyke, that the investigator should be constantly on his guard against the effects of suggestion. Not only must all prejudices and preconceptions be avoided, but when information is received from outside, the actual, undeniable facts must be carefully sifted from the inferences which usually accompany them. Of the necessity of this precaution our insurance practice furnished an excellent instance in the case of the fire at Mr. Brattle's oil-shop.

The case was brought to our notice by Mr. Stalker of the "Griffin" Fire and Life Insurance Society a few days after Christmas. He dropped in, ostensibly to wish us a Happy New Year, but a discreet pause in the conversation on Thorndyke's part elicited a further purpose.

"Did you see the account of that fire in Bloomsbury?" Mr. Stalker asked.

"The oil-shop? Yes. But I didn't note any details, excepting that a man was apparently burnt to death and that the affair happened on the twenty-fifth of December.

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Stalker. "It seems uncharitable, but one can't help looking a little askance at these quarter-day fires. And the date isn't the only doubtful feature in this one; the Divisional Officer of the Fire Brigade, who has looked over the ruins, tells me that there are some appearances suggesting that the fire broke out in two different places — the shop and the first-floor room over it. Mind you, he doesn't say that it actually did. The place is so thoroughly gutted that very little is to be learned from it; but that is his impression; and it occurred to me that if you were to take a look at the ruins, your radiographic eye might detect something that he had overlooked."

"It isn't very likely," said Thorndyke. "Every man to his trade. The Divisional Officer looks at a burnt house with an expert eye, which I do not. My evidence would not carry much weight if you were contesting the claim."

"Perhaps not," replied Mr. Stalker, "and we are not anxious to contest

the claim unless there is manifest fraud. Arson is a serious matter."

"It is wilful murder in this case," remarked Thorndyke.

"I know," said Stalker. "And that reminds me that the man who was burnt happens to have been insured in our office, too. So we stand a double loss."

"How much?" asked Thorndyke.

"The dead man, Percival Bland, had insured his life for three thousand pounds."

Thorndyke became thoughtful. The last statement had apparently made more impression on him than the former ones.

"If you want me to look into the case for you," said he, "you had better let me have all the papers connected with it, including the proposal forms."

Mr. Stalker smiled. "I thought you would say that — know you of old, you see — so I slipped the papers in my pocket before coming here."

He laid the documents on the table and asked: "Is there anything that you want to know about the case?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "I want to know all that you can tell me."

"Which is mighty little," said Stalker; "but such as it is, you shall have it.

"The oil-shop man's name is Brattle and the dead man, Bland, was his lodger. Bland appears to have been a perfectly steady, sober man in general; but it seems that he had announced his intention of spending a jovial Christmas Night and giving himself a little extra indulgence. He was last seen by Mrs. Brattle at about half-past six, sitting by a blazing fire, with a couple of unopened bottles of port on the table and a box of cigars. He had a book in his hand and two or three newspapers lay on the floor by his chair. Shortly after this, Mr. and Mrs. Brattle went out, on a visit to Hornsey, leaving him alone in the house."

"Was there no servant?" asked Thorndyke.

"The servant had the day and night off duty to go to her mother's. That, by the way, looks a trifle fishy. However, to return to the Brattles; they spent the evening at Hornsey and did not get home until past three in the morning, by which time their house was a heap of smoking ruins. Mrs. Brattle's idea is that Bland must have drunk himself sleepy, and dropped one of the newspapers into the fender, where a chance cinder may have started the blaze. Which may or may not be the true explanation. Of course, a habitually sober man can get pretty mimsey on two bottles of port."

"What time did the fire break out?" asked Thorndyke.

"It was noticed about half-past eleven that flames were issuing from one of the chimneys, and the alarm was given at once. The first engine arrived ten minutes later, but, by that time, the place was roaring like a furnace. Then the water-plugs were found to be frozen hard, which caused some delay; in fact, before the engines were able to get to work the roof had fallen in, and the place was a mere shell. You know what an oil-shop is, when once it gets a fair start."

"And Mr. Bland's body was found in the ruins, I suppose?"

"Body!" exclaimed Mr. Stalker; "there wasn't much body! Just a few charred bones, which they dug out of the ashes next day."

"And the question of identity?"

"We shall leave that to the coroner. But there really isn't any question. To begin with, there was no one else in the house; and then the remains were found mixed up with the springs and castors of the chair that Bland was sitting in when he was last seen. Moreover, there were found, with the bones, a pocket-knife, a bunch of keys and a set of steel waistcoat buttons, all identified by Mrs. Brattle as belonging to Bland. She noticed the cut steel buttons on his waistcoat when she wished him 'good-night.' "

"By the way," said Thorndyke, "was Bland reading by the light of an oil lamp?"

"No," replied Stalker. "There was a two-branch gasalier with a porcelain shade to one burner, and he had the burner alight when Mrs. Brattle left."

Thorndyke reflectively picked up the proposal form, and, having glanced through it, remarked: "I see that Bland is described as unmarried. Do you know why he insured his life for this large amount?"

"No; we assumed that it was probably in connection with some loan that he had raised. I learn from the solicitor who notified us of the death, that the whole of Bland's property is left to a cousin — a Mr. Lindsay, I think. So the probability is that this cousin had lent him money. But it is not the life claim that is interesting us. We must pay that in any case. It is the fire claim that we want you to look into."

"Very well," said Thorndyke; "I will go round presently and look over the ruins, and see if I can detect any substantial evidence of fraud."

"If you would," said Mr. Stalker, rising to take his departure, "we should be very much obliged. Not that we shall probably contest the claim in any case."

When he had gone, my colleague and I glanced through the papers, and

I ventured to remark: "It seems to me that Stalker doesn't quite appreciate the possibilities of this case."

"No," Thorndyke agreed. "But, of course, it is an insurance company's business to pay, and not to boggle at anything short of glaring fraud. And we specialists, too," he added with a smile, "must beware of seeing too much. I suppose that, to a rhinologist, there is hardly such a thing as a healthy nose — unless it is his own — and the uric acid specialist is very apt to find the firmament studded with dumbbell crystals. We mustn't forget that normal cases do exist, after all."

"That is true," said I; "but, on the other hand, the rhinologist's business is with the unhealthy nose, and our concern is with abnormal cases."

Thorndyke laughed. " 'A Daniel come to judgment,' " said he. "But my learned friend is quite right. Our function is to pick holes. So let us pocket the documents and wend Bloomsbury way. We can talk the case over as we go."

We walked an easy pace, for there was no hurry, and a little preliminary thought was useful. After a while, as Thorndyke made no remark, I reopened the subject.

"How does the case present itself to you?" I asked.

"Much as it does to you, I expect," he replied. "The circumstances invite inquiry, and I do not find myself connecting them with the shopkeeper. It is true that the fire occurred on quarter-day; but there is nothing to show that the insurance will do more than cover the loss of stock, chattels and the profits of trade. The other circumstances are much more suggestive. Here is a house burned down and a man killed. That man was insured for three thousand pounds, and consequently, some person stands to gain by his death to that amount. The whole set of circumstances is highly favourable to the idea of homicide. The man was alone in the house when he died; and the total destruction of both the body and its surroundings seems to render investigation impossible. The cause of death can only be inferred; it cannot be proved; and the most glaring evidence of a crime will have vanished utterly. I think that there is a quite strong prima facie suggestion of murder. Under the known conditions, the perpetration of a murder would have been easy, it would have been safe from detection, and there is an adequate motive.

"On the other hand, suicide is not impossible. The man might have set fire to the house and then killed himself by poison or otherwise. But it is

intrinsically less probable that a man should kill himself for another person's benefit than that he should kill another man for his own benefit.

"Finally, there is the possibility that the fire and the man's death were the result of accident; against which is the official opinion that the fire started in two places. If this opinion is correct, it establishes, in my opinion, a strong presumption of murder against some person who may have obtained access to the house."

This point in the discussion brought us to the ruined house, which stood at the corner of two small streets. One of the firemen in charge admitted us, when we had shown our credentials, through a temporary door and down a ladder into the basement, where we found a number of men treading gingerly, ankle deep in white ash, among a litter of charred woodwork, fused glass, warped and broken china, and more or less recognisable metal objects.

"The coroner and the jury," the fireman explained; "come to view the scene of the disaster." He introduced us to the former, who bowed stiffly and continued his investigations.

"These," said the other fireman, "are the springs of the chair that the deceased was sitting in. We found the body — or rather the bones — lying among them under a heap of hot ashes; and we found the buttons of his clothes and the things from his pockets among the ashes, too. You'll see them in the mortuary with the remains."

"It must have been a terrific blaze," one of the jurymen remarked. "Just look at this, sir," and he handed to Thorndyke what looked like part of a gas-fitting, of which the greater part was melted into shapeless lumps and the remainder encrusted with fused porcelain.

"That," said the fireman, "was the gasalier of the first-floor room, where Mr. Bland was sitting. Ah! you won't turn that tap, sir; nobody'll ever turn that tap again."

Thorndyke held the twisted mass of brass towards me in silence, and glancing up the blackened walls, remarked: "I think we shall have to come here again with the Divisional Officer, but meanwhile, we had better see the remains of the body. It is just possible that we may learn something from them."

He applied to the coroner for the necessary authority to make the inspection, and, having obtained a rather ungracious and grudging permission to examine the remains when the jury had "viewed" them, began to ascend

the ladder.

"Our friend would have liked to refuse permission," he remarked when we had emerged into the street, "but he knew that I could and should have insisted."

"So I gathered from his manner," said I. "But what is he doing here? This isn't his district."

"No; he is acting for Bettsford, who is laid up just now; and a very poor substitute he is. A non-medical coroner is an absurdity in any case, and a coroner who is hostile to the medical profession is a public scandal. By the way, that gas-tap offers a curious problem. You noticed that it was turned off?"

"Yes."

"And consequently that the deceased was sitting in the dark when the fire broke out. I don't see the bearing of the fact, but it is certainly rather odd. Here is the mortuary. We had better wait and let the jury go in first."

We had not long to wait. In a couple of minutes or so the "twelve good men and true" made their appearance with a small attendant crowd of ragamuffins. We let them enter first, and then we followed. The mortuary was a good-sized room, well lighted by a glass roof, and having at its centre a long table, on which lay the shell containing the remains. There was also a sheet of paper on which had been laid out a set of blackened steel waistcoat buttons, a bunch of keys, a steel-handled pocket-knife, a steel-cased watch on a partly-fused rolled-gold chain and a pocket corkscrew. The coroner drew the attention of the jury to these objects, and then took possession of them, that they might be identified by witnesses. And meanwhile the jurymen gathered round the shell and stared shudderingly at its gruesome contents.

"I am sorry, gentlemen," said the coroner, "to have to subject you to this painful ordeal. But duty is duty. We must hope, as I think we may, that this poor creature met a painless, if in some respects a rather terrible, death."

At this point, Thorndyke, who had drawn near to the table, cast a long and steady glance down into the shell; and, immediately his ordinarily rather impassive face seemed to congeal; all expression faded from it, leaving it as immovable and uncommunicative as the granite face of an Egyptian statue. I knew the symptom of old and began to speculate on its present significance.

"Are you taking any medical evidence?" he asked.

"Medical evidence!" the coroner repeated, scornfully. "Certainly not, sir! I do not waste the public money by employing so-called experts to tell the jury what each of them can see quite plainly for himself. I imagine," he added, turning to the foreman, "that you will not require a learned doctor to explain to you how that poor fellow met his death?" And the foreman, glancing askance at the skull, replied, with a pallid and sickly smile, that "he thought not."

"Do you, sir," the coroner continued, with a dramatic wave of the hand towards the plain coffin, "suppose that we shall find any difficulty in determining how that man came by his death?"

"I imagine," replied Thorndyke, without moving a muscle, or, indeed, appearing to have any muscles to move, "I imagine you will find no difficulty whatever."

"So do I," said the coroner.

"Then," retorted Thorndyke, with a faint, inscrutable smile, "we are, for once, in complete agreement."

As the coroner and jury retired, leaving my colleague and me alone in the mortuary, Thorndyke remarked:

"I suppose this kind of farce will be repeated periodically so long as these highly technical medical inquiries continue to be conducted by lay persons."

I made no reply, for I had taken a long look into the shell, and was lost in astonishment.

"But my dear Thorndyke!" I exclaimed; "what on earth does it mean? Are we to suppose that a woman can have palmed herself off as a man on the examining medical officer of a London Life Assurance Society?"

Thorndyke shook his head. "I think not," said he. "Our friend, Mr. Bland, may conceivably have been a woman in disguise, but he certainly was not a negress."

"A negress!" I gasped. "By Jove! So it is. I hadn't looked at the skull. But that only makes the mystery more mysterious. Because, you remember, the body was certainly dressed in Bland's clothes."

"Yes, there seems to be no doubt about that. And you may have noticed, as I did," Thorndyke continued dryly, "the remarkably fire-proof character of the waistcoat buttons, watch-case, knife-handle, and other identifiable objects."

"But what a horrible affair!" I exclaimed. "The brute must have gone

out and enticed some poor devil of a negress into the house, have murdered her in cold blood, and then deliberately dressed the corpse in his own clothes! It is perfectly frightful!"

Again Thorndyke shook his head. "It wasn't as bad as that, Jervis," said he, "though I must confess that I feel strongly tempted to let your hypothesis stand. It would be quite amusing to put Mr. Bland on trial for the murder of an unknown negress, and let him explain the facts himself. But our reputation is at stake. Look at the bones again and a little more critically. You very probably looked for the sex first; then you looked for racial characters. Now carry your investigations a step further."

"There is the stature," said I. "But that is of no importance, as these are not Bland's bones. The only other point that I notice is that the fire seems to have acted very unequally on the different parts of the body."

"Yes," agreed Thorndyke, "and that is the point. Some parts are more burnt than others; and the parts which are burnt most are the wrong parts. Look at the back-bone, for instance. The vertebrae are as white as chalk. They are mere masses of bone ash. But, of all parts of the skeleton, there is none so completely protected from fire as the back-bone, with the great dorsal muscles behind, and the whole mass of the viscera in front. Then look at the skull. Its appearance is quite inconsistent with the suggested facts. The bones of the face are bare and calcined and the orbits contain not a trace of the eyes or other structures; and yet there is a charred mass of what may or may not be scalp adhering to the crown. But the scalp, as the most exposed and the thinnest covering, would be the first to be destroyed, while the last to be consumed would be the structures about the jaws and the base, of which, you see, not a vestige is left."

Here he lifted the skull carefully from the shell, and, peering in through the great foramen at the base, handed it to me.

"Look in," he said, "through the Foramen Magnum — you will see better if you hold the orbits towards the skylight — and notice an even more extreme inconsistency with the supposed conditions. The brain and membranes have vanished without leaving a trace. The inside of the skull is as clean as if it had been macerated. But this is impossible. The brain is not only protected from the fire; it is also protected from contact with the air. But without access of oxygen, although it might become carbonised, it could not be consumed. No, Jervis; it won't do."

I replaced the skull in the coffin and looked at him in surprise.

"What is it that you are suggesting?" I asked.

"I suggest that this was not a body at all, but merely a dry skeleton."

"But," I objected, "what about those masses of what looks like charred muscle adhering to the bones?"

"Yes," he replied, "I have been noticing them. They do, as you say, look like masses of charred muscle. But they are quite shapeless and structureless; I cannot identify a single muscle or muscular group; and there is not a vestige of any of the tendons. Moreover, the distribution is false. For instance, will you tell me what muscle you think that is?"

He pointed to a thick, charred mass on the inner surface of the left tibia or shin-bone. "Now this portion of the bone — as many a hockey-player has had reason to realise — has no muscular covering at all. It lies immediately under the skin."

"I think you are right, Thorndyke," said I. "That lump of muscle in the wrong place gives the whole fraud away. But it was really a rather smart dodge. This fellow Bland must be an ingenious rascal."

"Yes," agreed Thorndyke; "but an unscrupulous villain too. He might have burned down half the street and killed a score of people. He'll have to pay the piper for this little frolic."

"What shall you do now? Are you going to notify the coroner?"

"No; that is not my business. I think we will verify our conclusions and then inform our clients and the police. We must measure the skull as well as we can without callipers, but it is, fortunately, quite typical. The short, broad, flat nasal bones, with the 'Simian groove,' and those large strong teeth, worn flat by hard and gritty food, are highly characteristic." He once more lifted out the skull, and, with a spring tape, made a few measurements, while I noted the lengths of the principal long bones and the width across the hips.

"I make the cranial-nasal index 55–1," said he, as he replaced the skull, "and the cranial index about 72, which are quite representative numbers; and, as I see that your notes show the usual disproportionate length of arm and the characteristic curve of the tibia, we may be satisfied. But it is fortunate that the specimen is so typical. To the experienced eye, racial types have a physiognomy which is unmistakable on mere inspection. But you cannot transfer the experienced eye. You can only express personal conviction and back it up with measurements.

"And now we will go and look in on Stalker, and inform him that his

office has saved three thousand pounds by employing us. After which it will be Westward Ho! for Scotland Yard, to prepare an unpleasant little surprise for Mr. Percival Bland."

There was joy among the journalists on the following day. Each of the morning papers devoted an entire column to an unusually detailed account of the inquest on the late Percival Bland — who, it appeared, met his death by misadventure — and a verbatim report of the coroner's eloquent remarks on the danger of solitary fireside tippling, and the stupefying effects of port wine. An adjacent column contained an equally detailed account of the appearance of the deceased at Bow Street Police Court to answer complicated charges of arson, fraud and forgery; while a third collated the two accounts with gleeful commentaries.

Mr. Percival Bland, alias Robert Lindsay, now resides on the breezy uplands of Dartmoor, where, in his abundant leisure, he no doubt regrets his misdirected ingenuity. But he has not laboured in vain. To the Lord Chancellor he has furnished an admirable illustration of the danger of appointing lay coroners; and to me an unforgettable warning against the effects of suggestion.

A murder mystery of the A.E.F. and the first World War . . . a strange background for a strange crime problem and an even stranger character — Cook Bill Puckett of the 17th Provisional Company.

DUMB YANK

by KARL DETZER

THE CRIME, which was to be called, inaccurately, "The Moroccan Murder Case," occurred between eight and ten o'clock at night. But the events which led up to it apparently began at eleven in the morning when Captain Arthur Caney stepped out of his room and met Major MacLeod. That is where the police started their investigation.

It was a foggy morning at Camp Maroc, there in the bent arm of the River Huisne, three kilometers below the old cathedral city of LeMans. Foggy and busy. But mornings always were busy in this camp. Mornings and afternoons and nights.

The Tours branch and the Paris-Brest division of the Etat railway crossed at the edge of the camp, and gave birth to a bawling, ill-disciplined freight yard, which in 1919 was devoted to unloading commissary and quartermaster supplies for the homegoing A. E. F. On Camp Maroc lay the responsibility for distributing these supplies.

At the Forwarding Camp, five kilometers across muddy fields from Camp Maroc, thirty thousand soldiers sat in the mud and drank too much eau-de-vie and quarreled and gambled away their thirty-three dollars a month and prayed for ships. But there were no ships, and the base ports of St. Nazaire and Brest, through which these soldiers and a million others were supposed to pour, were corked tighter than a bottle of Barsac, 1890. Watchful waiting was in order.

Everywhere tempers were plenty brittle; particularly Captain Caney's. He blamed Major MacLeod personally for being sent back to Maroc. He, Caney, had been moving freight out of the yards as fast as any man could, he thought; certainly no major could do it any faster.

Had the encounter between the major and the captain been the only unusual event of the day, the police would have been less disturbed and

would have solved the murder immediately to their own satisfaction. But it was not, by any means. There were too many other occurrences that day in the officers' tin-roofed quarters at the eastern edge of the camp.

Caney had commanded the Seventeenth Provisional Company for five weeks . . . until MacLeod arrived two nights before and assumed charge. This morning the captain had overslept. He'd spent half the night in the freight yards, so there was nothing peculiar in the fact that he did not arise until ten. Bill Puckett, the cook for the officers' mess, heard him stirring then, and went to his room with a bowl of oatmeal and a mug of coffee. Caney took it, thanked Puckett, and closed the door. It was eleven before he opened it again.

At the instant he did open it, Major MacLeod was passing along the corridor . . . on the way to his quarters to get dry boots, he explained to the police that night. Caney made some remark to him in an undertone. Whatever it was, it apparently angered the major.

"I'll thank you to let me alone, captain," Puckett heard him respond. Caney backed into his room, and MacLeod pushed in after him. For five minutes they quarreled. Though Puckett did not hear their words, he could testify that Caney said very little. It was the major's voice that boomed angrily.

Then MacLeod stormed out of the quarters, forgetting his boots after all, and Caney remained in his room until noon, when he walked quietly into the mess hall and sat down. Not at the head of the table. MacLeod had ranked him out of that seat.

But today the major was absent. He had left word with his orderly that he must go to LeMans and would not be back until three, and so the end chair stood empty. MacLeod was not there, but Second Lieutenant James Hagan was. Hagan, a lanky cub from Tennessee, had been drinking. Not drunk, understand. Just talkative. Slightly loud. He sat at the foot of the table, paid no attention to Caney, and once started to sing. Caney watched him with disapproval.

Then suddenly he said: "You're excused, lieutenant. You may go to your quarters."

Hagan looked at him in astonishment.

"What for, sir?" he asked.

"Because you're drunk, Hagan."

The lieutenant stood up. He held the back of his chair so tightly that his

knuckles, over the top of it, were white.

"I'm not drunk, sir. I wish you'd prove it!"

He spoke quietly. All the conviviality had faded from his voice. He was immensely serious.

"If you want me to prove it, I will," Captain Caney said. "Go to your quarters in arrest."

He did not even look at the lieutenant again, merely picked up his fork and cut into his corned beef hash. Young Hagan swallowed, then turned smartly and marched toward his room.

There were only three others at table that noon, First Lieutenant Ferdinand Shasta, medical corps; Second Lieutenant Hawthorne, of the quartermaster department, and Aristide Marriotte, sous-lieutenant of the French Forty-second Regiment of Chasseurs, attached here as interpreter.

Naturally in the passage between Caney and young Hagan, these other three pretended that they had heard and seen nothing. Hawthorne in particular devoted himself entirely to his knife and fork. He was a thin, serious, bespectacled officer with too long a neck, too shrill a voice, and too blond a small mustache. How he ever got past the benzine board at the Second Training Camp at Fort Sheridan had repeatedly been a subject of some discussion among the men who served with him. He was one of those officers, who no matter how desperately they try, cannot escape a nickname. His was "The Virgin," and strangely enough he did not seem to resent it.

This noon, as always, he ate steadily and well. It was his habit to stow away more food than anyone else in the mess, in spite of his meagre body, and today this hunger seemed so hard to appease that Captain Caney, shortly after dismissing Hagan, said: "Old appetite seems to be holding out, Hawthorne."

"Yes, sir," the lieutenant answered.

"That's good," Caney grunted. "We're having broiled lobster for dinner tonight. Ordered it yesterday. My party. I'm entertaining a guest. My guest this time, gentlemen. The sweetheart of the regiment."

Hawthorne dropped his fork.

"Madame Barrier?" he asked without looking up.

"In person," Caney told him. He chuckled a little heavily. "I got tired watching my lieutenants bring in the most beautiful woman in France. So I invited her myself."

"Well, *I'll* be here for dinner then," Shasta said.

He pushed back his chair as he spoke, wiped his mouth vigorously with his napkin and tossed the napkin to the table. Cook Puckett had just set a cup of steaming coffee in front of Caney, and Shasta's napkin caught it somehow and turned it over into the captain's lap.

Caney leaped up, his brief good humor gone, and the pain of the scalding coffee, and anger at Shasta, coloring his face. Shasta had the poor judgment to laugh. Even Hawthorne stopped eating.

But instead of a tirade, Caney delivered himself of a single word. He wiped the coffee off his breeches and turned slowly to the medical officer.

"Pig!" he exclaimed.

The word was unfortunate. It happened that Shasta, a fat man with deep jowls, bore a remarkable resemblance to a prize porker, and Caney's epithet pricked him.

"Watch your tongue, sir!" he barked. "Or else. . . ."

"Or else what?" Caney asked. Then he laughed. His anger seemed to fall from him immediately. "Okay, doctor. I apologize. Beg your pardon. Just as you should have done."

He lighted a cigarette, dropped the match into his saucer, and nodded to Bill Puckett, who brought him a fresh cup of coffee.

The men said nothing. Caney was often like that. His fierce temper struck like a lightning flash. It blazed up without warning and immediately was gone. The story had drifted back to the camp that the temper had been responsible for his removal from command of a combat company early in November, and his return to the S. O. S.

He was entirely affable again when Shasta turned without further words and left the room. In a moment Hawthorne and Marriotte followed him.

The second incident ended thus, only to be picked up again on the pencil points of the police and set down in their little untidy notebooks. The third occurrence, shortly before dinner, was no less important in their eyes.

Marriotte, the Frenchman, had come to the quarters at about half after five. He met Captain Caney on the duckboard outside the door, and the pair stood a moment in conversation. Puckett, from the kitchen window, heard part of this talk, too, and Lieutenant Hawthorne, who was brushing the mud from his boots on the steps, brushing seriously as he did everything else, heard a little, although he proved a most reluctant witness.

"We'll go to the Apollo, I suppose," Caney was saying, and eyeing the

Frenchman doubtfully, when Marriotte leaned close to him and whispered. What he proposed neither Puckett nor Hawthorne could repeat, but they both heard Caney's answer.

"What do you mean, Marriotte?"

The interpreter shrugged. "Very well," he said, "if you have no red blood in you."

Caney's right hand came up suddenly. Marriotte was continuing: "All most discreet, my captain. Who can know? Just the four of us . . . you, Madame, the other woman . . . and you can return here in the morning at seven."

Caney's hand hovered only an instant, then slapped the Frenchman sharply across the left side of his thin, dark, handsome face. Marriotte flushed and rubbed his cheek. But he did nothing, and Caney, still angry, turned and stamped into the building.

Those were the incidents. Nothing else of importance occurred, according to the witnesses that night. Madame Barrier arrived at six o'clock, but that was not unusual. She had been here half a dozen times as the guest of Lieutenant Hawthorne.

She was a widow, attributing that widowhood to the siege of Verdun. And not the most beautiful woman in France. In spite of what Caney said, she was not beautiful at all, just one of those women who do not need beauty to attract the eyes of every man in the room.

The mess still failed to understand how Hawthorne had ever discovered her; Hawthorne, "The Virgin," of all people. He had met her two months before this, at his billet in LeMans when he was still with the quartermaster corps there, and a friendship had sprung up . . . a very discreet, pleasant friendship, without any of the implications that so many of those friendships had. Hawthorne wasn't that kind of officer.

But his mates stared, nevertheless, when he first brought her to dinner. There had been other guests from time to time. Dr. Shasta, for one, had the habit of bringing all kinds of people, but when "The Virgin" arrived with Madame Barrier . . . there certainly had been no one just like *her* before!

This night of February fourth, Major MacLeod returned from LeMans just before dinner. For a moment, on seeing Captain Caney again, his attitude was uncertain, but when the latter greeted him politely, even if a little stiffly, MacLeod responded in the same manner. They consulted briefly on some official business in the major's quarters, and Puckett, who

made it a point to listen this time, heard no fresh outburst.

Then MacLeod had caught sight of the resplendent Madame Barrier, and it must be reported that he hurried faster than he needed into his room to change clothes. He was a young major . . . not much over thirty . . . rather pink of face, with a reddish, ill-disciplined mustache and extremely pale blue eyes. His legs were short, and he looked squat whenever he stood up, like a rocking chair from which the rockers have been sawed.

In spite of the fact that she was Caney's guest, the major was particularly attentive to Madame Barrier at dinner. But so were all the others, for that matter. Caney did not seem to object; very plainly he enjoyed the role of host. He conversed more than usual in English and poor French.

Lieutenant Hagan, still in arrest, sat at the foot of the table, but addressed all his remarks to the woman, or to Shasta or Marriotte. His two ranking officers might as well have been in Paris, for all the attention he gave them.

The dinner was good. Cook Bill Puckett had seen to that. He wore his white cap in honor of the occasion, and a clean white apron. His broad, dull face beamed as he served the broiled lobster, which was only one shade redder than his cheeks. Puckett had been a cook in Kansas City before the war, and by some mysterious chance uncommon to most men in the Army, here he was, assigned to Camp Maroc to do the thing he knew how.

Plodding in from the kitchen, he looked carefully around the table at the plates. Like most cooks, he enjoyed carrying out empty plates. They were by far the most eloquent tribute to his skill. If a man ate everything you gave him, he must like what you cooked, and if an officer at this table did not eat, then Puckett had the persistent habit of inquiring, respectfully, whether anything was wrong with the food.

He liked company, too. Liked to see the officers having a good time. And they were having a good time tonight. No doubt of that. Whatever the major's quarrel with Caney had been this morning, it apparently was forgotten now. Shasta was careful of his napkin, too, and Hagan entirely sober.

Puckett took up the plates.

To Hawthorne he said: "The lieutenant didn't like the lobster?"

"Oh sure," Hawthorne replied. "Very good."

Puckett carried the lieutenant's plate to the kitchen, scraped away the crumbs from the table and returned with the dessert, which tonight was

apple betty.

At sight of it Caney protested, laughing: "After a meal like this, Puckett? What a lack of imagination!"

But he ate heartily of the apple betty, and Madame Barrier insisted that it was magnificent. They had finished their meal at ten minutes past seven, and Caney was anxious to be away. The show at the Apollo in LeMans would not be great art, he admitted, but good entertainment. Besides, Madame had said she would like to attend.

Everyone left the mess hall at once, Shasta in search of a game of chess at the Y. M. C. A. down near the tracks, Hagan of necessity to his quarters. Major MacLeod picked up an *Army and Navy Journal* as he rose from the table.

"Let me know if I'm wanted," he told Puckett, and Marriotte and Hawthorne walked with him down the corridor.

The cook heard Madame Barrier protesting as she got to the door, "But my captain, the rain! I shall certainly become most damp!"

"We're just going down the walk to the transport garage," Caney assured her. "I've a car ready there. Wait, I'll get a poncho for you."

Rain drummed harder after the pair left. Puckett finished his dishes, put out the kitchen light, and walked through the long, low building. In addition to cooking, he acted as servant to the officers in the mess; each morning and evening must go in search of shoes to shine and beds to make.

Major MacLeod's door was ajar, his light was on, and the *Army and Navy Journal* lay open on the floor. But of MacLeod himself there was no sign. Nor of Hawthorne, whose light was on, too.

Shasta evidently had found his chess game at the Y. M. C. A. and Hagan's door was closed. Puckett grinned. In arrest, was he? Puckett had known men in arrest to slip away for the evening. He did not try to enter.

But he did step into Marriotte's quarters. He had seen Marriotte go out alone, some few minutes after dinner; to his office down by the tracks, perhaps; at least he had not returned. Quietly Puckett eased into the room, and without turning on the light, reached up to a shelf above the Frenchman's bed. He found the atomizer just where it always was.

He turned its short spout against the front of his issue blouse and pressed the bulb. The perfume was lilac. Puckett preferred carnation, but he liked lilac, too. He pressed the bulb again, holding the nozzle against his sleeve.

"Hot dog!" he said.

The body of Captain Caney was discovered shortly after eleven o'clock, face down in a muddy field about two hundred yards from the officers' mess, in the direction of the garage. It lay under a thicket of small willows, in a particularly dark portion of the field, at a distance of some fifteen or twenty paces from the duckboard walk which joined garage and officers' quarters. The breeches pockets were inside out.

Sergeant Archie Cort, of the LeMans office, Division of Criminal Investigation, arrived in Camp Maroc at midnight in response to the report of military police. He was pleased to find that the body had not been touched, and still lay in the cold field, under the dripping sky. A military policeman, with no liking for the job, stood guard beside it. Any footprints which might have told a story were tramped out.

In the garage a second M.P. was holding one Benoit Vernoix, a cobbler from the nearby suburb of Pontlieu, whose screams had brought the garage night force to the scene.

"And what the hell were you doing out, at that hour of the night?" the D. C. I. sergeant demanded of him.

The man was weeping. "Ah, *mon général!*" he cried. "Last evening my pig disappears! A pig of immense value and most affectionate! She will not eat except from my hand. . . ."

"Leave pigs out o' this," the sergeant said.

"But I cannot, m'sieur!" The man pounded together his knuckles, which were very dirty. "It is because I search the pig that I find . . ." he broke off.

"Go on," Cort said.

"Mais oui, mais oui! I take my lantern and start out to search for Victory . . . that is her name. I follow her tracks. This way . . . that. As if the devil himself had a saddle on her. In the mud I follow them until here. . . ."

"You find something besides a pig."

"I stumble, m'sieur."

He paused. The garage door had burst open, and in rushed a florid, moon-faced soldier. His yellow curls were plastered down to his forehead with sweat, and he wore no leggings. Between the unlaced bottoms of his breeches and the unlaced tops of his shoes, his flannel underwear showed white.

"Hey, sergeant," he cried, "I gotta know about this!"

Cort stared at him. "Who the hell are you?"

"I'm the cook," Puckett answered. "You gotta tell me. . . ."

The sergeant demanded, "Oh, is that so, General Pershing? I got to? You

stick around. I want you to tell me."

"I can do it," Puckett said.

He pulled out a large red handkerchief and mopped his face. He was out of breath. Toes together, hands in breeches pocket, he stood against the wall while the distraught Frenchman repeated his story. When he had finished, the D. C. I. sergeant said:

"I guess you're telling the truth. Go home to bed."

"But Victory. . . ."

"Find her tomorrow," Cort advised.

He pushed the man out into the night, but before he could turn back to the cook, two officers entered. In the hand of one of them was a long, black-handled knife.

"What's that, lieutenant?" Cort demanded.

The officer, who was bearded, replied, "We're medical detachment, camp infirmary. Been examining the body."

"And found . . . ?"

"This. Under his ribs."

"How long's he been dead?" Cort asked.

The medico guessed cautiously: "Several hours, I'd say. Maybe around nine o'clock, maybe before. Somewhere between eight and ten, at least. It's hard to tell exactly. He died instantly."

He laid the knife on the table, and Cook Puckett, uninvited, tramped forward and looked down at it. His dull eyes bugged.

"If that ain't a hell of a note. From my kitchen."

The sergeant scoffed. "Your kitchen? There's a million knives like that in France, soldier. Regular issue."

Puckett objected.

"Sure, Mr. Pinkerton, a million, but there ain't that many has got this nick took out of 'em, where I busted it openin' a can of willy."

"Step aside," the sergeant said, "and let me have a look at it. If it's yours, when'd you see it last?"

"Hell, I didn't pull no stop watch," Puckett retorted. "Some time today. I couldn't find it when I was gettin' supper. I was out for a couple hours this afternoon, shooting craps, but the kitchen was locked."

"You're crazy," Cort said. The Medical officers departed, and free of their presence, Cort added, "Crazier'n a coot." He rolled a cigarette, borrowed a

match from the garage corporal, and sat down on a gasoline drum. "Y' can't ever identify a knife like that, big boy. Sure, it's got a nick. So's half the knives this side of Berlin. But if it *is* yours, and this captain's knocked off with it and his body robbed, where's the cash, then? He was killed for his cash."

Puckett rolled his own cigarette. "Wrong first thing," he answered. "Captain Caney never carried a lot of cash. Wasn't robbery a-tall. If it was, why didn't the woman holler?"

"What woman?" Cort demanded.

He made a few notes while the cook talked. At the end the sergeant grunted, went to the wall telephone, and asked for the French military exchange. In a moment he was shouting in bad French for the arrest of Madame Barrier, wherever she might be. Returning, he asked Puckett, "Anything happen at the mess today? Anything out of the way?"

Puckett shook his round head. Cort waited impatiently. He didn't expect much more help from this man; only half believed what the fellow had said already. It might be a knife from the mess kitchen, might not. The cook's red face looked as empty as an upset bucket, the sergeant thought.

"Nothing happened a-tall," Puckett decided, "outside of Lieutenant Hawthorne, he leaves half his lobster."

"Good Lord!" Cort exclaimed. "If you ain't a dumb Yank!"

"It was dawgoned good lobster we had."

"If it was lobster or poison, I'd take poison any time, soldier," Cort retorted. "That goes for oysters, too. I wasn't askin' about their appetite. I want to know what happened."

"I'm tryin' to tell you," Puckett objected, "if you wouldn't get hard-nosed and shoot off your minnywerfer. I'm a cook, why shouldn't I talk about appetites? Nothing happened, then. Captain slaps the frog lieutenant in the pan, but mebbe you ain't askin' about that, neither."

"Slapped him?"

Puckett repeated the events of the day.

"Enough there to start a dozen murders," Cort admitted, "only . . . his pockets were inside out."

"Have it your own way," Puckett said.

"You go and bring all the officers here," Cort grunted, "double time."

Puckett returned to the quarters and stirred out Major MacLeod, Dr. Shasta and Lieutenant Hawthorne. They listened with incredulity on their

faces and started to dress at once. Puckett called Hagan next. He was gone, just as the cook suspected; so, also, was Sous-Lieutenant Marriotte.

The major was first dressed, but wasted three minutes searching for his left spur; at last tramped out with only his right heel clicking. The other two followed him. Hawthorne's neck looked longer and Shasta looked fatter at this time of night.

Puckett did not go with them to the garage. In the kitchen he searched again in the drawer where he kept his knives . . . one was gone, all right, and he remembered the nick in it, sergeant or no sergeant. He laced his shoes and breeches and built a fire in the range and set water on it to boil. The officers would ask for coffee after this. He needn't open a tin of milk. They'd want their coffee black.

Funny about that knife, he thought.

It was his; he'd swear to it. A man in his job needn't bother his head remembering a lot of stuff, but certainly he ought to know his own knives when he saw them. Taking care of kitchen knives and G. I. cans, putting out three meals a day, making beds, saddle-soaping shoes . . . was all he had to do. . . .

He paused. Shoes? He turned slowly from the drawer, leaving it open, forgot even to close the drafts in the range, and padded unhurriedly down the corridor toward the front entrance.

A cupboard stood there against the wall. He opened its door and saw that on the shelf, as usual, lay a whisk broom, a shoe brush, a tin of saddle soap, a heavy pressing iron, and a heap of rags.

He touched the brush. Its bristles were damp . . . quite damp. He picked it up and turned it over deliberately. When had he used it last? Not since morning, and the bristles still damp? Breathing heavily through open lips, he held it, looking down at it almost accusingly, until a drop of sweat from his forehead splashed on his hand and he thrust it back and shut the door quickly.

Next minute he was in the major's room, crouching beside the bed, jerking the major's extra shoes from under it. He turned them over, felt the moist leather, looked at the spatter of mud on the uppers, and ran his thumb nail along the soles, then slowly put them down and slipped back into the corridor.

Hagan's room adjoined the major's, but Hagan, Puckett knew, owned

only one pair of shoes, and he was out somewhere, without leave, wearing them now.

He crossed the corridor into the room assigned to Lieutenant Shasta. The medico's extra shoes were dry and mudless. He wasn't as hard up for shoes as Lieutenant Hagan was. He possessed two pairs, but the ones he was wearing tonight were in need of soling. Puckett knew that from cleaning them, knew all about everybody's shoes. Hagan owned the one pair, Shasta two . . . one of them worn out . . . and Lieutenant Marriotte four.

Tonight, for some reason, the Frenchman had his best pair on his feet. Of the other three, one was a little damp, with fine flecks of mud on it. Puckett examined it a minute, then put it back beside the others and went on to look at Hawthorne's.

Hawthorne's extras, like MacLeod's and Marriotte's, were damp. Damp, but apparently clean. There was no mud upon their uppers and beneath, in the angle of the heel, the only clay on them was drying in the crack. Puckett poked it with his finger and a chunk fell to the floor. He picked it up; still carrying it, went, uneasily, into the quarters of the dead Captain Caney.

Caney's shoes were under the middle of his bed always. Puckett got down on his knees and fished them out. He ran his hand into the inside of each, then shoved them back under the bed.

That done, he returned to the kitchen and sat down behind the stove and stared vacantly at the wall.

The old alarm clock on the shelf pointed to half after three when he heard the others coming from the garage. He got up sleepily, took out the fat black coffee pot, reached thrice into the coffee bin with his hand, and filled the bottom of the pot generously. He poured boiling water into it and set it back upon the stove.

Sergeant Cort stepped in first. He sniffed the coffee and without speaking to Puckett turned toward the mess hall. The three officers followed him. MacLeod was saying: "You're convinced, sergeant, the motive was robbery?"

Puckett shook the coffee pot.

"I'm sure of it, major," Cort replied. "A man wouldn't take a dame out to spend the evening without some jack in his pockets, would he? And he's picked clean as a jay bird. Not a sou on him. What can that mean, except he's stuck up and killed?"

Puckett showed his head in the door. "Stuck up with a kitchen knife," he inquired, "when there's a million guns around?"

Cort turned to him. "Keep your shirt on, soldier," he suggested, "you talk too much."

"Okay," Puckett agreed. He went back to the kitchen. He'd go down to LeMans some day and rain all over this cock-eyed sergeant. He listened a minute, standing where Cort could not see him.

Gendarmes were bringing Madame Barrier here now, the sergeant said; they had found her at the railway station at the end of Avenue Thiers.

"Coffee, sir?" Puckett asked the major.

He served Cort last. He was setting the cup down when the front door opened and Hagan arrived. At sight of MacLeod, he drew back.

"Broke arrest, did you?" the major demanded.

Hagan swallowed. Puckett looked first at his face, then at his feet, and returned to the kitchen and shut the door. He did not open it until he heard Marriotte's voice.

"But yes," the Frenchman was explaining, "I have the right to spend the night away. I have a friend . . . a lady. . . ."

The major growled, "You damn frogs and your women!"

"But I did not kill him!" Marriotte protested.

Puckett, leaning over him to set down his coffee, spoke to Cort. "Y'ain't accusin' *him?*"

Cort was angered this time.

"When I want you to tell me who did this job, I'll ask you," he said.

"Okay, and I'll tell you, sarge," Puckett answered, apparently unruffled.

Hagan laughed nervously. "Why don't you tell him now, cook? Get the suspense over with." His voice was tight and he swallowed hard and he laughed uneasily again.

"No time for you to get comical, lieutenant," Cort objected. "Think it over. Your superior officer puts you in arrest; you break out and while you're out, he's killed. How's your alibi?"

"Alibi?" Hagan repeated. His smile had quickly disappeared.

"Yeh. Where was you tonight, eight to ten?"

"Why, I was walking over toward Arnage. To get a drink."

"Alone?"

"Of course, alone."

Cort emptied his cup. "Sweet little layout," he remarked. "You a-walk-

ing alone over toward Arnage, and the major hunting his pipe down by the tracks, and Lieutenant Shasta wandering around some Y. M. C. A., and the Frenchie out with a woman. Not an alibi in the whole lot!"

"Except mine," Hawthorne said quietly. "You can ask over at Third Company officers' mess."

Hagan laughed. "Trust The Virgin," he said.

"I'll check his," the sergeant retorted.

He held up his cup for more coffee. Puckett filled it, where he stood, and it overflowed into Cort's hand. "Have a care, dumbbell," he said. He set the cup down and it spattered over again on the table cloth. Puckett stopped and wiped up the drops from the floor. "You sure been soaking up an awful lot of somebody's perfume, soldier," Cort exclaimed.

Major MacLeod interrupted.

"It seems to me," he began. His tone was conciliatory. But before he could tell how or what it seemed, there was a commotion at the door.

Madame Barrier had arrived. Two gendarmes marched behind her. They pushed her in and saluted with bent fingers.

The woman was unexcited. She had changed her black evening dress for a brown wool suit . . . looked as if she was going somewhere, Puckett thought.

"Now," she asked, "what is this?"

"Party," MacLeod told her grimly. "Continuation of a party. Sit down. What's *your* alibi?"

He did not rise. No one did, except Hawthorne. Puckett waited, coffee pot in hand. The gendarmes were whispering to Cort. Puckett walked over, nearer them. Whatever it was that one of them held, it passed to Cort's hand and thence to his pocket.

"Well, lady," the sergeant asked, "how about it?"

The woman's thin shoulders shrugged, ever so slightly.

"I do not know you," she said.

"Y' don't need to," Cort answered. "This ain't formal. What you got to say?"

"I have nothing. How could I? I am with my poor captain. We walk on what you call duckboard. In the dark . . . in zis direction . . . somebody call to him. . . ."

"Coffee, miss?" Puckett asked.

"When was that?" Cort demanded. "Go 'way with your coffee, fellow."

"It is the moment after we have leave this door, m'sieur," the woman answered. She still was calm. "Oui, in the dark, this man calls. From behind. The captain, he say to me, 'Pardon.' He step back. I advance. Twenty, thirty meters. I hear the voices. They quarrel. M'sieur the captain is much angry. He say like this, 'Don't be a fool.' Vraiment, I hear it plain. 'Don't be a fool,' he say. 'I do what I wish. None your beesness, ever.' "

"Coffee?" Puckett persisted.

Cort scowled at him. "Get out the way, cook. Where was you, then, lady?"

The woman peeled off one glove and took the coffee. She sipped once and set it down.

"We got some milk," Puckett said.

"Shut up, will you?" Cort demanded.

The Frenchwoman continued: "Why, I stop and listen, M'sieur. The quarrel becomes most violent. I . . . I hurry away. Is that not right to do? I do not like quarrels. But as I hurry, I hear the scream. Oui, a most fearful scream. I tell myself the captain is hurt." She hesitated. "I . . . I return at once. . . ."

"You found him?"

"Non, non!"

Cort reached into his blouse; then, as if changing his mind, withdrew his hand empty. "You didn't find him?" he persisted.

"Non, non, I do not find him. It is so dark, so muddy. I hunt . . . then the fear seizes me again. I . . . I am a coward, perhaps? I go away. Queeck."

"Take a look at this," Cort said. He withdrew his hand again from his pocket. In it was a small roll of French money.

"The gendarmes found this in your bag," Cort disclosed.

The woman drew back. "That?" she cried. "Oui, it is mine. Mine only! If you have it now, then the gendarme steals it!"

"But it's got a stain on it here," Cort said. He laid the roll on the table and pointed. "A stain that looks like blood."

The others leaned forward. But instantly Puckett's freckled hand reached out and took up the money. His eyes were popping. He unfolded the bills and began to count, dropping them one at a time to the table.

"Twenty francs . . . twenty . . . twenty . . . two tens . . . this here's the five . . . see yourself, how it's torn and mended?"

"Listen, you thick-head!" Cort yelled. He snatched at the money. "Leave this to me!"

"Okay," the cook said. He pushed the pile of bills aside. "You're right, it's Captain Caney's roll. Eighty-five francs. I recognize them."

Cort tipped back his head. "You can recognize money, too?" he demanded. He laughed, and Hagan joined him. "My God," the sergeant said, "I wisht I was as smart as a cook."

Puckett's broad face reddened. He turned to Major MacLeod.

"Captain kept his money in his shoe, sir," he explained. "In his shoe under the bed. Hid it there. I see it every day when I brush the shoes. Sure I take it out, often. How'd I clean 'em up good if I didn't? It was me fixed that one piece."

Cort scoffed. "Pasted it?" He swung on the woman. "How'd you happen to get this roll, lady? Answer me that."

"And do it quick," the major added.

Madame Barrier cried out. "Mais non, I did not kill! Did not! Believe me, I ask the saints to witness!" She spread out her hands. She had taken off both gloves now and her fingers showed white. "I tell the truth! Yes, to be sure I find him . . . dead. Already dead!"

"Then what?" the major barked. "You took that money off him?"

"Oui, m'sieur, I do that. What else can I do? They will say I kill him, these pigs of police. I am frightened, so frightened I cannot think. All I know is, I must escape . . . but how? I have no money. I . . . I feel in the pocket. . . ."

"Nice pal," Cort commented.

The major inhaled deeply. "So you are willing to concede, now, sergeant, that I had nothing to do with this . . . crime?"

Cort replied shortly, "I am holding the woman, sir."

Madame Barrier jumped to her feet. "M'sieurs!" she begged. She stared at them in panic. Their eyes were hard. Her glance traveled frantically from face to face till it came to the cook.

"You," she appealed, "you tell them. I do not kill anybody!"

Puckett shook his round head. "No more'n me," he agreed. "'S God's truth, Major. She ain't the one."

"Didn't kill him?" Cort growled. "Well, how do you know?"

Puckett said, "'Cause I know who did do it, if you're askin'."

Sergeant Cort had seen notoriety hounds before. And would-be detectives.

They annoyed him. The dumber they were, the more positive. He said as much, scowling into Puckett's face.

"Okay," Puckett replied. He started to the kitchen.

"Wait a moment, cook," the major halted him. "If you're so positive, why don't you tell us?"

"You ain't asked me to, sir," Puckett answered. He returned to the table and cleared his throat. "I'm dumb mebbe," he told Cort. "I ain't a high-rankin' file closer with some hen tracks on my sleeve, but what I know I know, and that's my kitchen an' everything in it, an' the sleepin' rooms an' everything in 'em, too. That knife comes out my drawer. I'm gone from the kitchen two hours this afternoon. Yes, sir. No reason I shouldn't be, is there? But you can bet I don't leave no kitchen door open. I lock it up. So whoever takes that knife has to have a key. Yes, sir. Well, how many keys is there?"

"We've all got keys," Lieutenant Hawthorne said.

"Okay, sir. All you officers got 'em, and me, I got one, too. But nobody else. So one of us must of took the knife."

Cort yawned noisily.

"Next?" Major MacLeod asked.

"Next, the body," Puckett answered. "It's lyin' in mud. Well, mud's somethin' else I know about. A man uses as much saddle soap as I do, he gets to thinkin' a lot about mud. I go look at the shoe brush and what do I find? It's wet. Good and wet. That means somebody's been usin' it within a couple hours or so. What for? Well, to take mud off his shoes, I figger, an' if there ain't some special reason for taking it off quick, they'd of left it for me in the morning."

The major looked down quickly at his boots; remembering the missing spur, thrust his feet farther under the table.

"So I go to your quarters, sirs, and look at your shoes."

Shasta pursed his fat lips.

"Who gave you permission?" he demanded.

"Nobody," Puckett admitted. "It's my job to look after 'em. I go hunt and I find just who's been brushing off the mud. Some of the shoes is muddy yet, so it ain't them. And some don't have any mud on them, but they're dry, just like I left 'em this morning, so I know it ain't them, either. But there's one pair that's good an' damp. They've been worn tonight, that means. They're clean now. Brushed all clean, but damp."

Lieutenant Hawthorne suggested, "Couldn't they stay damp from morning?"

"Maybe, sir. Only when I brush a pair of shoes, I clean the soles, too. And there's fresh mud on this pair, under the corner of the heel, underneath."

"Well, what about it?" Hagan interrupted. "My shoes are muddy right now."

"Yes, sir," Puckett admitted. "But that ain't all. Y' just got to consider it 'long with other things. This lady here says somebody calls the captain and he goes back and they tangle. Somebody's pickin' a fight, see? Mad about something. Now, what makes a guy mad? Mad enough to slip out with a knife? Money, liquor, a skirt. . . ."

Shasta grunted. "Well, who killed him?"

"I'm tellin' you, sir," Puckett answered. "Money, liquor, or a skirt. Nobody was drunk tonight, so it ain't liquor. An' everybody here knows how Captain Caney ain't ever got any money. Sends it home in allotments. So what's it leave? A skirt."

"Non, non," Madame Barrier pleaded.

"Leaves a skirt," Puckett repeated, "and who's most likely to be most het up about Captain Caney's going out on a date? Not Lieutenant Marriotte. He's got women behind every tree."

Major MacLeod frowned.

"And not you, major. You never see this lady before tonight."

"I'm glad you leave me out of your deductions, Puckett."

"Yes, sir, you're 'way out, sir, even if you ain't got any alibi. None of you have got one, only Lieutenant Hawthorne."

He walked toward the door. "Just a minute, sirs."

They heard him tramping down the corridor. Presently he returned, carrying a pair of brown garrison shoes. The leather in both of them still was damp, but there was no mud visible. However, in the turn of the heels, Puckett revealed the fresh clay.

Major MacLeod took the left one in his hands.

"The guy that kills Caney is the guy them shoes belongs to," Puckett said. "He gets mad this afternoon, thinkin' how the captain's goin' to take his woman. Gets so mad he runs into my kitchen an' grabs the knife, an' tonight, when they start out, goes chasin' after 'em. Tells Captain Caney to leave his woman alone. 'Course, the captain gets mad, too . . . always

does . . . and, well, after the fight, this fellow comes back an' cleans his shoes. Forgets about under the heel. But he don't forget to fix an alibi. Rest of you don't think of alibis, 'cause you don't know what's happening."

MacLeod dropped the shoe on the floor. "Hawthorne!" he shouted.

Hawthorne's long neck bent like an overheated candle; his thin shoulders drooped; he sat forward, with his spectacles sliding down his sweating nose.

"I tried to tell this smart sergeant," Puckett said, "soon as he come hollerin' around. Told him how Lieutenant Hawthorne don't eat his lobster tonight. I knew somethin' was wrong, soon as I see his plate. It takes a lot to spoil his appetite."

"Hawthorne!" the major repeated.

"Yes, sir," Hawthorne muttered.

"Feller like him don't often get a woman," Puckett explained. "Likes to keep one when he gets her. I know. I'm funny lookin', too. Funny lookin' guys always takes their women serious."

You may have seen the motion picture starring Claude Rains and Margo, but we'll wager you never read the superb story on which the picture was based! — Ben Hecht at his brilliant best.

CRIME WITHOUT PASSION

by BEN HECHT

MR. LOU HENDRIX looked at the lady he had been pretending to love for the past six months and, being a lawyer, said nothing. Mr. Hendrix was a gentleman who could listen longer to female hysterics without unbending than was normal. This, he would have said, was due to his aloof and analytical mind. Then, also, the events which were taking place in this boudoir at the moment were of a familiar pattern. Some eight or nine times Mr. Hendrix had been the hero of just such climaxes as this, when new love had entered his life, and necessitated similar farewells.

The young lady who, this time, was doing the screaming was a nymph of the cabarets known as Brownie. Her full name was Carmen Browne. She danced, and very effectively, at the El Bravo Club where, devoid of plumage as an eel, she led the Birds of Paradise number. In this she was ravishing as a Dream of Fair Women.

Why so young and delicious a siren as Brownie should be so disturbed over the amorous defection of Mr. Hendrix would have confused anyone who knew this gentleman or merely took a one minute look at him. He was not Romeo nor was he Adonis, nor was he even such a male as one associates with the general practice of seduction. He was a little man with that objectionable immaculateness which reminds one, instanter, of sheep's clothing. He was one of those popinjays of the flesh pots with the face of a tired and sarcastic boy. His sideburns were a wee too long, his smile unduly persistent (like a ballet dancer's), his voice far too gentle to have deceived anyone, except perhaps a woman, as to his spiritual composition. But one can always depend on the ladies to misunderstand the combination of gentleness and sideburns.

Brownie, who among her own kind was considered not only quite a reader of books but a sort of practical authority on masculine characteristics, had misunderstood Lou Hendrix, amazingly. Carry on as she would now she was no match for this *caballero* of the law who, out of a clear sky, was

engaged in giving her what she called "the go-by." As her monologue of screams, epithets and sobs progressed the lovely and muscular girl understood it all. She perceived, much too late for any use, that she had to do with as purring a hypocrite, rogue and underhanded soul as one might flush in a seven-day hunt on Broadway, which, according to the chroniclers Brownie most admired, is the world's leading water hole for human beasts of prey.

Looking around at the pretty apartment in which Mr. Hendrix had installed her and in which she had lorded it over her friends for six months and from which she must now exit — love's dream being ended, Brownie spread herself on the couch and filled her Sybaritic diggings with a truly romantic din. From the more coherent utterances of this tearstained beauty it seemed that she was innocent of all dallyings with a certain Eddie White, an ex-college hero, and that since leaving this same Mr. White whose love interest she had been before the Birds of Paradise number was staged, she had never once permitted him to lay a finger on her. She was, wailed Brownie, being wrongly accused. Then, sitting up, her greenish eyes popping with rage until they looked like a pair of snake heads, Brownie laughed, as she would have said, scornfully, and declared that she could see through Mr. Hendrix and his so-called jealousy. He was getting rid of her because he didn't love her any more. He was tired of her and putting her on the escalator — that was all there was to it.

To this, Mr. Hendrix, thoroughly seen through, made no reply and Brownie, announcing that she was not going to be made a sucker of, fell back on the couch, beat some cushions with her fists and shook with grief. The telephone rang. Brownie straightened on the couch.

"It's probably for you," she said.

"More likely it's Mr. White," said Mr. Hendrix.

The taunt brought Brownie to her feet.

"If it's for me, by any mischance," said Mr. Hendrix, "say I'm not here."

Brownie spoke into the phone.

"Who?" she asked. "No, he's not here. No, I don't know when he'll be here. No, no, I don't expect him." Hanging up she looked bitterly at Mr. Hendrix. "Your office," she said. "Always making me lie for you."

"You might have been a bit more polite," said Mr. Hendrix.

The heartlessness of this suggestion sent Brownie back to the couch and her grief. She resumed her sobs. Mr. Hendrix continued to regard her with

creditable, if villainous detachment. His heart was in the highlands with another lassie. But even discounting that factor Mr. Hendrix felt he was pursuing a wise course in ridding himself of so obstreperous an admirer as lay howling here. He had no use for overemotional types. They were inclined to drive diversion, which was Mr. Hendrix' notion of Cupid, out of the window with their caterwauling.

Mr. Hendrix' soul, in fact, was a sort of china closet and he was firm in his aversion to flying hooves. He belonged to that tribe of Don Juans, rather numerous at the Broadway hole, who never hang themselves for love. Tears he regarded as bad sportsmanship and heartbreak was to him plain blackmail. Beauty — and by beauty Mr. Hendrix meant chiefly those delicious and agile Venuses of the cabaret floor-shows — beauty had been put into Broadway (if not into the world) for man's delight; certainly not for his confusion and despair. And this little barrister lived elegantly, if rather villainously, by this conception.

A number of things, all obvious to the analytical Mr. Hendrix, were now operating in Brownie's mind and making her wail — Eddie's vengeful delight at her getting the go-by from his successor; the tittering of the little group of columnists, hoofers, waiters and good-time Charlies whom she called the World; the lessening of her status as a siren — she might even be demoted from leading the Birds of Paradise Number, and through all these considerations — the Nerve of the Man, throwing her down as if she were some Nobody! As for the more passional side of the business, the pain in her heart at losing someone she had so stupidly loved and misunderstood and at losing the foolish Broadwayish dream of wedlock she had cherished for half a year, Brownie chose not to mention these in her ravings, being too proud.

Mr. Hendrix, still preserving his finest courtroom manner of Reason and Superiority, watched on in silence and fell to wondering what he had even seen in this red-headed, almost illiterate creature with her muscular legs and childish face to have ever considered her charming or desirable. But he was given small time to meditate this problem of idealization. Brownie, with a yell that set the base of his spine to tingling, leaped from the couch, stared wildly around and then, emitting a series of shrill sounds, had at the furnishings of the Love Nest. She pulled a portiere down, hurled two vases to the floor, swung a chair against the wall and smashed it, beat Mr. Hendrix' framed photograph to bits against the edge of the piano, seized a

clock from the mantelpiece and bounced it on the floor and was making for Mr. Hendrix' derby, which he had placed on a chair near the door, when he, with an unexpected shout, headed her off.

The barrister defending his derby received a blow on the side of his face that sent him spinning. A thrown object caught him behind the ear. Brownie's pointed shoes belabored his shins. He retreated. But the hysteria to which he had been coolly and analytically listening seemed suddenly to have been injected, like a virus, into his bloodstream. It had started with the tingling in the base of his spine. Smarting from blows and full of some sort of electric current which gave off oaths in his head, the little lawyer began to outbellow his now ex-paramour. He came at the lady and in his hand he held, almost unaware of the fact, a large brass candlestick.

What it was that made this popinjay, so renowned for coolness, strategy and cynicism in his twin professions of amour and the law, so completely shed his character, God alone, who was not at Mr. Hendrix' elbow at the moment, could have told; and perhaps a psychiatrist or two might also have made a guess at. But here he was much too far gone for analysis, his own or anyone else's, charging at the lovely Carmen Browne like a bantam cave man, screaming and swinging the heavy piece of brass in the air.

There was no precedent in Mr. Hendrix' life for such a turn of events and no hint in any of his former love doings that passion could so blind his faculties and hate so fill his heart. Yet blind he was and full of a clamorous hate that demanded something of him. From the oaths which escaped Mr. Hendrix during this preliminary skirmish with the brass candlestick, it seemed that what he hated was women; loathed and hated them with a fury out of the Pit. Announcing this he swung the piece of brass and the second swing exhilarated him the more. It had struck squarely against Brownie's head, dropping her to the carpet. Mr. Hendrix, out of breath, stood cursing and grimacing over her like a murderer.

Slowly the little lawyer's rage melted. His heart swelled with terror and the nape of his neck grew warm. Brownie lay as she had fallen. He leaned over. Her skull was cracked. Blood was running. Her eyes were closed. Her legs, exposed in an incongruously graceful sprawl, were inert. He put his ear to her bosom. There was no heart beating. He stood for several minutes holding his breath and listening automatically for sounds outside the door. The choking sensation in his lungs subsided and the cool, analytical mind that was Mr. Hendrix returned like some errant accomplice tiptoeing

back to the scene of the crime.

Carmen Browne lay dead on her hearthstone. No more would she lead the Birds of Paradise number at the El Bravo Club. But Mr. Hendrix wasted no time considering this sentimental phase of the matter. He had committed a murder, without intent, to be sure; even in self-defense, looked at factually. But no, self-defense wouldn't hold, Mr. Hendrix was thinking swiftly. There rushed through his mind all the angles, holes, difficulties, improbabilities and prejudices of his case and in less than a minute the little lawyer had put himself on trial on a plea of self-defense and found himself guilty.

Since a young man, Mr. Hendrix had always been close to crime. He had had that unmoral and intellectual understanding of it which helps make one type of excellent lawyer. In action, defending a criminal, Mr. Hendrix had always been like some imperturbable surgeon. Guilt was a disease that could be cured, not by any operation on the soul of its victim, but by a process of mental legerdemain which convinced a jury that no guilt existed. Mr. Hendrix might have said that he served a cause beyond good and evil, that of extricating the victims of fleeting misadventures from the unjustly permanent results of their deeds.

Thus, far beyond most men who might have found themselves confronted by the strange and ugly dilemma of having unexpectedly committed a murder, Mr. Hendrix was prepared for his new role of criminal. He knew all the ropes, he knew all the pitfalls of the defense of such a case as this. He knew the psychology of the prosecution. And with an expert, if slightly still fevered, mind he knew the perfect details by which his guilt might be cured, the ideal evidence, persuasive and circumstantial by which a jury could be cajoled to the verdict of not guilty.

In less than a minute, Mr. Hendrix had a full grasp of his case, seeing far into its convolutions and difficulties. He set about straightening these out.

But like some dramatic critic who, after observing plays for years with subtle and intimate understanding of them, is summoned suddenly on the stage and with the strange footlights glaring in his eyes told to perform the part whose words he knows, whose ideal gesture and intonation he has always dreamed about, Mr. Hendrix felt the panic of debut. To know and to act were phenomena surprisingly separate. This was what delayed the cautious barrister for another minute, a minute during which Mr. Hendrix'

client, with beating heart and white face mumbled for speed, chattered even of flight.

But at the end of this second minute Mr. Hendrix had elbowed this ignominious client into a far corner of his mind, seated him as it were at the counsel's table with orders to keep his mouth shut — and taken charge of the case. He leaned over and looked at the clock on the floor. The dial glass was broken. The clock had stopped, its hands at two minutes of four. Mr. Hendrix' thoughts were rapid, almost as if he were not thinking at all but knowing. He could move the hands forward to five o'clock. He could leave the premises undetected, if possible, and attach himself for the next two hours to a group of prospective alibi witnesses, remain with them during the hours between four, ten and seven and this would be the proof he had not been in the apartment at the time of the murder. Mr. Hendrix examined the watch on Carmen Browne's wrist. It too had stopped. It registered one minute after four. The two time pieces, evidently synchronized by their owner, told a graphic and substantially correct tale. At 3:58 the struggle had begun. At 4:01 the woman had been killed. He would have to set the wrist-watch forward a full hour to preserve this interesting discrepancy in the stopped clocks.

The telephone rang. Mr. Hendrix straightened, not having touched either of the hour hands. He had actually anticipated a telephone ringing, and in this anticipation known the ruse of the forwarded time hands was stupid. At 3:50 Carmen Browne had answered a phone call, a record of which was with the switchboard man in the lobby. Now at 4:03 — he consulted his own watch — she failed to answer. Other phone calls might likewise come before five o'clock, all of which Carmen Browne would fail to answer, thus establishing an important series of witnesses against the fact that the murdered woman had been alive between four and five o'clock; thus rendering his alibi of his own whereabouts during that time practically futile. There was also the possibility that the neighbors had heard their quarrel and noted the time of the screaming. And more than all these the chance that someone, a maid or the building agent (Carmen Browne had been consulting him about sub-letting her place) might enter the room before five o'clock.

It was the hour preceding 4:01 for which Mr. Hendrix needed an alibi. He already knew its vital ground work. At 3:50 Carmen Browne, alive, had told someone on the phone — probably Tom Healey of his own law

firm — that he was not in her apartment. Mr. Hendrix's eyes had remained on his own wrist watch as his thought slipped through these pros and cons. It was 4:04. He glanced at the sprawled figure on the floor, shivered, but stood his ground. Another phase of his case had overcome him. He smiled palely, shocked at what had almost been an oversight. He must not only provide an alibi for himself but fortify it with evidence tending to prove someone other than he had done the deed. He must invent a mythical murderer — leave a trail of evidence for the sharp eyes and wits of the prosecution leading to Another — a never to be found another, but yet one always present in the Case.

Carmen Browne's fingerprints were on the broken clock, the smashed chair, the battered photo frame. This was wrong. It would reveal that it was Carmen who had been in the rage, smashing things, demanding something that had resulted in her murder — and this sort of a situation, brought out by the prosecution, might easily point to Lou Hendrix, known to have been her lover. No, said Lawyer Hendrix swiftly, it must have been her assailant, demanding something of Carmen Browne, who had been in the rage and done the smashing and struck the fatal blow. Mr. Hendrix established this fact circumstantially by wiping Carmen Browne's fingerprints from the objects in question with a silk handkerchief. He wiped also and more carefully the brass candlestick. The absence of fingerprints pointed to a certain self-consciousness on the part of the assailant after the deed but that was both legitimate and normal. Men of the deepest passion, and there was precedence for this, remembered to obliterate evidence.

At the door, Mr. Hendrix, in his hat, overcoat and gloves, paused. He repeated to himself carefully, Carmen Browne had been attacked by some suitor, jealous of her real sweetheart, Mr. Hendrix, as witness the destroyed photograph of the latter. But why hadn't she used the gun the police would find in the desk drawer two feet from the spot where her body lay? There were of course normal explanations to be put forward. But Mr. Hendrix did not admire them legally. For fifteen precious seconds Lawyer Hendrix balanced the issue. During this space Mr. Hendrix listened rather than thought. He listened to the prosecution pointing out to the jury that the reason Carmen Browne had not reached for this available weapon with which to defend herself was because she had not expected an attack from the assailant, because the assailant was one familiar to her against whom she had no thought of arming herself; and even further, because the assailant,

all too familiar with the premises, knew where this gun was as well as did Carmen Browne, and prevented her from reaching it. All these values pointed shadowly, Mr. Hendrix perceived, at his client. He removed the gun from the drawer and dropped it into his coat pocket. He must be careful in disposing of the weapon and Mr. Hendrix' mind dwelt stubbornly on a dozen cases in which an attempt at post crime evidence disposal had been the connecting link with guilt. But Mr. Hendrix assured his client firmly that he would be more cautious in this regard than any of his previous defendants had been.

With the gun in his coat pocket Mr. Hendrix stepped out of the apartment. Now he was, he knew, purely in the hands of luck. A door opening, a neighbor appearing would ruin his case instantly. But no untoward event happened. He had three floors to descend. He listened at the ornamental elevator doors. Both cages were going up. Mr. Hendrix walked quickly down the three flights and coolly, now, like a gambler rather than a lawyer, rehearsed the possible permutations of Luck.

He had entered the apartment at three o'clock that morning with Carmen Browne. But because it was his habit to preserve a surface air of respectability toward the attendants of the place, though he fancied they knew well enough what was going on, he had walked up to the apartment with Brownie. The switchboard operator concealed in an alcove in the lobby had not seen them come in, nor had the elevator boy on duty, as both were out of sight at the moment. If now he could leave the building with the equal but vitally more important luck of not being seen, his case would be more than launched.

The lobby was empty, but Mr. Hendrix did not make the mistake of slipping out too quickly, and coddling the presumption that no eyes had observed him. He knew too well the possibility of the unexpected witness and he paused to study the premises. The switchboard attendant, half hidden in the alcove, had his back to the lobby and was reading a newspaper. Both elevator cages were out of sight. There was no one else. Mr. Hendrix stepped into the street.

Here again he stopped to look for that unexpected witness. How often, he remembered grimly, had the best of his cases been tumbled by the appearance on the stand of those aimless, incalculable human strays who had "Seen the Defendant." Mr. Hendrix saw two of just that type. Two women were walking, but with their backs to him and away from the

apartment. A delivery truck was passing. Mr. Hendrix noticed that the driver was talking to a companion and that neither of these passers looked in his direction. There was no one else. Mr. Hendrix turned his attention to the windows across the street. Only the first three floors mattered. Identification was impossible, or at least could be sufficiently challenged, from any greater height. The windows were empty. As for the windows of the building directly over him, if he kept close to the wall none could see him from these.

Satisfied with this rapid but concentrated scrutiny, Mr. Hendrix started walking toward the corner. If the triumph of intellect over nerves, of reason over the impulses of the senses may be called heroism, then this smiling, casually moving little popinjay in the black derby and snug overcoat might well be called a hero. Innocence, even aimlessness, was in his every movement; and in his refusal, despite a driving curiosity to look at the time on his wrist — a tell-tale gesture were it recorded by anyone — there was something approaching the loftiness of purpose which distinguished the ancient Ascetics. As he turned the corner, Mr. Hendrix, still unruffled, still amiably rhythmic in his movements, looked back to make sure no taxicabs had entered the street. None had.

He was now on 6th Avenue and he moved more briskly. He had four blocks to walk and habit sent his eyes looking for a taxicab. But alert to every variety of witness, he shook his head and stayed afoot. He smiled remembering that his own bed in his own apartment was unmade. He had just turned in the night before when Brownie had telephoned and asked to meet him. Thus his housekeeper, who never arrived before noon, would establish simply the fact that he had slept at home. This was unnecessary, to be sure, unless some passerby had seen Brownie and a man enter the former's apartment at three this morning.

Mr. Hendrix arrived now at a Sixth Avenue cinema palace. He looked carefully over the small crowd, waiting for tickets and then joined the line. In a few minutes he was being ushered into the roped enclosure at the rear of the auditorium. He slipped away quickly, however, and walked in the dark to the other side of the theatre. He approached one of the ushers and demanded to know where he could report the loss of a pair of gloves. After a brief colloquy he was led to the office of the lost and found department and here Mr. Hendrix, very voluble and affable, explained his mishap. He was not, he smiled, usually so careless with his belongings but the picture had been so

engrossing that he had forgotten all about his haberdashery. Then Mr. Hendrix gave his name, address, a description of the missing gloves and watched with a glow of deep creative satisfaction the time being written down on the blank form used for cataloguing such matters. "Four-eighteen," the man wrote and Mr. Hendrix, consulting his watch, pretended to be startled. Was it that late, he demanded, good Lord! he had had no idea of the time. It was quite a long picture. And the Lost and Found official, drawn into chumminess by Mr. Hendrix' affability, agreed that the film was a little longer than most, but well worth sitting through — to which Mr. Hendrix heartily assented.

Emerging from the movie palace, Mr. Hendrix rehearsed his case to date. The main body of his alibi was achieved. He had spent the time between two-thirty and four watching a movie. His continued presence at four-eighteen in this theatre was written down in black and white. He had also taken care that it should be a movie he had already seen so as to be able to recite its plot were he questioned in the next few hours. And he had also provided a motive for seeing this particular movie. The film had to do with the character and career of a mythical state's attorney, and a newspaper friend of Mr. Hendrix who conducted a gossip column had asked him to contribute a few paragraphs from a legal point of view carping at the improbabilities of the scenario.

Mr. Hendrix' next port of call was an elegant speakeasy. Here he had a drink, engaged in an exchange of views with the bartender, who knew him, asked the correct time so he might adjust his watch. At 4:50 he stepped into a phone booth in the place and called his office. He inquired whether anybody had been trying to reach him that afternoon. The law clerk on duty for the firm, Tom Healey, answered as Mr. Hendrix had expected. Mr. Healey said he had been trying to find him in relation to a disposition but had been unable to locate him. At this Mr. Hendrix feigned a light anger. Where had the incompetent youth called? He had, said Mr. Healey, tried everywhere, even Miss Carmen Browne's apartment.

At this bit of information Mr. Hendrix, in his mind's eye addressing one of his future star witnesses, changed his voice. He grew angry and very obviously so, for he knew the laziness of people's memory and their slipshod powers of observation. He inquired sourly if Mr. Healey had spoken to Miss Browne. On hearing that he had, Mr. Hendrix said:

"Do you mind telling me how she seemed when you asked if I was there?"

"Well, I don't know," Mr. Healey said.

"Try and think," said Mr. Hendrix, "I'd like to know."

"Well," said Mr. Healey, "come to think of it, she struck me as a little curt or upset about something."

"Ha!" said Mr. Hendrix and, to the surprise of his office underling, called the young lady a villainous name.

"I don't want you to call me up at her place any more," he raised his voice. The clerk, Mr. Healey, said he would never do it again, but Mr. Hendrix, as though too enraged to notice this promise continued, "I'm all washed up at that telephone number. Understand what I mean? You can just forget about it. Any other calls?"

"No," said Mr. Healey.

"O. K.," said Mr. Hendrix and hung up the phone with an angry bang.

He walked from the speakeasy with the light step which to Mr. Hendrix' office colleagues always characterized a Not Guilty verdict in sight. Now that the tingling at the base of his spine as well as the annoying warmth on the nape of his neck, as if a Prosecuting Staff were actually breathing on him, had gone entirely, Mr. Hendrix was beginning to feel not only relaxed but even amused. He could hear the Prosecution falling into this little trap he had just laid.

Question: So Mr. Hendrix told you that you needn't try to reach him at Miss Browne's apartment any more?

Answer: Yes, sir.

And Lawyer Hendrix looked winningly at the jury that sat in his mind's eye. Gentlemen of the Jury, consider this. As if, having committed a crime the defendant would be so gauche as to give himself away by some such oafish remark to a law-clerk — a type of person trained to remember what he hears. Not a casual stranger, mind you, but a man with sharp and practiced wits.

Mr. Hendrix, skittering happily along the street, cleared his throat, beamed and felt a desire to laugh. He had never quite so enjoyed a case. What subtle and yet vital psychological proof of his innocence was the fact that he had just said to Tom Healey what he had; what perfect proof of the fact that he had been the victim of an obvious coincidence in saying he was washed up with Carmen Browne when she lay dead in her apartment. No guilty man would ever have said that.

From a drug store he was passing, Mr. Hendrix made another telephone

call. He called Carmen Browne. Inquiring for her of the apartment switchboard operator a sharp excitement stirred him. Before his eyes the image of her body sprawled gracefully and awfully on the floor at his feet swayed for a moment. He hoped the crime had been discovered, although there were still chances to improve his Case. But the switchboard man calmly plugged in for Carmen Browne's apartment.

"She doesn't answer," he said after a pause.

"This is Mr. Hendrix calling," said Mr. Hendrix. "Has she been in at all? I've been trying to get her all day."

"Hasn't come in while I've been here," said the man.

"How long is that?" said Mr. Hendrix.

"Oh, about three hours," said the man.

"Thank you," said Mr. Hendrix and hung up.

He had told Tom Healey he was washed up with Carmen Browne and now he was trying to reach her, and Mr. Hendrix considered this paradox, in behalf of his client, with a smile. It revealed, Gentlemen of the Jury, a distracted man; a lover full of confusion as a result of — what? Of the fact, gentlemen, Mr. Hendrix purred to himself, that my client was jealous of the attentions he had found out someone was paying to Carmen Browne; that he did not believe the poor girl's protestations of innocence and, driven from her side by suspicions, was yet lured back to her by his deep love. Jealous, Gentlemen of the Jury, of the attentions being paid to Carmen Browne by this creature who that very afternoon had entered her apartment and against who Carmen Browne had defended herself until struck down and killed.

To augment this phase of the case, Mr. Hendrix returned now to the apartment building in which Carmen Browne lay murdered. He approached the switchboard operator, who greeted him by name. Here Mr. Hendrix controlled a curious impulse that whitened the skin around his mouth. He felt impelled to ask this man whether he had noticed Mr. Hendrix in the building before, whether he had seen him during the few moments he had walked from the lobby an hour ago. Astonished at this impulse, Mr. Hendrix held his tongue for a space, aware that the switchboard man was looking at him with curiosity.

Question: How did the defendant seem?

Answer: Confused.

Gentlemen of the Jury, and how would a man, consumed with jealousy

seem while inquiring, against all his pride, if the woman he thought was wronging him, was home?

"Has Miss Browne come in since I called?" asked Mr. Hendrix.

"I haven't seen her," said the man. "I'll try her apartment again."

There was no answer.

"Give her this note when she comes back," said Mr. Hendrix.

He wrote on the lower part of a business letter from his pocket.

"Darling, if you are innocent, don't torture me any more. Give me a chance to believe you. I'm willing to forget what I heard or thought I heard over the phone. As ever Lou."

He placed this in a used envelope, scribbled her name on it, and sealed it.

Gentlemen of the Jury, can you imagine any man who had killed a woman he loved or had loved, so lost to all human reaction, so fiendishly wanton as to have written that little plea when he knew she was lying dead at his hands?

That was merely a rhetorical overtone, the human rather than evidential side of the note, but Mr. Hendrix filed it away in his memory as a bit of decoration. His alibi, Lawyer Hendrix murmured to himself was now complete. But the secondary phase of the case needed further effort. The beauty of a case lay always in the elaborateness of diverse but corroborating detail — as if the world were crying the defendant's innocence from every nook and cranny. And happily at work, Mr. Hendrix had lawyer-like so far forgotten the human existence of his client as to whistle cheerily the while he turned over and returned over the major psychological problem in his mind.

Defense — Carmen Browne had been murdered by a man to whom she refused, after perhaps leading him on, to surrender herself. Also it might be that the killing had been one of those passional accidents which the sex instinct, run amok, precipitates. It might be that Carmen Browne had led a double life and was discovered in this double life by her slayer.

Ergo — Lou Hendrix, sharp-witted, observant, a veritable connoisseur of women, must suspect the existence of this other man. And Defendant Hendrix must also be jealous of him.

Witness to this — his talk to Tom Healey; his note to Carmen Browne now in the hands of the switchboard operator.

And Lawyer Hendrix, with the thrill of a gambler rolling a third lucky seven, remembered at this point a third witness — a veritable star witness, beautifully, if unwittingly, prepared for her role a few days ago. This was

Peggy Moore.

Miss Moore danced at the El Bravo Club as a member of the ensemble. She had been Brownie's confidante for a year. Mr. Hendrix smiled blissfully recalling his conversation with Miss Moore less than a week ago and recalling also her general character, one made to order for the part he was to assign her.

This young lady was a tall, dark-haired Irish lassie with slightly bulging eyes and an expression of adenoidal and not unpleasing vacuity about her face. She was, as Brownie had frequently confided to him, a veritable love slave, a dithering creature incapable of thinking or talking on any subject other than the emotions stirred in her bosom by love or jealousy.

Some days ago Mr. Hendrix had selected this almost congenital idiot as the opening pawn in his decision to rid himself of Brownie. He had confided to Miss Moore's ears, so perfectly attuned to all tales of amorous agony, that he suspected Brownie of being still in love with his predecessor Eddie White. Miss Moore's eyes had bulged, her mouth opened as if to disgorge a fishhook and simultaneously a shrewd, if transparent emotion, had overcome her. Miss Moore, the victim of so much perfidy, had been convinced instanter of her chum's guilt and had launched at once into a series of lies, all defending Brownie's integrity and offering idiotic details of her devotion to her lawyer lover. Mr. Hendrix, intent on laying some foolish groundwork for his subsequent defection, had persisted, however, and, for no other reason than that he delighted in playing the human fraud whenever he could, had feigned sorrow and talked of woe.

Now Mr. Hendrix summoned Miss Moore on the telephone to meet him at the speakeasy he had recently quitted. He spoke guardedly, hinting at a lovers' quarrel, and pretending he needed her to verify some evidences of Brownie's guilt, just unearthed. Miss Moore, full of a laudable and loyal ambition to lie her head off in Brownie's behalf, as Mr. Hendrix had foreseen, arrived in a rush. And the two sat down at a table in a corner, Miss Moore to invent innocent explanations and alibis for her chum, at which like all overtearful addicts of passion she was amazingly expert; and Mr. Hendrix to weave her artfully into his case.

But first Mr. Hendrix, aware of the lady's sensitivity toward all matters pertaining to love, proceeded to get himself drunk. He must be the lover stricken with jealousy and seeking to drown his pains in liquor, a characterization which this simple child and student of amour would remember only

too vividly on the witness stand. Three drinks were consumed and then, honestly befuddled from such an unaccustomed dose, Mr. Hendrix launched into cross examination. And despite his thickened tongue and touch of genuine physical paralysis, Lawyer Hendrix remained as cool and analytical as if he were in a courtroom. He was not one to betray a client by any human weaknesses.

He put himself at Miss Moore's mercy. He must know the truth and she alone could tell him. Otherwise with too much brooding and uncertainty he would be sure to go out of his mind. His law practice was already suffering. He would lose all his money. Miss Moore nodded tenderly and understandingly at this saga of love woes. In reply she could assure Mr. Hendrix that he was being very foolish to be jealous of Eddie White because Mr. White wasn't even in town and besides Mr. White was engaged to marry a society girl in Newport. Mr. Hendrix sighed appreciatively at this walloping lie.

"It's not Eddie," said Mr. Hendrix, "it's somebody else. You know that as well as I. You're in her confidence. Don't try to lie to me, dearie. I caught her red-handed, talking over the phone. She hung up when I came into the room. She was making a date — and not with Eddie White."

Miss Moore paled at the thought of this dreadful contretemps, but kept her wits. Her chum's guilt frightened her but at the same time she saw through Mr. Hendrix' effort to lead her astray. Of course it was Eddie White of whom he was jealous. Miss Moore was certain of this and Mr. Hendrix, listening to her somewhat hysterical defense of Brownie, sufficient to have convicted that young lady of a hundred infidelities had he been interested, realized exactly what was in his companion's mind. He considered for a moment the plan of involving Eddie White in his case. He had thought of it before — Brownie's previous lover, a known hot-headed young gentleman given to nocturnal fisticuffs in public places. But for the second time he dismissed this phase. Eddie would have an alibi and the establishing of Eddie's physical innocence, however psychologically promising his guilt might have looked, would embarrass his client's case.

For the next hour Mr. Hendrix drank and discussed his jealousy, pleading with Miss Moore to be kind to him and reveal what she knew; and hinting at gifts in return for such service. But Miss Moore only increased the scope of her lies.

"Have you seen Brownie today?" Miss Moore finally broke off, winded.

Mr. Hendrix waved in his seat and looked at her with bleary drunken eyes.

"No," he said. "I don't trust myself to see her. God knows what I would do — feeling this way."

"You're just worked up about absolutely nothing," said Miss Moore and rose. She had to toddle off to the El Bravo where she performed during the dinner hour. Mr. Hendrix accompanied her to the door.

"Tell Brownie," he whispered, "I'll be over to the club tonight. And . . . and give her a last chance to prove her innocence."

"I'll give her the message," said Miss Moore and sighed.

Alone Mr. Hendrix returned to the phone booth. He sat down heavily and put in a call for Carmen Browne. His case was ready. He desired to hear the news of the finding of the body. An annoying tingle touched the base of his spine as he waited for the apartment switchboard to answer. He wondered how drunk he was. Drunk, to be sure, but sober enough to know exactly every phase and weigh every nuance. The moment he heard of the crime he would rush over, be detained by the police and with the aid of his intoxicated condition act thoroughly irrational and grief stricken. He would hint at no alibis, reveal not a shred of his case until the coroner's inquest.

The switchboard operator finally answered. Mr. Hendrix inquired thickly for Miss Browne. He was told Miss Browne was not in. He hung up. Rising and swaying for a moment, Mr. Hendrix, thoroughly at peace with the world, except for this intermittent tingle, decided on the best course. He would go to the El Bravo Club, order his dinner and wait there till Brownie's absence was noticed and a search started.

The El Bravo orchestra was rendering a dance number. The dance floor was crowded. Mr. Hendrix looked dizzily at the circling figures. He had selected a table far to the side, one of those at which the performers and their friends grouped themselves during the evening. The stuffiness of the air made Mr. Hendrix feel drowsy. Looking up, he beheld a familiar figure approaching. It was Eddie White, whom he had pleased to style the ignorant drop kicker. Mr. Hendrix smiled. He noticed tiredly that Mr. White seemed a little drunk.

The ex-college hero, still a sturdy tanned and muscular product of the Higher Education, greeted Mr. Hendrix calmly. He dropped into a chair at the table and inquired, with an eye roving over the place, how tricks were.

Mr. Hendrix said they were fine.

There was a pause during which the music filled the cafe with glamorous and exciting sounds.

"Didn't know you were such a movie fan," said Mr. White apropos of nothing and Mr. Hendrix felt himself sobering up as if in a cold shower.

"Just what do you mean?" Mr. Hendrix managed to inquire and very casually.

His companion was busy looking them over on the dance floor and offering a roguish eye to a few of the tastier numbers. Mr. Hendrix stared at him in silence and felt the tingle return to his spine.

"Saw you going into the Roxy this afternoon," Mr. White resumed.

"You did," said Mr. Hendrix and then added, as if he were looping the loop, "what time was that?"

"What time?" Mr. White repeated looking at the little lawyer with a dull, athlete's stare. "Oh, a little after four, I should say."

"You're crazy," said Mr. Hendrix, "if you think you saw me going into the Roxy after four. Why I came out about twenty after four, after seeing the whole show."

"I don't care what you saw," said Mr. White, "I saw you going in at about a quarter after. I was gonna say hello but I thought the hell with it. How'd you like the picture? Ought to be in your line — all about one of those crooked legal sharks."

In the brief space during which Mr. Hendrix was now silent his thoughts were very rapid. Mr. White, God help Mr. Hendrix, was that most objectionable of all humans known to a legal case — the aimless stray that the Prosecution was wont to drag, rabbit fashion, out of its hat with which to confound the guilty. And Mr. Hendrix knew without thinking the full significance of this witness, Eddie White. If the defendant had been seen entering the movie theatre after four, he had been seen entering after the murder had been committed. But that was the least damaging phase. The defendant had left the movie theatre at 4:20, having lied to the attendants and told them he had spent an hour and a half in the place. With the fact of this lie established, the prosecution could take apart piece by piece the obvious mechanism of his alibi. There was no alibi. There was no case. In fact, to the contrary, Eddie White's simple statement of the time of day — after four — revealed all of the defendant's subsequent actions as those of a thoroughly guilty man, and Mr. Hendrix leaned across the table and put a hand on the

athlete's arm.

"It must have been somebody else you saw," he purred.

"Listen, don't tell me," said Mr. White. "I saw you looking around, buying your ticket and ducking in."

Mr. Hendrix winced at the damning phraseology.

"I know it was about a quarter after four," pursued Mr. White, "because I had a date outside. And don't get so excited. It wasn't with Brownie."

The tingle at the base of the Hendrix spine was almost lifting him out of his seat.

"That's a lie," said Mr. Hendrix thickly.

"What's that?" Mr. White demanded.

"I said you're lying," Mr. Hendrix repeated slowly. "You didn't see me."

"Oh, that's what you said, is it?" Mr. White was unexpectedly grim. "Listen, I never liked you and I don't take talk off a guy I got no use for. Get that."

And for the second time that day an unprecedented mood overcame the little lawyer. He made an effort to stop the words which suddenly filled his head but he heard himself saying them and wondering confusedly who it was who was drunk — he who was listening or he who was speaking. He was telling Mr. White what a liar, numbskull and oaf he was and Mr. White stood up. Words continued, Mr. Hendrix aware that he and Mr. White were both talking at once. But the music made a blur in his ears and the El Bravo Club swayed in front of his eyes. Then Mr. Hendrix realized, and darkly, that the towering Mr. White's hand was on his collar and that he was being lifted out of his seat. The El Bravo orchestra was rolling out a jazz finale and nobody seemed to have noticed as yet the fracas taking place at this side table. As Mr. Hendrix felt himself being hoisted to his feet, a sense of nausea and helplessness overcame him. He thrust his hand into his coat pocket.

"Calling me a liar, eh?" Mr. White was growling in the Hendrix ear. He added a number of epithets.

The little lawyer saw for an instant a fist pull back that never landed. Mr. Hendrix had removed a gun from his coat pocket, a gun of whose existence in his hand he was as unaware as he had been of the brass candlestick. The gun exploded and Mr. White with a look of suddenly sober astonishment fell back into a chair. The music at this moment finished with a nanny goat blare of trumpets. No heads turned. No waiters came rushing. Shaking as if his

bones had turned into castanets, Mr. Hendrix stood looking at the crumpled athlete and watched his head sink over the table. The mouth was open. The athlete's fingers hanging near the floor were rigid.

Music started again and Mr. Hendrix turned his eyes automatically toward the dance floor. Blue and pink flood lights were shining on it and out from behind the orchestra shell came a line of almost naked girls. White legs kicked, smiles filled the air. Leading this chorus line Mr. Hendrix saw Carmen Browne. She was dancing.

The little lawyer grew sick. He shut his eyes. Then he opened them. They were full of pain and bewilderment. It was no hallucination. It was Brownie. Extending under her ear at the back of her head he saw strips of court plaster. She was alive and restored.

Mr. Hendrix knew exactly what had happened. The last time he had called her apartment, the switchboard man, failing to recognize his liquor-thickened voice, had withheld the information he might have offered Mr. Hendrix — that Carmen Browne was alive, that she had summoned a doctor, that she had left the apartment.

And even as he was thinking of this tiny detail, a hundred other details crowded into the Hendrix mind. He remembered his accusations to Brownie that she still loved Eddie White; his statement to Peggy Moore last week and this afternoon that he was too jealous to trust himself; his attack on Carmen Browne, his subsequent drunkenness, his idiotic antics in the movie theatre — as if he were shadowing Eddie White — what else could his rushing in and rushing out mean? Everything Mr. Hendrix had accomplished since 4:02 this afternoon pointed only at one conclusion — that he hated Eddie White, that he had almost killed his sweetheart out of jealousy over White, that, still burning with this emotion he had tracked White down and murdered him in cold blood.

Mr. Hendrix, during these brief moments staring at the crumpled athlete, wanted to scream, so macabre did all these events strike him, but his voice trailed off into a moan. What was this insane thing he had done for his client! Exonerated him! Mr. Hendrix, still shaking, slipped down into his chair. He, Lou Hendrix, the shining legal intelligence, had like some Nemesis convicted himself — and not of manslaughter, which might have been the verdict otherwise — but of premeditated murder in the first degree. There was no case. No defense was possible. There was nothing left to do but to flee like some thug.

Mr. Hendrix looked at his wrist. He had twenty minutes to make the ten o'clock train for Chicago. From Chicago he would travel to New Orleans and thence into Mexico. He had a wallet full of bills. The side exit of the El Bravo was ten feet away. But Mr. Hendrix, struggling to get to his feet, swayed and fell forward. The dozen drinks he had so shrewdly tossed down his gullet to help him act his part, joined the hideous plot he had hatched against himself. He was too drunk, too dizzy to stand up and move quickly.

They found the little barrister hunched in his seat staring at the murdered athlete. The gun was still in his hand. Mr. Hendrix was mumbling passionlessly.

"Guilty. Guilty. Guilty."

Did you know that Edgar Wallace wrote secret service stories, too? Here's an unusual item from perhaps the most versatile detective-story writer who ever lived.

CODE NO. 2

by EDGAR WALLACE

THE SECRET SERVICE never call themselves anything so melodramatic. If they speak at all, it is vaguely of "The Department" — not even "The Intelligence Department," you will note. It is a remarkable department, however, and not the least of the remarkable men who served — in a minor capacity, it is true — was Schiller.

He was an inventive young Swiss with a passion for foreign languages. He knew all the bad men in London — bad from the violently political standpoint — and was useful to the Chief Secretary (Intelligence), though Bland and the big men . . . well, they didn't dislike him, but they sort of . . . I don't know how to put it.

Watch a high-spirited horse pass a scrap of white paper on the road. He doesn't exactly shy, but he looks at the flapping thing very expectantly.

He was never in the Big Game, though he tried his best to get there. But the Big Game was played by men who "chew ciphers in the cradle," as Bland put it.

In some mysterious way Schiller got to know that Reggie Batten had been shot dead whilst extracting the mobilization orders of the 14th Bavarian Corps from a safe in Munich — this was in '11, and the sad occurrence was described as an "aviation accident."

The Munich military authorities took Reggie's body up in an aeroplane and dropped it . . . and the Munich newspapers gave poor Reggie some beautiful notices, and said that the funeral would be at two o'clock, and they hoped that all his loving friends would gather round. Such of his unsuspecting acquaintances as did gather were arrested and searched, their lodgings and baggage ransacked, and were in due course most incontinently sent across the frontier.

Bland, who was in Munich, did not attend the funeral; in fact, he left the beer city without lingering unnecessarily.

He was back in town only a day when Schiller asked for an interview.

Bland, square-chinned, clean-shaven, and wholly impassive, heard particulars of Schiller's application and laughed.

"You are altogether wrong in your view of Mr. Batten," he said. "He was unconnected with this department, and his death was due to a very deplorable accident. Therefore I cannot give you his job."

Schiller heard and bowed.

"I have been misinformed, sir," he said politely.

He went to work in another way and made a carefully planned attack upon the Chief Secretary, who had reached that delicate stage of a man's career which is represented by the interregnum between the end of a period of usefulness and the consciousness of the fact.

Sir John Grandor had been in his time the greatest Intelligence man in Europe, but now — he still talked of wireless telegraphy as "a wonderful invention."

Yet Sir John was chief, and a fairly shrewd chief. His seal of office was Code No. 2, which no mortal eye had seen save his. It lay on the bottom shelf of the safe between steel-bound covers, sheet after sheet of close writing in his own neat hand.

No. 2 Code is a very secret one. It is the code which the big agents employ. It is not printed, nor are written copies circulated, but is learnt under the tuition of the Chief himself. The men who know Code No. 2 do not boast of their knowledge, because their lives hang upon a thread — even in peace time.

Schiller could never be a big agent. For one thing, he was a naturalized foreign subject and the big men are nationals, trained to the Game from the day they enter the Office. They are educated men, condemned for life to dissociate themselves from the land of their birth, and who they are, or where they live, is known only to three men, two of whom have no official existence.

Sir John liked Schiller and did many things for him. He told him stories of his past adventures and Schiller listened attentively. In the course of one of these post-prandial discussions (he was a most presentable young man, and Sir John frequently took him home to dinner), Schiller casually mentioned Code No. 2. He spoke of it with easy familiarity, and Sir John discussed the Code in general terms. He told his guest how it was kept in the special safe, how it was made up on the loose-leaf system, and how it was a nuisance because it was always in disorder because he had to consult it every day, and

invariably replaced the sheets he had been using on the top, irrespective of their alphabetical right to that position.

The young man had innocently suggested that he should come to Sir John's office every night and sort them out, but the old man smiled benevolently and had said he thought not.

Bland summoned Grigsby to his office one day, and that florid young man came to the tick of the clock.

"This fellow Schiller is bothering me," said Bland in the low tones which are almost second nature in the Service. "He is a smart fellow and very useful, but I mistrust him."

"He has a blameless record," said the other, staring out of the window, "and he knows little of the bigger things — Sir John is a ditherer, but he's close enough. What is worrying you now?"

Bland strode up and down the room.

"He is inventing a new wireless receiver," he said, "and he has got the old man interested. He works all day at it in his room, and at night he carries it down to Sir John's office, where it is most religiously locked in the safe.

"Of course, it is absurd to imagine that the box — it is about the size of a biscuit-tin — can contain anything with human intelligence and get out in an air-tight safe and walk around, or go squinting at the code; but, somehow, I don't like it."

Grigsby chuckled.

"It's a new one on me," he confessed. "I'm not denying that Schiller isn't clever; he invented a draught excluder for my room which is a model of ingenuity, but I can hardly imagine a wireless receiver which reads and transmits a code from the interior of a steel safe."

But Bland was not convinced.

He sent for May Prince. She was holiday-making in Devonshire, but came at once to town: a straight slip of a girl — she looked eighteen, though in truth she was ten years older — with the loveliest smile in the world, a pair of appraising gray eyes, and a mouth which, in repose, was a little inclined to droop.

"Sorry to disturb you on your holiday," said Bland, "but I want Schiller kept under observation. Next week you will be discharged from the Department for neglect of duty. You will retire with a grievance, and you will tell Schiller, whom you will continue to meet, that I am a beast and that I lose a great deal of money backing racehorses. I will have a few bookmakers'

accounts prepared for you, which you will show discreetly."

"Is he to blackmail you?" she asked.

Bland shook his head.

"If he is all I think he is, he will not. No, he might give you confidence for confidence — so long."

And May, with a nod, went out.

Schiller's invention took an unconscionable time to develop. Yet he was enthusiastic over its possibilities and inspired the Chief with some of his enthusiasm. He worked in his spare time at the machine, and regularly every evening at five minutes to six he would carry his heavy box to the Chief's office, solemnly deposit his burden on the iron grill which formed the one shelf of the safe, and watch the locking up with a jealous eye.

And May Prince had nothing to report. Three days before that fatal 1st of August which brought so much destruction and misery to Europe, Bland, who had been working day and night in the interest of his department, went up to Schiller's room to question him regarding the *bona fides* of a certain Antonio Malatesta, suspected of being an agent of the Central Powers. Bland very seldom visited the offices of his subordinates, but on this occasion his 'phone was out of order.

He found the door locked and knocked impatiently. Presently it was opened by the smiling Schiller. The table was covered with a litter of wire, electric batteries, tools, and screws, but of the great wireless receiver there was no sign.

"You are looking for my wonder-box, sir?" said Schiller. "She is in my safe — soon I will give you the most remarkable demonstration! Even today I caught a signal from the Admiralty — through a closed window."

Bland was not listening.

He stood erect, his nose in the air, sniffing.

There was a faint, sweetish smell — a scent of camphor and something else. Schiller watched him through narrowed eyes.

"H'm," said Bland, and, turning on his heel, left the room.

A telegram lay on the table. It had been delivered in his brief absence:

> "Schiller is agent in Central European pay. He is head of cryptogram department. Have proof. — MAY."

Bland pulled open the drawer of his desk, took out an automatic pistol, and raced through the door, and took the stairs two at a time.

Schiller's door was open, but he had gone.

He had not passed out through the lobby or the front entrance of the building, but a commissionaire on duty at the side door had seen him pass and had heard him hail a cab.

Bland went back to his office and put through a 'phone call to the police:

"Watch all railway stations and docks. Arrest and detain Augustus Schiller."

He described him briefly, but with a sure touch.

"It is very lamentable," said Sir John, really troubled, "but I can't think he has taken away anything of importance. Has he removed his invention?"

"I have that all right, Sir John," said Bland grimly, "and tonight with your permission I am going to see what happens."

"But surely you don't think —?"

Bland nodded.

"I haven't monkeyed with it at all, but I've listened very carefully through a microphone and there is no doubt that it contains a clockwork mechanism. It is almost silent, but I have detected the sound. I suggest that we place the box where it is usually put, leave the safe door open, and watch."

Sir John frowned. All this seemed a reflection on his judgment and, as such, was to be resented, but he was too loyal a man in the Service to which he had given forty-five years of his life to allow his injured vanity to come before his public duty.

At six o'clock the box was placed in the safe.

"Is that where it was always put?" asked Bland.

"I generally — in fact invariably — put it on the iron grid."

"Just above Code 2, I see, sir."

The Chief Secretary frowned again, but this time in an effort of thought.

"That is true," he said slowly; "once, I remember, when the box was placed a little to one side Schiller pushed it to the center, which I thought was a little impertinent of him."

The two men drew up a couple of armchairs and seated themselves before the safe.

Their vigil promised to be a long one.

Eight, nine, ten o'clock passed, and nothing happened.

"I think it is rather ridiculous, don't you?" asked Sir John testily, as the quarter to eleven chimed.

"It seems so," said Bland doggedly, "but I want to see — good God — look!"

Sir John gasped.

Immediately beneath the box was Code 2, enclosed in a leather binder, the edges of which were bound, for durability sake, with a thin ribbon of steel.

Now, slowly the cover of the book was rising. It jerked up a little then fell, leapt again and fell back, as though there were something inside which was struggling to get free. Then of a sudden the cover opened and remained stiffly erect, forming, with the contents, the letter L, the upright of which was the cover.

There was a "click," and the interior of the safe was illuminated with a soft greenish radiance. It threw a glow upon the top page of the code which lasted for nearly a minute. Then it died away and the cover of the book fell.

"Phew!" whistled Bland.

He lifted the black box carefully from the safe and carried it to Sir John's desk, examined the bottom of the box with a long and patient scrutiny, then set it down.

"Code No. 2 is in the hands of the enemy, sir," he said.

It was daylight when he finished his investigations. Half the box was taken up by accumulators. They supplied the current which, operating through a powerful magnet, lifted the cover of the Code-book. They gave the light to the wonderful little mercurial-vapor lamps, which afforded the concealed camera just enough light to make an effective exposure.

"The little clockwork arrangement is, of course, simple," said Bland, "that sets the time for the machine to work and switches the current on and off. It probably opens and closes the shutters which hide the lens and the lamp and the magnet. I suspected the camera when I smelt the film in his room."

Sir John, white and haggard, nodded.

"Get me out of this as well as you can, Bland," he said gruffly. "I'll retire at the end of the year. I'm a damned old man."

He walked to the door and paused with his fingers on the handle.

"There are thirty men's lives in Schiller's keeping," he said; "their names and addresses are in that book. I suppose he got through the book. I am so careless that I changed the order of the pages almost every day, and the devil has been at work for nine months. He ought to have worked through the

book by now, for there was a different sheet on top every time."

"I'll do my best, sir," said Bland.

Schiller was away — and safely away — before war was declared. He was seen in Holland and was traced to Cologne. There was no possibility of changing the code, and messages were already coming through from agents.

Bland took a bold step. Through a man in Denmark he got into communication with Schiller and offered to make a deal. But Schiller was not selling. In the telegraphed words of the emissary whom Bland had sent:

> "Schiller is receiving an enormous fee from enemy government for decoding wireless messages that your agents are sending. He alone knows the code."

Nothing daunted, Bland again got into communication with the traitor, offering him an enormous sum if he would consent to return to a neutral country and retain his secret.

"Meet me in Holland, and I will fix everything," his message ended. It elicited a reply which was characteristic of the ingenious master-spy:

> "Come into Belgium and I will arrange."

A mad suggestion, for Belgium was now enemy ground, but Bland took his life in his hands, and a long glass dagger in his handbag, and left the same night for the Continent.

Bland went into Belgium by the back door and made a laborious way to Brussels. It would not be in the national interest to explain the means and methods he employed to make his entry into that carefully guarded land, but it is sufficient to say that he met Schiller, looking very prosperous, in the *estaminet* of the Gold Lion at Hazbruille, a small village on the Ghent-Lille Road.

"You are a very brave man, Mr. Bland," complimented Schiller, "and I wish I could oblige you in what you wish. Unfortunately, I cannot."

"Then why did you bring me here?" asked Bland.

The other looked at him curiously.

"I have a certain code," he said quietly. "I have it complete with certain exceptions: there are three pages missing. What do you want for them?"

Here was a staggerer for a smaller man than Bland.

"That is a fair offer," he said, calmness itself, "but what is the particular code you are buying?"

"No. 2," said the other, "I thought —"

Bland interrupted him.

"No. 2 Code?" he said, sipping his bock (he was for the time being a Belgian peasant). "Of course, that's rubbish. Neither you nor I know No. 2 Code; the code you stole was No. 3."

Schiller smiled superiorly.

"When you get back to London," he said, "ask your Chief whether 'Agate' does not mean 'Transports loading at Borkum.' "

"You might have got hold of that particular word by accident," said Bland grudgingly.

"Ask him if 'Optique' does not mean 'Emperor has gone to Dresden,' " persisted the calm Schiller.

Bland looked round the room thoughtfully.

"You know a great deal, my friend," he said.

The woman who managed the *estaminet* came in a little later and found Bland pulling slowly at a rank cigar, his elbows on the table, a half emptied bock before him.

The woman glanced with a little smile at Schiller.

"He's tired," said Bland, emptying the bock. "Let him sleep on. And don't let the flies disturb him," he added humorously.

Schiller lay sideways on the bench at which Bland was sitting, his face to the wall, and over his head was a coarse blue handkerchief.

"He will not be disturbed," said Madame, and pocketed the five-sou tip that Bland gave her with a grateful smirk.

"When he wakes," said Bland at the door, "tell him I have gone on to Ghent."

Three hours later a German landsturm soldier who had come for his evening coffee, whisked away the handkerchief which covered the sleeper's face, and stammered:

"Gott!"

For Schiller was dead, and had been dead for three hours. It took even the doctor quite a long time to discover the blade of the glass dagger in his heart.

A week after this Bland was dressing for dinner in his West End flat, and had reached the patience stage of bow-tying, when his valet informed him that Grigsby had called.

"I told him you were dressing, sir," said Taylor, "but Mr. Grigsby is that

full of his horse winning the Gatwick steeplechase that he won't take 'No' for an answer."

Taylor was a privileged person, and was permitted to be critical even of Bland's friends. Taylor was an ideal servant from his master's point of view, being simple and garrulous. To a man in Bland's profession garrulity in a servant was a virtue because it kept the employer always on his guard, never allowed him the delusion of safety or the luxury of indiscretion. Moreover, one knew what a garrulous servant was thinking and, through the medium of secret agents, what he was saying.

"Show him up here," said Bland after a while.

Mr. Grigsby came noisily into the dressing-room, though his greeting of Bland was a little cold.

"I've a bone to pick with you," he said. "What the devil have you been saying to Lady Greenholm about me? You know my feelings about Alice —"

"Wait a moment, please," said Bland sharply, and turned to his servant. "Taylor, you can go to the General Post Office with the letter you will find on the hall-stand."

Mr. Grigsby waited until he heard the door of the flat close, then walked into the passage and shot the bolt of the front door.

He came back to where Bland was standing with his back to the fire, his hands thrust into his trouser pockets.

"You're sure he had No. 2?" he asked.

Bland nodded.

Grigsby bit his lip thoughtfully.

"It isn't worth while worrying about how he got it — now," he said. "The question is, who will get it next?"

Bland opened a cigar case, bit off the end of a cigar, and lit up before he replied.

"What news have you at this end?" he asked. "I was across the border before they discovered his death; naturally, I have heard nothing save what our Amsterdam man told me."

"The code is in London," said Grigsby briefly. "As soon as he was dead a cablegram was sent to Valparaiso by the authorities in Brussels. It was addressed to a man named Van Hooch — probably a third party. Here it is —"

He took out a pocket-book and laid a slip of paper on the table. The message was short and was in Spanish:

"Schiller's London lodging."

"It's rather puzzling," said Bland. "Schiller wouldn't have written the code out — he was too clever for that. And yet he must have given the authorities a guarantee that the secret should not be lost with his death. It has probably been arranged that he should tell some person agreed upon — in this case a man in South America — in what manner the code was hidden. The exact *locale* he left until his death, probably sealed up amongst his private papers."

"That is a sound theory," said Grigsby. "He told you nothing more —"?

Bland shook his head.

"I had to kill him of course," he said with a note of regret. "It was pretty beastly, but the lives of thirty good men were in his holding. He probably knew where they were stationed."

"And the man that comes after will also know," said the other grimly. "We start tonight to make a very scientific search of his lodgings."

But the flat in Soho Square yielded no profit.

For the greater part of a fortnight three of the smartest Intelligence men (including Lecomte from the French department) probed and searched, slitting furniture, pulling up floors, and dismantling cupboards.

And the result was a negative one.

"I'll swear it is there," said Bland dejectedly. "We've overlooked something. Where is May Prince?"

"She's at the Chief Censor's. She has an office there," explained Grigsby.

"Ask her to come over."

May came in some triumph.

"I thought you'd send for me," she said. "I could have saved you such a lot of trouble!"

Bland was all apologies.

"I've neglected you terribly, May," he said. "Do you know, I have never seen you since you sent me the wire about Schiller?"

She nodded.

"I know that — Schiller is dead, isn't he?"

"How did you know?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"One reads things in the Censor's office — innocent letters from Holland, with messages written between the lines in formic acid and milk which becomes quite visible if you use the correct formulae. Mr. Schiller was a re-

markable man; and his father was one of the greatest scholars Switzerland has produced, though he was blind. What do you want of me now?"

Bland explained briefly. The girl knew of Code No. 2 and the secrecy which surrounded it, and realized the urgency of the situation.

"By the way, how did you know that he was an enemy agent?" he asked.

"I discovered *his* code," she replied cryptically.

Accompanied by the two men she went to the flat in Soho Square. The flooring had been replaced and the rooms were habitable again. She made a tour through the flat, then she returned to the big dining-room.

"This is the room where the code is," she said decisively.

It was a cheerful apartment, papered in a rich brown. A broad dado of a simple design belted the walls, and the wainscotting had been painted a chocolate color to harmonize with the paper. From the ceiling hung an electric fitting, and at this May glanced.

"We've had that down," said Bland, "and the wainscot has been taken out, but we've found nothing."

"Will you leave me alone here for a few minutes'?" asked the girl.

The two men withdrew, but they were hardly out of the room before she followed, her eyes blazing with the joy of discovery.

"Got it!" she laughed. "Oh, I knew — I knew!"

"Where is it?" demanded the astonished Bland.

"Wait," she said eagerly. "When do you expect your South American visitor?"

"Tomorrow — of course, the room will be guarded and he will have no chance of searching."

Her eyes were still dancing when she nodded.

"We shall see — tomorrow. I fancy you will have a very frank visitor from Valparaiso, and when he comes I want you to send for me."

"What on earth —"

"Wait, wait, please! What will he say?" She closed her eyes and frowned. "I can tell you his name; it is Raymond Viztelli —"

"You knew this all along?" asked the astonished Grigsby, but she shook her head.

"I knew it when I went into the room," she said, "but now I am guessing. I think he will offer to help you discover the code, and he will tell you there is a secret panel in the wall, and that it will take days and days to make the discovery. And I think he will ask you to be present when he makes his

search."

"He needn't ask that," said Bland unpleasantly.

"I think you're very mysterious, May, but I've a kind of feeling that you're right."

She had a few questions to ask the janitor of the building before she left.

"Mr. Schiller did all his own decorations — in the dining-room, didn't he?"

"Yes, miss," said the man. "A regular feller he was for potterin' about with a paste-pot or a paint-brush."

"And he has paid his rent in advance?"

"That's right, Miss."

"And he said that nothing was to be done to the flat till he came back?"

"His very words!" said the caretaker.

"I thought so," said May.

. . . . .

At ten o'clock next morning a card was brought to Bland. It was inscribed:

"Señor X. Bertramo Silva,"

and written in a corner, "of Valparaiso."

Bland pressed a bell, and in a little time Grigsby and the girl came in.

"He's come," said Bland shortly, and handed her the card.

The visitor was shown in. He was a dapper little man with a pointed beard, and spoke excellent English. Moreover, after the preliminaries he plunged straight into the heart of his subject.

"I am going to be very frank with you, Mr. Bland," he began; and Bland shooting a swift glance at the girl, saw the laughter in her eyes.

"I was for some time an agent of the Central Powers — I tell you this because I wish you to clearly understand my position," he went on. "Safe in South America, I thought no call would be made upon my services. A few weeks ago, however, I received a cablegram which was intercepted by the British authorities.

"I had known, of course, that in certain eventualities I might be obliged to come to England to make a search for certain documents, and that I should learn the place where they were hidden by telegram. That telegram came — I am here!"

He flung his arms dramatically.

"I came straight to you on my arrival. I tell you frankly why I came, because I decided, the night before I reached Plymouth, that the game was not worth the candle. I will assist you as far as possible to discover the documents, and then I will, if you will allow me, return to South America."

It was all very amazing to Bland. The man had said almost all that May had predicted he would say. He looked at the girl again, and she nodded.

"You understand that your search —" began Bland.

"Will be under the eyes of the police?" interrupted the man from Valparaiso. "I would prefer it."

"You would like to start your search at once, I suppose?" asked Bland.

"The sooner the better," said the other heartily.

"One moment."

It was the girl who spoke.

"You have a very good memory, señor?" she asked.

For just a fraction of a second the smile died from the man's eyes.

"I have an excellent memory, madame," he said curtly.

They went together in a cab and were admitted to Schiller's flat by the police officer on guard.

"Have you any theory?" asked Bland as they stood in the hall.

"Yes," replied the other quickly. "I think the documents are hidden in a recess in the wall behind a secret panel. It may take a week to find the panel. This is a very old house, and it is possible Mr. Schiller chose it for some structural advantage it may have had."

Again Bland thought rapidly — the frankness of the man, his willingness to help — the talk of secret panels was all in accordance with the girl's amazing prophecy.

He saw the glee in her eyes — glee at the mystification of her Chief.

Then he turned to the little man.

"Go ahead," he said.

Señor Silva bowed.

"I will take this wall first," he said, "and I will search for the evidence of a panel. My fingers are perhaps more sensitive than yours —"

His hand was outstretched toward the dado, when —

"Stop!"

At the sound of the girl's sharp warning Señor Silva turned.

"Before you go any farther," she said, "let me ask you if you value your life?"

The Chilean shrugged and spread his hands.

"Naturally, madame."

The girl turned to Bland.

"If this man learns Code 2, what will happen to him?"

"He will certainly die," said Bland simply.

She nodded.

"You may go on if you wish, but you are starting a little too far to the right."

"To the right —!" he stammered, his face going ghastly gray.

"The message to you begins at the door, Señor Viztelli," she said calmly. "The code does not begin until you reach the window. Will you continue?"

He shook his head, having no words.

Bland called in his men and they hustled the little South American into a cab.

"And now explain," said Bland.

The girl walked to the wall near the door and touched the dado.

"Feel," she said.

Bland's fingers touched the wallpaper gingerly. He felt a few pin-point eruptions, passed his hand to the right, and felt more. Then the truth dawned on him.

"Braille!" he whispered. The girl nodded.

"Schiller's father was a blind man," she said, "and Schiller evidently took up the study of the alphabet by which blind men read. Silva was informed how the code had been written and learnt it against the time when it would be necessary to take over Schiller's work."

She ran her fingers along the dado.

"There are seven lines of writing, and they run round the room," she said. "Schiller pasted this dado on himself — a bit at a time — as fast as he was able to photograph Code 2. This is how the top line begins.

"To Raymond Viztelli," she read. "Keep up pretense helping police; be frank, as I have told you. Tell them there is a secret panel, and you will be able to come often. Code begins: 'Abraham' means 'New guns have been fitted —' "

Bland caught her hand and gently drew it away.

"If you want to be a nice live girl and dine with me tonight," he said half humorously, "do not pursue your investigations any farther."

That afternoon Bland did a little amateur paper-stripping.

Here's what happens when a college professor turns Chief of Detectives. Meet Dr. Joseph Apperson and the problem of the queer death car.

MRS. MACBETH

by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

THE BODY was cold when the milkman found it, propped up behind the wheel of a shiny red coupé, parked in a side street about half a block from the railway station. The coroner figured the man was killed some time between eleven at night and one in the morning, and it was a little after six when I drove up with Joseph Apperson, the new chief of detectives.

Well, it took me three minutes to figure we were due to hold our noses and swallow some more of those nasty "Police Baffled" headlines. The killer did a swell job of covering his tracks. The dead man was tall, middle-aged, and sort of dull and respectable-looking. He wasn't scrawny, exactly, but he couldn't have been a very big eater, either. He'd been shot through the left temple, and the gun was on the floor of the car. There wasn't a scrap of paper or a tailor's label in his clothes that we could identify him by. The license plates were gone off the car, the number had been chiseled off the engine, and the serial number was missing, too. I didn't look to see if there was any laundry mark on the man's shirt, because what good is a laundry mark when you don't even know what town the laundry would be in?

Apperson was opening the door near the driver's seat, looking at some scratches on the window glass, when I said:

"I wouldn't be touching those door handles, Mr. Apperson, till the identification bureau boys get here. They might break their own spotless record and develop some finger prints off the chromium."

I figured Apperson wouldn't mind a little advice from an old-timer like me, even if he was my superior, because he'd only been on the force a week. He was the City Council's idea of shooting new life into the police department with a dose of brains. Some of the Councilmen that could read had been telling the others how the Department of Justice in Washington had been getting results on account of using college men. So the Council sent up to the State University and borrowed Dr. Joseph Apperson, Professor of Criminal Psychology, to be our chief of detectives. I kind of expected to

see some goggle-eyed old fogy show up, with birds'-nests in his whiskers, but I was wrong. Apperson wasn't goggle-eyed, and he didn't have whiskers. He was just old enough to have been a field-artillery captain in the Battle of Saint-Mihiel, and he had clear blue eyes and a nice, clean-cut smile. He didn't do himself much good by coming down to the station on his day off, wearing white flannels and asking about a tennis court, and once in a while he'd forget himself and shoot off big words at me. On the whole, though, he was a good guy, and I wanted to see him get started right on his first homicide case. That's why I passed out the tip about not messing up finger prints.

"Don't worry about finger prints, Sergeant," he came back at me. "If we found any, they wouldn't do us any good, because they're not on file anywhere. This isn't a professional job."

"I don't know, now, Mr. Apperson," I said. "That number being chiseled off the engine, that's a professional crook's stunt. It looks to me like it might be a stolen-car gang that put this fellow on the spot for something. You see, they'd make a date with him to come here, then shoot him as he drove up to the curb."

Apperson laughed a little, but good-natured.

"Pretty clever, wasn't it?" he said. "To shoot through the window without breaking the glass."

"That's right," I said. I forgot about the window being closed. And the gun was inside the car. "You don't think it's suicide, do you? There's powder burns — "

"Of course not," said Apperson. "The man was killed instantly. He couldn't have moved over into the driver's seat by himself after he was shot."

"But maybe he was driving," I said.

Apperson smiled. "Look at the seat," he said, in that deep voice of his. He had a bass voice that you could almost feel, like the low notes on an organ.

Well, I looked at the seat for quite a while. At first I didn't see anything about it that gave Apperson a tip on who was driving. Then I noticed it was one of those adjustable seats, that you can fix to suit long-legged drivers or short-legged drivers. The seat was pulled all the way forward — for short legs. But the dead man had legs as long as mine, and I'm six feet two. Pretty smart of Apperson.

Just then Churchill and Smith came along. They'd been ringing door-

bells in that block, and asking people if they heard a shot sometime around midnight. Nobody'd heard anything. I told Apperson that.

"All right, Sergeant," he said. "Then you'd better make the rounds of the hotels and check on everybody that registered since eleven o'clock last night."

"You don't think a killer'd walk into a hotel right after bumping a guy off, do you, now, Mr. Apperson?" I asked him.

"Certainly," he said. "There was a suitcase on the luggage rack in back of this car when it got here. You probably didn't notice the straps dangling from it. Well, Sergeant, a person with luggage isn't likely to wander about the streets. He'll go to a hotel to avoid attracting attention."

"That's pretty smart thinking, Mr. Apperson," I said. It was smart, too, but I guess it made me a little mad because I didn't notice those straps myself. So I thought I'd see if I couldn't make the professor squirm by pretending to think he was even more wonderful and have him admit he wasn't. I winked at Churchill. Then I said:

"Mr. Apperson, have you figured out yet what kind of looking man we ought to be picking up?"

The professor had started to crawl under the car feet first. He stopped when he was half way under, and sat up in the street, his blue eyes very serious. I tried to figure whether he was going to laugh or get sore, but he didn't do either. He just said:

"In the first place, Sergeant, I think our man is a woman."

Well, that was another fast one, because I hadn't seen any hairpins, or powder smudges, or lipstick marks around, or any high-heel prints, either, and I'd been looking, too.

"Moreover," Apperson went on, talking a little like a book, "I think you'll find she's a small woman, and well dressed. Probably she'll be wearing a fur coat, because it's still quite cold in the north, where this car has been driven during the past few months."

I started to ask him how he knew the car was from the north, but he cut me off.

"At any rate," he said, "she'll be wearing jewelry." Then he slid under the car.

"Listen, Mr. Apperson," I said, pretty much flabbergasted, "how in hell — ?"

"I can't stop to give lessons now, Sergeant," he said from underneath.

"Round up the women. I'll see you at the station in an hour."

I rounded up six women by the time Apperson showed up at the detective bureau, full of grease and dust, looking more like a garage mechanic than a professor or even a chief of detectives. One of my women had a fur coat; dyed alley-cat, I figured. Two of them had jewelry, but it looked like ten-cent-store pearls and Christmas-tree sparklers to me. Then there was a colored wench a yard wide, and a hatchet-faced music teacher with goggles thick as dollar watches and a buzz-saw tongue that she kept working on me all the way to the station. I figured Apperson wouldn't want any of these, but the sixth one looked like the goods: A cute little red-head with a fox neckpiece. The red-head made me wait in the hall a couple of minutes, and I could swear I heard two people moving around in her room before she let me in. Of course she was alone when the door opened. She acted nervous when I asked her about the window being open on the fire escape, and she put up an awful squawk about coming to the bureau.

Well, Apperson looked them over, asked a few questions in that rumbling voice of his, and shook his head.

"Release them all," he said. "This the best you could do, Sergeant?"

"There's one other woman, registered last night at the Grand Hotel," I said.

"Why isn't she here?"

"She came in on the midnight train with her husband. That sort of lets her out, doesn't it?"

Apperson screwed up his eyebrows, of which he had plenty.

"Did you see her get off the train, Sergeant?" he asked.

"No," I said. "But I talked to the hotel runner that met the train, and brought them to the Grand in the hotel bus. He said they both came in together on the midnight. Just in case there was something rotten in the woodpile, I left Churchill at the hotel to keep an eye on them."

"Let's join Mr. Churchill," said Apperson.

On the way over to the hotel, he pulled out a long skinny cigar no bigger round than a lead pencil, lit it, and leaned back in the police car with his eyes closed. I sat there for a while, sniffing his smoke, which smelled expensive, and then I said:

"You know, Mr. Apperson, I think we made a mistake, letting that red-head go. She sure acted funny with me. I told her I was going to take her over to the Morgue to look at the dead man, and she turned more colors

than a camisole. I thought sure she was going to faint on me. She said I couldn't drag her near the Morgue with a team of caterpillar tractors."

"Then she isn't our woman," said Apperson, his eyes still closed. "Our woman would have gone gladly, and looked her victim over with perfect equanimity. She is exceedingly cold-blooded. She must have been, to have planned this murder so far in advance — far enough to have had the engine number removed before leaving home, accurately enough to time her arrival near a distant railway station almost to the minute. Very clever. She knows it, of course. Superiority complex. Drunk with a sense of the power of her own intelligence. Quite sure of her own infallibility."

Those were a lot of ten-dollar words the professor was handing out. He still had his eyes closed, so I took out my note book and wrote down the words I could spell. I figured I'd shoot them back at him some day, since he liked that kind of thing. After all, I come up for lieutenant of detectives in a couple of months, and I may as well make a good impression on the chief.

"I was just thinking, Mr. Apperson," I said. "How could this woman you talk about take the license plates off that car without the fellow with her getting suspicious?"

Apperson opened his eyes. He shook hands with me.

"Congratulations, Sergeant," he said. "Your reason is beginning to function. The explanation is, of course, that she removed the plates after she killed her man. I found the nuts, the gadgets that attached the plates, lying in the street under the car. The plates won't be found in the vicinity, naturally. But they may prove the flaw in her armor. The woman won't break down under ordinary questioning, because she has too much confidence in herself. She's convinced she has planned the perfect crime. We must make her think it isn't perfect, that we're just a little cleverer than she is."

The way Apperson talked about this woman as though she was guilty, when he hadn't even seen her, sort of gave me the willies. I was going to ask him again how he knew a woman did the murder, when the car stopped in front of the Grand Hotel. We got out and walked through the lobby. I showed him the names on the register: "Mr. and Mrs. William MacLeish, New York; Room 402."

"Pass keys to 402," said Apperson, flashing his gold badge on the desk clerk.

We walked into 402 without knocking, and I guess I don't have to tell you we got kind of a chilly reception.

The first thing I saw was a fur coat hung over the back of a chair. Then I saw Mrs. MacLeish. She was standing in front of a mirror, powdering her nose. MacLeish just finished shaving and came running out of the bathroom.

"Of all the impudence!" said Mrs. MacLeish.

"Is it a hold-up, Lispeth?" MacLeish yelled. "Shall I phone for the police?"

"The police have arrived," I cracked back at him, "and have the situation well in hand."

Apperson didn't say anything right away. He was sizing up the two people, and from his expression, I could tell that he was pretty satisfied. He had a lot of pleased little wrinkles around the corners of his eyes.

I looked the MacLeishes over myself. The lady tallied with the way Apperson figured her, all right. She was small, and dark, and sort of expensive-looking. She was pretty, but she would have been prettier if her jaw hadn't been quite so strong. I figured she was about ten, maybe fifteen years younger than the dead man in the auto. She had dark little gimlet eyes that bored right into you and made you want to apologize for breathing the same air with her. When she talked, she sounded more like a professor than Apperson did.

MacLeish was dark, too, and his hair was slicked back so smooth that you could see your face in it. I guess women would call him good looking; he had a dimple where his chin should have been, and his eyes were big and dreamy, with long lashes. He looked two or three years younger than the missus, and he seemed to be used to taking orders from her.

"Please pardon the intrusion, Mrs. Macbeth," said Apperson after a minute.

I thought it was kind of funny that he called her "Mrs. Macbeth," because he saw on the register downstairs that her name was MacLeish. The woman didn't seem to notice the mistake, though.

"Under what pretext are you violating our privacy?" she wanted to know, very haughty.

"I believe you lost some jewelry, Mrs. Macbeth," said Apperson, looking at the woman's hands.

"That's untrue," she said. MacLeish didn't say anything. He just sat down on the edge of the bed.

"But the rings you wore when you came in last night are missing," said Apperson, very politely. He was probably the world's politest cop, except

maybe an English dick from Scotland Yard I worked with on a case once.

"The rings aren't missing," said MacLeish, "They're on the washstand."

Apperson told me to go in the bathroom and look. I brought back a platinum wedding ring with diamonds all the way around it, and another ring with a big solitaire diamond in it. When I handed them to Apperson, he dropped one right in front of MacLeish, but do you think MacLeish would get off the bed to pick it up? Not him. I picked it off the floor, and Apperson went over to Mrs. MacLeish. He took hold of her left hand and slipped the two rings on her third finger.

"All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand," he said. It seemed a silly thing to say, but Mrs. MacLeish didn't crack a smile. She just pulled her hand away, very slow and dignified.

"Now that we've settled that," she said, looking down her straight, sharp nose at Apperson, like a queen looking at a cat, "you may go."

"Not yet, Mrs. Macbeth," Apperson said. "There's still a little matter to settle. You killed a man last night."

"I did?" She laughed. It was a light, pretty laugh, as cheerful as the ice tinkling in a highball glass. There was nothing phoney about the laugh. She thought Apperson was being funny, and she laughed, that's all. Not nervous, for a nickel's worth. I began to think that Apperson was on the wrong track, after all. I looked at MacLeish. You would have thought he was the lady's slave, the way he sat there on the edge of the bed, making calf-eyes at her.

"This is fantastic," she said, when she stopped laughing. "Why, Mr. MacLeish and I weren't here last night. We came in on the midnight train."

"MacLeish came in on the midnight train," said Apperson. "But you didn't. You parked a red coupé near the station a little before train time. When the train came roaring into the station, you pulled the trigger, knowing that the noise of the train would hide the sound of the shot. Then you removed the license plates from the car, unstrapped your suitcase from the luggage rack, crossed the tracks, and joined MacLeish as he walked through the station. Very deftly done, Mrs. Macbeth."

Mrs. MacLeish laughed again. Her teeth were small and looked very sharp.

"This is indeed amusing," she said, still laughing with her eyes. "But I'd really like to know what it is all about."

"I'd be glad to show you, Mrs. Macbeth, as a special favor," said Apperson, bowing like a stage butler, "if you would return the favor by allowing me to glance through your luggage."

"I should be delighted to accommodate you," she said.

There were two suitcases on the floor. One of them was full of gents' clothes, and Apperson pulled out a shirt. He held it up to the light and said: "Out, damned spot! Out, I say!" Then he opened the other case, which had some ladies' pink whatchamacallits packed in with some gents' shirts and socks. Apperson looked at one of these shirts and said: "Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?"

Apperson sounded pretty cockeyed, talking like that in his graveyard voice. I couldn't see any blood spots on the shirts, and I thought the professor had gone balmy on me. Then he stood up and pointed at MacLeish.

"What size collar do you wear?" he shot at him.

"Fifteen and a half," said MacLeish.

"Some of these shirts are fourteen and a half," said Apperson.

"Well, yes," said MacLeish. "The old ones. They're a little tight for me, now."

Apperson aimed the finger of his other hand at the lady.

"What's your husband's business, Mrs. Macbeth?"

MacLeish couldn't think right away what he was.

"I'm a . . . a . . ." he began.

"He's a poet," said Mrs. MacLeish.

"I don't mean the handsome young aesthete on the bed," said Apperson. "I mean your husband; the man you felt you had outgrown; the man who was smothering your soul and stunting your intellectual ambitions, who didn't appreciate your aesthetic nature; the man who wore a fourteen and a half collar."

"William," said Mrs. MacLeish, very calm and quiet, "this misguided police officer intimates that we are not legally married. Are you going to let him insult your Lispeth?"

MacLeish didn't move, but his eyes got as big as door knobs.

"Your husband, Mrs. Macbeth," said Apperson, with all his vocal cords turned on full, "was a dentist!"

Well, the word "dentist" did the trick. Mrs. MacLeish turned white as quicklime. I could see she figured that Apperson knew everything, and there wasn't any use going on with the show. For a second she looked just as scared as any cheap crook that we'd caught with the goods. Then suddenly she looked hard, with her lips pressed together and her eyes flashing, like she was ready to fight.

I reached for my gun, but nobody moved except Apperson. The professor swung around, smacked MacLeish with the flat of his hand and knocked him off the edge of the bed.

MacLeish yelled. Apperson grabbed the mattress and heaved it off onto the floor. Then I yelled.

Lying on the springs, where they'd been hidden under the mattress, were two Connecticut automobile license plates.

"When our actions do not," said Apperson, picking up the metal oblongs, "our fears do make us traitors."

Mrs. MacLeish walked up to Apperson. She was trembling a little, but she managed to get back some of her grand manner. She looked pretty proud when she raised her head and pointed her chin at him.

"Lay on, Macduff," she said.

Well, about ten minutes on the long-distance phone to Connecticut, and we had the whole story. The only mistake Apperson made was that the woman's name wasn't Mrs. Macbeth; it was Elizabeth Linder. The dead man was her husband, Dr. George Linder of Hartford, Conn., and he was a dentist, all right. Later the Hartford police dug up a lawyer that Mrs. Linder had been around to see about getting a divorce. The lawyer said he told Mrs. Linder she didn't have a case, on account of a man's being a sucker and a dentist is not grounds for divorce in Connecticut. It seems that Dr. Linder was sort of dumb and was always very good to her, and gave her everything she wanted — except William MacLeish. So she took MacLeish in her own way.

It was a little after nine o'clock when we finished booking Mrs. Linder for murder and MacLeish for conspiracy. Then Apperson and I went around the corner to a stool joint for some breakfast.

"Mr. Apperson," I said, while the ham and eggs were frying, "I can see how you figured the auto plates were under the mattress. I thought myself there was something phony about the way that bird MacLeish was hugging the bed. But would you mind telling me — ?"

"How I deduced the murderer was a woman?" Apperson finished the question for me. "It was simple. You saw me examining scratches on the window at the driver's side of the coupé. What's the most likely substance, Sergeant, hard enough to scratch that glass? Diamond, isn't it? It would seem, therefore, that the marks were made by the natural movements of the driver's left hand, wearing diamonds, brushing against the window. And who

wears diamonds on the left hand, Sergeant, but a woman — married, or at least engaged?

"Another point: That glass had to be in a raised position to be scratched the way it was. That means the coupé had been driven extensively — by a woman — with the windows closed. In this part of the country, Sergeant, the winters are so mild that we don't have to close our car windows against the cold, so I concluded that the car must have come from the north. And a woman who wears diamonds would probably wear a fur coat against a northern winter. I already explained to you how I knew she was a small woman."

"But how did you know the dead man was a dentist?" I asked.

"If you'll go to the Morgue, Sergeant," Apperson said, "and look at the dead man's hands, you'll notice that the skin is soft and white — the hands of a professional man — except for a slight callous along the inside of the right middle finger, near the end joint. This callous is an occupational mark common to dentists, caused by the daily pressure of the drill held in the usual manner."

Well, that floored me. I could see then why a little brains might be a good thing in the police department. But I was still bothered by that mistake Apperson made when he kept calling Mrs. Linder "Mrs. Macbeth." I told him so. He grinned.

"That wasn't a mistake, Sergeant," he said. "That was whimsy. You see, about three hundred years ago a fellow named Shakespeare wrote a play about a woman like Mrs. Linder — strong, ambitious, sure of her own infallibility. Her name was Lady Macbeth, she dominated weaker men, and she, too, got mixed up in a murder."

"Did they pinch her?" I wanted to know.

Apperson smiled. He lit another one of his long, skinny cigars. He gave me one this time.

"She died," he said, handing me the match, "driven half insane by her conscience."

Well, that was three weeks ago. Since then I got the book out of the public library and read about Lady Macbeth. I got Apperson's point, all right. Our Mrs. Macbeth isn't dead yet, but she has a pretty good chance of dying if the jury is hard-boiled. And she'll probably be insane, too. Only it won't be her conscience that'll make her go insane; it'll be the defense attorneys.

We take joy in bringing back a pre-eminent trail-blazer of American detective fiction — the creator of Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, The Thinking Machine. For a tale which was penned in 1907, and has had no publication since, "The Problem of the Stolen Rubens" is a remarkably modern story.

THE STOLEN RUBENS

by JACQUES FUTRELLE

MATTHEW KALE made fifty million dollars out of axle grease, after which he began to patronize the high arts. It was simple enough: he had the money, and Europe had the old masters. His method of buying was simplicity itself. There were five thousand square yards, more or less, in the huge gallery of his marble mansion which were to be covered, so he bought five thousand yards, more or less, of art. Some of it was good, some of it fair, and much of it bad. The chief picture of the collection was a Rubens, which he had picked up in Rome for fifty thousand dollars.

Soon after acquiring his collection, Kale decided to make certain alterations in the vast room where the pictures hung. They were all taken down and stored in the ballroom, equally vast, with their faces toward the wall. Meanwhile Kale and his family took refuge in a near-by hotel.

It was at this hotel that Kale met Jules de Lesseps. De Lesseps was distinctly the sort of Frenchman whose conversation resembles calisthenics. He was nervous, quick, and agile, and he told Kale in confidence that he was not only a painter himself, but a connoisseur in the high arts. Pompous in the pride of possession, Kale went to a good deal of trouble to exhibit his private collection for de Lesseps' delectation. It happened in the ballroom, and the true artist's delight shone in the Frenchman's eyes as he handled the pieces which were good. Some of the others made him smile, but it was an inoffensive sort of smile.

With his own hands Kale lifted the precious Rubens and held it before the Frenchman's eyes. It was a "Madonna and Child," one of those wonderful creations which have endured through the years with all the sparkle and color beauty of their pristine days. Kale seemed disappointed because de Lesseps was not particularly enthusiastic about this picture.

"Why, it's a Rubens!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I see," replied de Lesseps.

"It cost me fifty thousand dollars."

"It is perhaps worth more than that," and the Frenchman shrugged his shoulders as he turned away.

Kale looked at him in chagrin. Could it be that de Lesseps did not understand that it was a Rubens, and that Rubens was a painter? Or was it that he had failed to hear him say that it cost him fifty thousand dollars. Kale was accustomed to seeing people bob their heads and open their eyes when he said fifty thousand dollars; therefore, "Don't you like it?" he asked.

"Very much indeed," replied de Lesseps; "but I have seen it before. I saw it in Rome just a week or so before you purchased it."

They rummaged on through the pictures, and at last a Whistler was turned up for their inspection. It was one of the famous Thames series, a water color. De Lesseps' face radiated excitement, and several times he glanced from the water color to the Rubens as if mentally comparing the exquisitely penciled and colored newer work with the bold, masterly technic of the older painting.

Kale misunderstood his silence. "I don't think much of this one myself," he explained apologetically. "It's a Whistler, and all that, and it cost me five thousand dollars, and I sort of had to have it, but still it isn't just the kind of thing that I like. What do you think of it?"

"I think it is perfectly wonderful!" replied the Frenchman enthusiastically. "It is the essence, the superlative, of Whistler's work. I wonder if it would be possible," and he turned to face Kale, "for me to make a copy of that? I have some slight skill in painting myself, and dare say I could make a fairly creditable copy of it."

Kale was flattered. He was more and more impressed each moment with the picture. "Why, certainly," he replied. "I will have it sent up to the hotel, and you can —"

"No, no, no!" interrupted de Lesseps quickly. "I wouldn't care to accept the responsibility of having the picture in my charge. There is always a danger of fire. But if you would give me permission to come here — this room is large and airy and light — and besides it is quiet —"

"Just as you like," said Kale magnanimously. "I merely thought the other way would be most convenient for you."

De Lesseps laid one hand on the millionaire's arm. "My dear friend," he

said earnestly, "if these pictures were my pictures, I shouldn't try to accommodate anybody where they were concerned. I dare say the collection as it stands cost you —"

"Six hundred and eighty-seven thousand dollars," volunteered Kale proudly.

"And surely they must be well protected here in your house during your absence?"

"There are about twenty servants in the house, while the workmen are making the alterations," said Kale, "and three of them don't do anything but watch this room. No one can go in or out except by the door we entered — the others are locked and barred — and then only with my permission, or a written order from me. No, sir, nobody can get away with anything in this room."

"Excellent — excellent!" said de Lesseps admiringly. He smiled a little. "I am afraid I did not give you credit for being the far-sighted businessman that you are." He turned and glanced over the collection of pictures abstractedly. "A clever thief, though," he ventured, "might cut a valuable painting, for instance the Rubens, out of the frame, roll it up, conceal it under his coat, and escape."

Kale laughed and shook his head.

It was a couple of days later at the hotel that de Lesseps brought up the subject of copying the Whistler. He was profuse in his thanks when Kale volunteered to accompany him into the mansion and witness the preliminary stages of the work. They paused at the ballroom door.

"Jennings," said Kale to the liveried servant there, "this is Mr. de Lesseps. He is to come and go as he likes. He is going to do some work in the ballroom here. See that he isn't disturbed."

De Lesseps noticed the Rubens leaning carelessly against some other pictures, with the holy face of the Madonna turned toward them. "Really, Mr. Kale," he protested, "that picture is too valuable to be left about like that. If you will let your servants bring me some canvas, I shall wrap it and place it up on this table off the floor. Suppose there were mice here!"

Kale thanked him. The necessary orders were given, and finally the picture was carefully wrapped and placed beyond harm's reach, whereupon de Lesseps adjusted himself, paper, easel, stool, and all, and began his work of copying. There Kale left him.

Three days later Kale found the artist still at his labor.

"I just dropped by," he explained, "to see how the work in the gallery was getting along. It will be finished in another week. I hope I am not disturbing you?"

"Not at all," said de Lesseps; "I have nearly finished. See how I am getting along?" He turned the easel toward Kale.

The millionaire gazed from that toward the original which stood on a chair near by, and frank admiration for the artist's efforts was in his eyes. "Why, it's fine!" he exclaimed. "It's just as good as the other one, and I bet you don't want any five thousand dollars for it — eh?"

That was all that was said about it at the time. Kale wandered about the house for an hour or so, then dropped into the ballroom where de Lesseps was getting his paraphernalia together, and they walked back to the hotel. The artist carried under one arm his copy of the Whistler, loosely rolled up.

Another week passed, and the workmen who had been engaged in refinishing and decorating the gallery had gone. De Lesseps volunteered to assist in the work of rehanging the pictures, and Kale gladly turned the matter over to him. It was in the afternoon of the day this work began that de Lesseps, chatting pleasantly with Kale, ripped loose the canvas which enshrouded the precious Rubens. Then he paused with an exclamation of dismay. The picture was gone; the frame which had held it was empty. A thin strip of canvas around the inside edge showed that a sharp penknife had been used to cut out the painting.

All of these facts came to the attention of Professor Augustus S.F.X. Van Dusen — The Thinking Machine. This was a day or so after Kale had rushed into Detective Mallory's office at police headquarters with the statement that his Rubens had been stolen. He banged his fist down on the detective's desk, and roared at him.

"It cost me fifty thousand dollars! Why don't you do something? What are you sitting there staring at me for?"

"Don't excite yourself, Mr. Kale," the detective advised. "I will put my men at work right now to recover the — the — What is a Rubens, anyway?"

"It's a picture!" bellowed Kale. "A piece of canvas with some paint on it, and it cost me fifty thousand dollars — don't you forget that!"

So the police machinery was set in motion to recover the picture. And in time the matter fell under the watchful eye of Hutchinson Hatch, reporter.

He learned the facts preceding the disappearance of the picture and then called on de Lesseps. He found the artist in a state of excitement bordering on hysteria; an intimation from the reporter of the object of his visit caused de Lesseps to burst into words.

"*Mon Dieu!* It is outrageous! What can I do? I was the only one in the room for several days. I was the one who took such pains to protect the picture. And now it is gone! The loss is irreparable. What can I do?"

Hatch didn't have any very definite idea as to just what he could do, so he let him go on. "As I understand it, Mr. de Lesseps," he interrupted at last, "no one else was in the room, except you and Mr. Kale, all the time you were there?"

"No one else."

"And I think Mr. Kale said that you were making a copy of some famous water color; weren't you?"

"Yes, a Thames scene by Whistler," was the reply. "That is it, hanging over the fireplace."

Hatch glanced at the picture admiringly. It was an exquisite copy, and showed the deft touch of a man who was himself an artist of great ability.

De Lesseps read the admiration in his face. "It is not bad," he said modestly. "I studied with Carolus Duran."

With all else that was known, and this little additional information, which seemed of no particular value to the reporter, the entire matter was laid before The Thinking Machine. That distinguished man listened from beginning to end without comment.

"Who had access to the room?" he asked finally.

"That is what the police are working on now," said Hutchinson Hatch. "There are a couple of dozen servants in the house, and I suppose, in spite of Kale's rigid orders, there was a certain laxity in their enforcement."

"Of course that makes it more difficult," said The Thinking Machine in the perpetually irritated voice which was so characteristic a part of himself. "Perhaps it would be best for us to go to Mr. Kale's home and personally investigate."

Kale received them with the reserve which rich men usually show in the presence of representatives of the press. He stared frankly and somewhat curiously at the diminutive figure of the scientist, who explained the object of their visit.

"I guess you fellows can't do anything with this," the millionaire assured

them. "I've got some regular detectives on it."

"Is Mr. Mallory here now?" asked The Thinking Machine curtly.

"Yes, he is upstairs in the servants' quarters."

"May we see the room from which the picture was taken?" inquired the scientist, with a suave intonation which Hatch knew well.

Kale granted the permission with a wave of the hand, and ushered them into the ballroom, where the pictures had been stored. From the center of this room The Thinking Machine surveyed it all. The windows were high. Half a dozen doors leading out into the hallways, the conservatory, quiet nooks of the mansion offered innumerable possibilities of access. After this one long comprehensive squint, The Thinking Machine went over and picked up the frame from which the Rubens had been cut. For a long time he examined it. Kale's impatience was evident. Finally the scientist turned to him.

"How well do you know M. de Lesseps?"

"I've known him for only a month or so. Why?"

"Did he bring you letters of introduction, or did you meet him merely casually?"

Kale regarded him with displeasure. "My own personal affairs have nothing whatever to do with this matter! Mr. de Lesseps is a gentleman of integrity, and certainly he is the last whom I would suspect of any connection with the disappearance of the picture."

"That is usually the case," remarked The Thinking Machine tartly. He turned to Hatch. "Just how good a copy was that he made of the Whistler picture?"

"I have never seen the original," Hatch replied; "but the workmanship was superb. Perhaps Mr. Kale wouldn't object to us seeing —"

"Oh, of course not," said Kale resignedly. "Come in; it's in the gallery."

Hatch submitted the picture to a careful scrutiny. "I should say the copy is well-nigh perfect," was his verdict. "Of course, in its absence, I can't say exactly; but it is certainly a superb work."

The curtains of a wide door almost in front of them were thrown aside suddenly, and Detective Mallory entered. He carried something in his hand, but at sight of them concealed it behind him. Unrepressed triumph was in his face.

"Ah, professor, we meet often; don't we?" he said.

"This reporter here and his friend seem to be trying to drag de Lesseps

into this affair somehow," Kale complained to the detective. "I don't want anything like that to happen. He is liable to go out and print anything. They always do."

The Thinking Machine glared at him unwaveringly for an instant, then extended his hand toward Mallory. "Where did you find it?" he asked.

"Sorry to disappoint you, professor," said the detective sarcastically, "but this is the time when you were a little late," and he produced the object which he held behind him. "Here is your picture, Mr. Kale."

Kale gasped in relief and astonishment, and help up the canvas with both hands to examine it. "Fine!" he told the detective. "I'll see that you don't lose anything by this. Why, that thing cost me fifty thousand dollars!"

The Thinking Machine leaned forward to squint at the upper right-hand corner of the canvas. "Where did you find it?" he asked again.

"Rolled up tight, and concealed in the bottom of a trunk in the room of one of the servants," explained Mallory. "The servant's name is Jennings. He is now under arrest."

"Jennings!" exclaimed Kale. "Why, he has been with me for years."

"Did he confess?" asked the scientist imperturbably.

"Of course not," said Mallory. "He says some of the other servants must have hidden it there."

The Thinking Machine nodded at Hatch. "I think perhaps that is all," he remarked. "I congratulate you, Mr. Mallory, upon bringing the matter to such a quick and satisfactory conclusion."

Ten minutes later they left the house and took a taxi for the scientist's home. Hatch was a little chagrined at the unexpected termination of the affair.

"Mallory does show an occasional gleam of human intelligence, doesn't he?"

"Not that I ever noticed," remarked The Thinking Machine crustily.

"But he found the picture," Hatch insisted.

"Of course he found it. It was put there for him to find."

"Put there for him to find!" repeated the reporter. "Didn't Jennings steal it?"

"If he did, he's a fool."

"Well, if he didn't steal it, who put it there?"

"De Lesseps."

"De Lesseps!" echoed Hatch. "Why the deuce did he steal a fifty thousand

dollar picture and put it in a servant's trunk to be found?"

The Thinking Machine twisted around in his seat and squinted at him coldly for a moment. "At times, Mr. Hatch, I am absolutely amazed at your stupidity. I can understand it in a man like Mallory, but I have always given you credit for being an astute, quick-witted man."

Hatch smiled at the reproach. It was not the first time he had heard it. But nothing bearing on the problem in hand was said until they reached The Thinking Machine's house.

"The only real question in my mind, Mr. Hatch," said the scientist then, "is whether or not I should take the trouble to restore Mr. Kale's picture at all. He is perfectly satisfied, and will probably never know the difference. So —"

Suddenly Hatch saw something. "Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean that the picture Mallory found was —"

"A copy of the original," snapped the scientist. "Personally I know nothing whatever about art; therefore, I could not say from observation that it is a copy, but I know it from the logic of the thing. When the original was cut from the frame, the knife swerved a little at the upper right-hand corner. The canvas remaining in the frame told me that. The picture that Mr. Mallory found did not correspond in this detail with the canvas in the frame. The conclusion is obvious."

"And de Lesseps has the original?"

"De Lesseps has the original. How did he get it? In any one of a dozen ways. He might have rolled it up and stuck it under his coat. He might have had a confederate. But I don't think that any ordinary method of theft would have appealed to him. I am giving him credit for being clever, as I must when we review the whole case.

"For instance, he asked for permission to copy the Whistler, which you saw was the same size as the Rubens. It was granted. He copied it practically under guard, always with the chance that Mr. Kale himself would drop in. It took him three days to copy it, so he says. He was alone in the room all that time. He knew that Mr. Kale had not the faintest idea of art. Taking advantage of that, what would have been simpler than to have copied the Rubens in oil? He could have removed it from the frame immediately after he canvased it over, and kept it in a position near him where it could be quickly concealed if he was interrupted. Remember, the picture is worth fifty thousand dollars; therefore, was worth the trouble.

"De Lesseps is an artist — we know that — and dealing with a man who knew nothing whatever of art, he had no fears. We may suppose his idea all along was to use the copy of the Rubens as a sort of decoy after he got away with the original. You saw that Mallory didn't know the difference, and it was safe for him to suppose that Mr. Kale wouldn't. His only danger until he could get away gracefully was of some critic or connoisseur, perhaps, seeing the copy. His boldness we see readily in the fact that he permitted himself to discover the theft; that he discovered it after he had volunteered to assist Mr. Kale in the general work of rehanging the pictures in the gallery. Just how he put the picture in Jenning's trunk I don't happen to know. We can imagine many ways." He lay back in his chair for a minute without speaking, eyes steadily turned upward, fingers placed precisely tip to tip.

"But how did he take the picture from the Kale home?" asked Hatch.

"He took it with him probably under his arm the day he left the house with Mr. Kale," was the astonishing reply.

Hatch was staring at him in amazement. After a moment the scientist rose and passed into the adjoining room, and the telephone bell there jingled. When he joined Hatch again he picked up his hat and they went out together.

De Lesseps was in when their cards were sent up, and received them. They conversed about the case generally for ten minutes, while the scientist's eyes were turned inquiringly here and there about the room. At last there came a knock on the door.

"It is Detective Mallory, Mr. Hatch," remarked The Thinking Machine. "Open the door for him."

De Lesseps seemed startled for just one instant, then quickly recovered. Mallory's eyes were full of questions when he entered.

"I should like, Mr. Mallory," began The Thinking Machine quietly, "to call your attention to this copy of Mr. Kale's picture by Whistler — over the mantel here. Isn't it excellent? You have seen the original?"

Mallory grunted. De Lesseps' face, instead of expressing appreciation of the compliment, blanched, and his hands closed tightly. Again he recovered himself and smiled.

"The beauty of this picture lies not only in its faithfulness to the original," the scientist went on, "but also in the fact that it was painted under extraordinary circumstances. For instance, I don't know if you know, Mr. Mallory, that it is possible so to combine glue and putty and a few other com-

monplace things into a paste which will effectually blot out an oil painting, and offer at the same time an excellent surface for water color work!"

There was a moment's pause, during which the three men stared at him silently — with conflicting emotions.

"This water color — this copy of Whistler," continued the scientist evenly — "is painted on such a paste as I have described. That paste in turn covers the original Rubens picture. It can be removed with water without damage to the picture, which is in oil, so that instead of a copy of the Whistler painting, we have an original by Rubens, worth fifty thousand dollars. That is true; isn't it, M. de Lesseps?"

There was no reply to the question — none was needed.

It was an hour later, after de Lesseps was safely in his cell, that Hatch called up The Thinking Machine and asked one question.

"How did you know that the water color was painted over the Rubens?"

"Because it was the only absolutely safe way in which the Rubens could be hopelessly lost to those who were looking for it, and at the same time perfectly preserved," was the answer. "I told you de Lesseps was a clever man, and a little logic did the rest. Two and two always make four, Mr. Hatch, not sometimes, but all the time."

The celebrated author of "The Green Hat" turns the searchlight of his brilliant style and imagination on a problem of hate, tenderness, and crime. A new story to you by Michael Arlen, never before published in America.

THE GOOD FRIEND

by MICHAEL ARLEN

IT WAS about four years after Mr. Cox had first thought of murdering Mr. Pyelaw that he finally made up his mind to do so.

Mr. Cox's reasons for wishing to commit such a crime were respectable, and he should not be judged too harshly. He saw in his partner, Mr. Pyelaw, a fount of spite and cruelty. And Mr. Cox disliked spite and cruelty with all his heart.

We should not, of course, set ourselves up as judges of our fellow men. Mr. Cox did not presume to judge Mr. Pyelaw. But he took an exceedingly unfavourable view of him as a man in all his aspects, and he thought something should be done about it.

The two gentlemen were partners in a prosperous firm of Gentlemen's Outfitters & Tailors in the West End of London, founded by their fathers. Both men were bordering on middle life, and both lived in a pleasant western suburb of the town, where Mr. Cox conducted a comfortable bachelor establishment not far from the house in which Mr. and Mrs. Pyelaw lived.

It has already been said that Mr. Cox's reasons for wishing to murder Mr. Pyelaw were respectable. Indeed, what kept him back from committing the crime for so long was the fact that he was deeply in love with his partner's wife, who returned this unfortunate affection.

But Mr. Cox had never so much as once spoken of love to Violet Pyelaw, and she had never once treated him but as a good friend and her husband's partner. There was no slyness here, nothing even faintly exceptionable.

Mr. Cox was conscious of sin in loving another man's wife, but neither he nor she could help their thoughts. What they could do was to control their words and deeds, and this, like the good respectable people they were, they did.

Now this austere restraint on their part must be all the more admirable

because of the open indifference and contempt with which Mr. Pyelaw treated his wife. George Pyelaw was a naturally sharp and bad-tempered man, and he could never control his temper. He was a dislikeable fellow altogether.

Another reason why Mr. Cox had for years thought his partner would be better out of the way was that in the firm of Cox & Pyelaw there was not a cutter, clerk, secretary, typist, or boy who had not at one time or other suffered from Mr. Pyelaw's vindictiveness and would not have sighed with relief at his retirement.

Now Mr. Cox was intensely proud of Cox & Pyelaw's high reputation and would have made every sacrifice to maintain its high position among its competitors. And it was in order to maintain this high position that he finally made up his mind to kill Mr. Pyelaw.

One day in July the firm's head cutter respectfully and affectionately informed Mr. Cox that he would shortly be resigning his position. Now Charles Oak had been with the firm for over forty years, in fact ever since its establishment by Cox's and Pyelaw's fathers, and his reputation as a cutter, particularly of trouserings, was second to none among the well-dressed gentlemen in London. He was affectionately known as Old Choak among a wide and distinguished circle of customers.

In short, the names of Old Choak and Cox & Pyelaw were interchangeable. They stood equally for craft, quality and no nonsense. You would sometimes hear in a London club one man say to another, after having viewed him critically, "Old Choak still on top of his form, I see."

Now but for Mr. Pyelaw's stupid vindictiveness, Old Choak — he was no more than fifty-five or six, really — would long since have been a partner in the firm. And it had long been Mr. Cox's dream that, should George Pyelaw ever retire, he and Mr. Oak together would carry on the business with that friendly co-operation of which the firm stood badly in need.

Thus the threatened resignation of the firm's treasured head cutter, owing to his incessant friction with Mr. Pyelaw, was an intolerable blow to the conscientious Mr. Cox. Many of the firm's best customers would inevitably follow Old Choak to any tailoring business in which he chose to buy a partnership.

Therefore Mr. Cox, unable to permit the gradual decline of Cox & Pyelaw from their high position as gentlemen's tailors, determined to put his partner out of the way for good and all.

Now while Chief Inspector Parbold had the name of being the best-turned-out official of the Criminal Investigation Department it would be an exaggeration to say that his suits had the distinction of a Davies, a Scholte or a Cox & Pyelaw. The Chief Inspector was well aware of this, and so it was with a certain amount of amused awe that he found he had to seek an interview with Mr. Cox of that eminent firm.

It was some seven months after his partner's sudden and tragic death, and Mr. Cox was living in temporary quarters not far from his place of business in Cork Street. The Chief Inspector explained that he had sought this interview at Mr. Cox's private residence because the visit of a man from Scotland Yard at a gentleman's place of business, no matter on how trifling a matter, must always form a subject of comment.

"Well, Chief Inspector," said Willie Cox, still looking his surprise at the visit, "what can I do for you?"

"It is merely, sir, that Scotland Yard sometimes has to go on making routine inquiries long after an incident is closed. To fill up the records, so to speak. I am sorry to have to bother you with the matter at all, particularly as you must still be feeling deeply the loss of your late partner."

"It was a tragic business," said Mr. Cox, quietly.

"Yes, indeed. I understand the widow has been abroad since and has not yet returned to England. Could you give me her address, Mr. Cox?"

"But surely, Chief Inspector, you don't wish to trouble Mrs. Pyelaw. She is staying with my sister in Paris, and here is her address. But anything I can tell you to save you the trouble of writing to her, I will with pleasure."

"I quite understand, Mr. Cox. It is merely a routine matter of confirming certain details put in at the inquest. I have here some rough notes which I made to-day from the newspaper reports of last August.

"It would appear that there was at first some doubt in the coroner's mind as to whether the late George Pyelaw committed suicide by drowning or was drowned by misadventure owing to being seized with abdominal cramp and sinking before you could reach him.

"The coroner very properly instructed the jury to return 'Death by Misadventure,' as there was no evidence to support the suicide theory. Let me summarize some of the facts before asking you the few questions which we need answered before filling in our records for good and all.

"You had been staying for about a week with Mr. and Mrs. Pyelaw at their seaside cottage near Rottingdean. On the day in question, an unusually

warm and oppressive one even for August, Mr. Pyelaw had been up to London on some business connected with your firm and had returned towards six o'clock in something of a temper."

"Well, not temper exactly, Chief Inspector. I think the records of the inquest will show that both his wife and I found him somewhat excitable, and we put this down more to the unusual heat than to anything else."

"Quite, Mr. Cox. It's of small importance, anyway. He had a stiff brandy and soda and then asked Mrs. Pyelaw to put back dinner for half an hour to an hour as he wanted to have a swim.

"You tried to dissuade him, Mr. Cox, knowing from your long association with him that a stiff brandy and soda on a nervous digestion such as his would not be good for him before a swim. However, Mr. Pyelaw was obstinate and not only insisted on having a swim but on having another brandy and soda as well.

"You then sacrificed your own convenience, for you had been swimming twice that day already, and went with him down to the beach. Mr. George Pyelaw was a stronger swimmer than you and insisted on going some distance out — much too far, in your opinion. You shouted out to him to come back, particularly as you saw that the beach was deserted at that hour of the evening, but he either did not hear or chose to ignore your cries.

"He continued swimming out, and you decided to do your best to follow him. You then noticed to your horror that he seemed to be in distress, and in trying to hurry towards him you, like any other unpractised swimmer, winded yourself and could not reach him in time.

"All that is quite clear, Mr. Cox, and we need no confirmation there. I note that the coroner commended your courage and said you deserved every sympathy for having done all you could in the face of your friend's obstinacy. We can all agree with that.

"But there is one thing which did not come out at the inquest — I feel this is a very delicate subject, Mr. Cox, and I only hope you will realize that I am no more than an automaton doing my duty."

"I quite understand," said Mr. Cox. "What is it?"

"May I ask, sir, if there was at any time — previous to Mr. Pyelaw's death — any understanding of any sort between you and his wife? Just wait one moment, sir, before answering. I am not dreaming of insulting either you or the lady by suggesting that anything underhand was ever contemplated. But we are men of the world, Mr. Cox, and know that there are occasions in

a man's life when, if a certain lady were free, he would find himself attracted to her by more than friendship."

Mr. Cox was rigid, but calm.

"I can't imagine the reasons for such a question, Inspector, but I can answer it quite frankly. There was never any hint of any understanding, either underhand or otherwise, between Mrs. Pyelaw and myself before my partner's death. There was a warm and confident friendship between us, but that is all. I might also add that my partner, who was not of an easy disposition, never had occasion to be at any time suspicious of his wife either as to her conduct or her thoughts."

"Thank you, Mr. Cox. I take it, then, that the fact that you and Mrs. Pyelaw are to get married shortly is due to an understanding only recently come to between you?"

"We shall not be married anyhow for another five or six months — for at least a year after George's death. But I must say, Inspector, that I had thought that no one but Mrs. Pyelaw and myself knew of this intended marriage. Naturally, we have nothing to conceal, and I do not mind who knows — but might I ask how you got the information, since neither she nor I have given it out?"

The Chief Inspector smiled tolerantly.

"Oh, we have all sorts of ways of getting to know things, Mr. Cox. Don't worry about that. Well, I fancy that's all. I must thank you again for answering all my questions so frankly, and I only hope we shan't have to trouble you again."

It goes without saying that Mr. Cox spent an unpleasant night after the interview with the man from Scotland Yard. But, curiously enough, he actually had very little on his conscience. For he had not lifted his hand against his fellow-man, either in violence or with poison.

Since his partner's death Mr. Cox had very often pondered on the unfathomable workings of Providence. For he had wanted to put a man out of the way, and that man had been put out of the way. Providence, undoubtedly.

Everything that had been said at the inquest had been true — except the one small fact that Mr. Cox had not tried to dissuade his partner from taking the second brandy and soda. George's obstinacy had done the rest, as had been stated before the coroner. He had swum too far out. It is true that Mr.

Cox had somewhat underrated his own ability as a swimmer, but after all modesty is not a crime.

No, Mr. Cox had not murdered his partner, except in thought. He had merely not tried so hard to prevent George from drowning as he would have done if he had not thought that George was better left alone, all things considered. Providence, undoubtedly.

On the other hand, who and what had put a bee in the Chief Inspector's bonnet? For a bee there undoubtedly was. Mr. Cox knew that Violet had accepted the tragedy as an act of God. She had held him in no way to blame — and certainly in no way responsible.

Mr. Cox could think of only one person in the world who would wish to make trouble for him and for Violet, and that was George's sister. George's sister shared her late brother's shortcomings to the full, and had never made any secret of the fact that she suspected all forms of human intercourse as hypocritical which did not depend on downright rudeness as their expression.

Mr. Cox, pondering on George's sister, flew over to Paris two days later. He was shocked at his Violet's appearance. Violet was not more than thirty-five, a plump and pretty woman with a gift for kind laughter which had withstood even her late husband's stubborn nagging.

But now she looked ill and drawn. And, to Willie Cox's consternation, she eyed him defensively, as though he might be an unwelcome stranger.

"Why have you come?" she asked sharply. "You didn't write me —"

He stared at her in unhappy bewilderment. His Violet. . . .

"But, dear, I wanted to see you. Isn't it natural? I thought you would be pleased. . . ."

"You don't understand!" she cried hysterically. "I didn't want to see you — again. I was going to write to you — to-day, to-morrow — that we can't get married — ever."

She burst out into hysterical sobbing, but that was not what appalled Mr. Cox so much as the fact that she definitely shrank away from him as he tried to comfort her with his arm. So he had been deluding himself all these months. Violet had suspected him all the time of somehow having contrived George's death. But he hadn't contrived it.

Mr. Cox drew a deep breath and prepared to tell her the truth. But as he turned towards her from the window he was astonished to see her, in an unguarded moment, looking at him with such deep and tender affection that

he could think of doing nothing but go quickly to her and kiss her on the forehead. There were tears in his eyes.

She sat rigid, but said quite calmly:

"Now sit down over there, Willie, and let us be sensible. I am being quite sensible now, you see. I am not going to marry you. *Please* don't interrupt, Willie. It is so very difficult to say this, though I have been thinking about it for weeks and weeks. I am bad, Willie — that is the trouble. I am bad all through — and so I can't marry you, because you are the justest and nicest man I ever met.

"You see, I am being quite sensible. Poor George did not die naturally from drowning. It wasn't a natural cramp. You remember that one of the reasons why he wanted that second brandy and soda was because he complained that that first very stiff one I gave him had tasted beastly. I had put something in it."

Mr. Cox tried to keep calm. He saw Chief Inspector Parbold again, and again he heard the Chief Inspector's agreeable voice stating that he was making merely routine inquiries.

Violet must not be told that yet. She was dry-eyed now, staring past him with a slight frown. Trying to be sensible. His dear Violet. He said nothing, knowing she would go on.

She said, "The night before we'd had such a scene. About you — no, not about you and me, for what had there ever been between us until then but silence and love and silence and silence? About you and the business.

"He went on and on about how you and Old Choak were trying to force him out. I tried to tell him all the time that the suggested agreement was very favourable to him, and that he would have a better income when retired than you have from the business. I tried to tell him that you were being more than fair.

"He was mad with spite, Willie, and he said he would rather ruin the business than let Old Choak have the partnership. He went on and on. . . .

"So when he went up to London the next day and came back again in a temper, I knew I would have another scene that night. And I couldn't bear another. I couldn't bear it.

"I didn't want to kill him. I didn't dream of killing him. I didn't know he was going to be so silly and obstinate as to go swimming when he asked for that first brandy and soda. I wanted to give myself a rest that night, that's all.

"I wanted him to be so tired and sleepy that he couldn't make a scene about what had happened in London and what he had said to Old Choak and what Old Choak had said to him and what the lawyers had said and on and on.

"So I crushed three tablets of aspirin and put them in that stiff brandy. I shouldn't have done it really, because I knew what effect even one tablet had on poor George. It was good for him if he was starting a cold, but in the ordinary way he was a bad subject for even the mildest drugs and even one grain would constrict him right across the chest for a while and then make him very drowsy.

"And I gave him three, and then he went swimming. . . .

"Listen, dear Willie, let us be sensible people and face the facts as God has put them before us. I did not intend to murder George, but through my act he died. Nothing can get round that. Nothing. I can't make a profit out of his death, and so I can't marry you."

They stared at one another across a deep and understanding silence. She was really quite surprisingly sensible. His dear Violet.

He said, "You have been tormenting yourself with this for months now, Violet. What has brought it to a head to-day?"

"Willie, I had a letter from Scotland Yard last night — from a Chief Inspector Something or other — asking me to go there for an interview if possible as soon as it was convenient. So I am going, and I am going to tell them everything. George's sister will be pleased, anyway — she always hated me, and you too —"

She broke down at that, and Mr. Cox did his best to comfort her.

He flew back to London in a very disturbed state of mind, after having persuaded Violet to take no steps about going to see the Chief Inspector for a few days.

But Violet had not told him the whole truth. She had not wanted to hurt and bother him intolerably. She had not told him that Chief Inspector Parbold had flown over to see her personally the night before and that she had been persuaded, or rather forced, to give permission to a Home Office order for the disinterment of George's body.

Chief Inspector Parbold, in conference with Superintendent Crust about a week later, gave it as his considered opinion that he had seldom known a more confused or damnable case.

He said, "That sister of his, Miss Pyelaw, should have let well alone. Not

really a jolly woman. She has got it in for the widow, and that's that."

"Well, Parbold, where are we now exactly?"

"Oh, that's easy. We start with a case of accidental drowning — and now we've got a murder seven months old. Nice work for the newspapers."

"So Cox *did* murder his partner then?"

"No, sir. But he thinks he did, and he came here and told me so at length. Very frank about it, was poor Mr. Cox. He had wanted to murder Pyelaw for years, because of this and that — and so when he saw him drowning he didn't do all he could to save him. And now old Joe Remorse is sitting on poor Cox's shoulder, and poor Cox is saying, 'I have sinned. Punish me.' "

"Well," said Superintendent Crust, "we are only police, not God. Not doing all you can do to prevent another bloke from drowning isn't murder."

"Exactly what I told our Mr. Cox, sir. And he seemed very disappointed. Oh, a nice case. Poor Cox was so disappointed at not being a murderer that I thought he was going to tell me he had swum out to Pyelaw as he was sinking and knocked him on the head. But I guess he hadn't worked up that story sufficiently, so he went away looking so sick that I almost thought of arresting him just to make him happy.

"Then next day along comes the widow. You had to be sorry for her, sir. And for Mr. Cox. As nice and honest a woman as ever I saw, and made for happiness. She told me she was a murderess. Oh, yes, she had got it all worked out. She was a bad woman and didn't deserve Mr. Cox's love nor anybody's love. She was a murderess through and through, and she had murdered her husband with aspirin."

"With *what*?"

"Exactly, sir. A surprising case, or I'm Charlie Chaplin. Yes, she had put three tablets of aspirin in his brandy and soda, and that had finished him off while he was swimming, and so she wasn't fit to live and so on. It was a long story, sir, and I had to listen because she is a nice person and a good woman. As you know, sir, we policemen have to be father-confessors every now and then. So I sent her away with the comforting words that she wouldn't rank as one of history's great poisoners, and that maybe it wouldn't do Mr. Cox any harm for her to dine with him that night."

"Cupid's little messenger, Parbold? Very pretty."

"And pretty, sir, is just how I felt when an hour or so after she had gone I got the results of the analysis of the contents of the body. George Pyelaw was poisoned by a good dose of arsenic."

"Well, well, Parbold. A nice case, as you say. So your good woman said aspirin and used arsenic?"

"She? If that poor lady, sir, had used even one minute spot of arsenic she would still be here telling you and me all about it and probably confessing to the Brighton Trunk Murder as well."

"Then where the devil are we now, Parbold?"

"Oh, that's easy, sir. You couldn't want a simpler case. Mr. Charles Oak, affectionately known as Old Choak to every young man in London now in bankruptcy for having spent more on clothes than he could afford, came along this morning and confessed to the arsenic. Gave it to Pyelaw that very day after lunch in his black coffee."

"I see," said Superintendent Crust helplessly.

"Yes, sir. Very contrite about it all, Old Choak was. Said he had done it for the best, and so on, because old Pyelaw was ruining the business. Said he was sorry. Said he wouldn't have confessed, but that Mr. Cox — whom he loved as his brother — had told him Scotland Yard was after somebody about Pyelaw's death. And so on."

"This affair is going to make a lot of noise, Parbold. So now we arrest Old Choak for the murder of George Pyelaw?"

"I suppose so, sir. He is detained, naturally. It seems an open-and-shut case now, in spite of all the confessions buzzing round one's head."

"You seem to be rather sorry about it, Parbold."

"In a way, yes. I don't like that vindictive spinster of an Ann Pyelaw getting away with it, and Old Choak isn't a criminal, arsenic or no arsenic. This Pyelaw was undoubtedly a bad chap, and made all these nice respectable people go a bit dotty. There are men like that, who arouse too much hatred."

"Well, I'll have the warrant sworn out."

"To-morrow will do, sir. I don't doubt but that Choak's our man, but this case has broken out into such a rash of confessions that I'll have to verify everything. To-morrow morning will do."

"By the way, how did he get the arsenic?"

"He's always had it, sir — a legacy from his dear old dad."

"Oh, really, Parbold!"

"Exactly, sir. A surprising case."

Chief Inspector Parbold had not been pulling the Superintendent's leg.

There wasn't a crony of Old Choak's either in or out of the firm who hadn't at some time heard about or actually seen the little white bottle full of what looked like bicarbonate of soda. It was always carefully locked away, of course, in a cupboard in Old Choak's rooms, and Old Choak would take it out now and again with pride.

"My old dad," he would say, "was a bit of a chemist in his day, and what he knew about poisons would startle some of your fancy doctors. So he put this here stuff together, just out of curiosity like, and then tells me about it one day when we are talking of poisoners, see. And then when he's dying he tells me where it is, all safe and locked up, and he tells me to be sure to destroy it.

"But I never had the heart, see. It's an insurance, see what I mean. It's wrong to take your own life, we agree on that. But what I say is suppose a doctor says to me to-morrow 'You, Charles Oak, have an incurable disease in a virulent form, and,' he says, 'you will shortly die a protracted death in great agony, and nothing,' he says, 'can be done about it, so help you God,' he says — well, I'd go home that night and put a spoonful of this in a nice hot grog and get it all over with, see?"

Of course there was no pride in Old Choak's voice as he solemnly confessed to Chief Inspector Parbold how he had committed the crime, and then handed over the small bottle of poison.

"Looks harmless enough," said the Chief Inspector.

"Yes, sir," said Old Choak, with faint return of pride in his old dad's ability as a chemist.

"Well, you are detained, Mr. Oak. They will make you quite comfortable here, even if you have to stay the night. There will be some more papers for you to sign presently — read them over, remember, before you sign. Now take it easy, Mr. Oak."

"Yes, sir," said Old Choak, trying to gulp down his tears. "But I don't know how I ever came to do such a horrible thing, I really don't."

A few hours later Superintendent Crust telephoned through to Chief Inspector Parbold's office.

"How's that Pyelaw case shaping?"

"Nicely, thank you. I have just this moment had the report in from the analyst about Exhibit A."

"Which is what?"

"Daddy's legacy, sir. The bottle of arsenic. We might have guessed it, of

course."

"Guessed what, man?"

"Don't be cross with me, sir. This case has given me a headache already. It's bicarbonate of soda."

"Ah, I thought so. A puzzling case, Parbold. But I've solved it."

"*You've* solved it, sir?"

"To the last dot, Parbold. The solution presented itself to me only a few minutes ago."

"A great brain, Super. I envy you."

"Don't envy, my lad, but aspire to copy. Come along to my office in half an hour, and see that all the murderers are there too — all three of them."

When all the interested parties in this unhappy case were seated in the Superintendent's private room at Scotland Yard, with Chief Inspector Parbold sitting near his chief, the Superintendent first of all addressed the only lady in the room.

"Mrs. Pyelaw," he said, "what I have to say to you now is going, I fear, to upset you a good deal. But then this has been a very upsetting case for all of you, and I fancy it will be a relief to have the truth.

"To begin with, I can tell you that what is going to be said in this room now need never pass any further so far as the police are concerned. The public know, of course, that the body has been exhumed. All they need know now, and all Miss Ann Pyelaw need know, for the matter of that, is that the body can be reinterred without upsetting the findings of the coroner's jury. I have already taken the Commissioner's advice in the matter, and he agrees with me that, while it's a ticklish legal problem, the public interest would not be benefited by the further publicity of another inquest.

"The late Mr. Pyelaw's solicitor, who appears to have been abroad on business for some weeks past and therefore knew nothing about the renewed interest in his late client's death until his return yesterday, has addressed to me this letter:

" 'Dear Superintendent Crust,

" 'Enclosed you will find a sealed envelope addressed to me by my late client, Mr. George Pyelaw. I need hardly tell you that I know nothing of its contents. It was handed to me at my office at five o'clock in the afternoon of the day on which he was accidentally drowned.'

"Now here is the enclosure, of which I have broken the seal. On the envelope is written, in the late George Pyelaw's own handwriting, *This letter to be handed unopened to the police only if and when any question arises but that the writer, George Pyelaw, was accidentally drowned while swimming on the evening of August the 12th, 1936.*

"The letter itself is addressed to his own solicitor and begins:

" 'Dear John,

" 'The police will read this before you do, but I don't know them and I do know you, so I am writing it to you. After sending this letter to you by special messenger I am going down to our cottage near Rottingdean. I am going to have a brandy and soda, or perhaps two, and then I am going for a swim. And I am not going to come back.

" 'Even if Willie Cox comes with me, I am not going to come back, for I am a stronger swimmer than he is. But to make quite sure that my resolution will not break down, that I won't suddenly funk, I am going to slip quite a good dose of arsenic into the first brandy and soda.

" 'I don't know anything about how arsenic works, but I fancy I'll have time to get out into the water before it really gets me. And then I hope to be "accidentally drowned," with no question of either having committed suicide or being poisoned.

" 'Of course you know Old Choak at the office. About a year ago in a moment of confidence he told me about some stuff he had very carefully locked away which looked like bicarbonate of soda but was really a proof of his old dad's ability as a chemist, for it was a highly complicated poison with arsenic as its main ingredient.

" 'To make it brief, I had no difficulty in due course in emptying the contents of his bottle into an envelope and substituting ordinary bicarbonate instead. No doubt it will be a great disappointment to Old Choak if one day he wants to do away with himself and finds he has only cured a tummy-ache.

" 'The reasons for my wanting to commit suicide must surely be self-evident to anyone who knows me at all well. I have been disliked and dislikeable ever since I was old enough to see what impression I was making on other people.

" 'I have tried and tried to be a normally agreeable fellow, but always something has prevented me. It's as though all my life I have been persecuted by a bitter, nagging, spiteful imp which hops between my tongue and my mind fouling my thoughts and my expressions.

" 'For the last few years, in fact ever since I married Violet, it has been getting worse. She is the kindest and gentlest woman in the world, you would have thought that no even remotely decent man would want to hurt her unnecessarily — and yet I have turned even her against me.

" 'Well, it's no good going on about it. I know what Willie Cox thinks about me. He feels that Cox & Pyelaw will benefit by my retirement, and I happen to know he is right. He has done his best and no man ever had a fairer partner. How he has managed to put up with me at all these last few years passes my understanding. Dear me, had I been in his position and he in mine, I should have been a murderer years ago.

" 'Every now and then, though, the clouds of spite have cleared enough from my mind to let me have a decent thought or two. For example, I have sometimes hoped that Willie and Violet would show something besides friendship for each other, for it is obviously a man like Willie who should be married to Violet and not a man like me.

" 'I have dreamt of letting her divorce me so that she could marry Willie. But then Willie has always seemed such a cold-blooded fish, and Violet, in spite of all my nagging, has never swerved in her devotion to me.

" 'It's a damnable thing, John, to feel that at bottom one's a decent ordinary average man — but that one is forever presenting oneself to people who want to be affectionate as a sour brute. But in my heart I have appreciated all the people who have wanted to like me and tried so hard to put up with me. Particularly my dear Violet and Willie and Old Choak. And so I have come to this decision — that the only way I can express my appreciation is to cease bothering them.

" 'Of course I hope that no one will ever see this letter and that I shall just be "accidentally drowned." But my sister Ann's character is very much like mine. And I fear that, should Willie and Violet ever wake up to the fact that they are ideally suited to be man and wife, Ann might just out of spite — as, alas, I should in her place — start casting doubts as to the real cause and manner of my death.

" 'I feel much better after having written this. I have lived spitefully in the house of mankind. I leave it with reverence, and hopefulness.

" 'GEORGE PYELAW.' "

'Q'

This is an editorial experiment . . . an original radio detective drama presented to you in printed form. If you like its novelty — as well as its content — we will give you more in future issues. Please write us about it.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE FRIGHTENED STAR

By ELLERY QUEEN

The Characters

ELLERY QUEEN.....the detective
NIKKI PORTER.....his secretary
INSPECTOR QUEEN.....his father
SERGEANT VELIE.....of Inspector Queen's staff
TONY PEPPER.....a Hollywood producer
NINA.....the frightened star
PEDRO FERNANDEZ.....a California Mexican
MARIA FERNANDEZ.....his wife
LIEUTENANT HATCH.....of the Los Angeles police
OFFICER MURPHY.....of the Beverly Hills force
and R. R. CONDUCTOR — NEGRO WAITER — TAXI DRIVER — REPORTERS

Scene

New York City — Beverly Hills — Los Angeles

SCENE I: The Queen Apartment

NIKKI: Gosh, it's hot. There's hardly a *whisper* at this window.

INSPECTOR: Real dog day, all right. Talking about dogs, Velie — what's the latest downtown on Strozzi?

VELIE: No news, Inspector. That wife-killer's the Invisible Man!

ELLERY: What's this, Dad? A murder case I don't know about?

INSPECTOR: Oh, Strozzi's an East Side punk who stabbed his wife to death and took it on the lam. Dragnet's out all over the country.

NIKKI: Ellery, you're getting a visitor. He just got out of a taxi downstairs.

ELLERY: So soon? Must be Tony.

NIKKI: Old slacks, blazer, sandals, felt hat with the brim stuck up à la Joe College, *and* a four-day beard!

VELIE: Sounds like a fu-gi-tive from a Hollywood chain-gang.

ELLERY: (*Laughing*) Quite right, Sergeant. It's Tony Pepper. He phoned a few minutes ago.

INSPECTOR: Tony Pepper! The Hollywood producer?

NIKKI: Ellery, you *knew* Mr. Pepper was coming and you didn't even tell me! My big chance to crash Hollywood — I always dreamed I'd meet a great producer some day — (*the men laugh as the doorbell rings imperiously*) Oh! He's here! Do I show any oomph? Is my nose shiny? (*the doorbell rings again*) I'm coming. . . . Oh, dear. . . . Ellery, I could pulverize you! (NIKKI *opens the door, flustered, and* TONY PEPPER *speaks to her crisply, as* SEARGEANT VELIE *whispers.*)

VELIE: (*Hurriedly*) Put in a good word for me — huh, Mr. Queen? Remember that police benefit, Inspector? When I did a couple o' speeches from "Hamlet"?

INSPECTOR: (*Dryly*) I've been trying to forget it for ten years, Velie.

ELLERY: (*Laughing*) Tony! Come in!

PEPPER: (*He is young, breezy, abrupt.*) Ellery! H'ya. This the celebrated Queen bunch?

NIKKI: (*Winningly*) I'm Nikki Porter, Mr. Pepper. . . .

PEPPER: (*Briefly*) Are you?

ELLERY: Tony, this is my father. . . . (PEPPER *acknowledges the introduction.*)

INSPECTOR: Glad to meet you, Mr. Pepper. Sit down, sit down! Nikki, hand Mr. Pepper those cigars.

ELLERY: And Sergeant Thomas Velie. . . . (PEPPER *Grunts.*)

VELIE: (*In an impressive "Ham" voice*) How do you do, Mr. Pepper. Hollywood, eh? Yes, "the play's the thing where-in to ketch the conscience of the king." (PEPPER *laughs, in a surprised way, then heartily.*)

PEPPER: (*Laughing*) Very funny, Sergeant!

VELIE: (*Faintly*) Funny?

NIKKI: Mr. Pepper, would you say I'm photogenic?

PEPPER: Huh? Oh, Ellery, I'm going back to the Coast tonight. How'd you like to go with me?

ELLERY: (*Laughing*) Just like that? What's up, Tony?

PEPPER: A gigantic idea. Remember Nina?

ELLERY: Nina. . . . Oh, yes. The movie star with one name.

NIKKI: Poor Nina. She hasn't made a picture in two years.

VELIE: My ol' lady was sayin' just the other night she wondered what'd become of Nina. . . . some baby doll. . . .

INSPECTOR: (*Softly*) I remember Nina — eyes like oversize black cherries. Beautiful woman. . . .

PEPPER: (*Triumphantly*) You see, Ellery? Here's Nina's public — right in this room! And there are millions of American movie-goers who feel the same way.

ELLERY: Why did Nina retire from pictures two years ago?

PEPPER: Nobody knows, and Nina won't talk. Height of her popularity she walks out of the studio and shuts herself up in a two-by-four bungalow in Beverly Hills. Won't see the press, won't explain to the studio — mystery, see?

ELLERY: (*Chuckling*) And where do *I* fit into the mystery, Tony?

PEPPER: I'm working on Nina to get her to make a comeback. (*The others exclaim*) A film now, starring Nina, would gross millions. If you can solve Nina's problem — the reason why she went out of circulation two years ago — I can blast her out of retirement and make a picture. What's more, you might dig up enough material in the process to give us a swell plot for a picture based on her own life! How does that strike you, Ellery?

ELLERY: (*Thoughtfully*) Sort of combination writing and detecting job. Sounds attractive.

VELIE: (*Eagerly*) Yeah. Mr. Pepper, ya couldn't use a tough-mugg type, could ya? I could play gangsters — I know enough of 'em. (*Acting tough*) Yeah! I mean you, Butch! Lay a finger on 'at moll and I'll plug yer carcass full o' lead! (*Hopefully*) See, Mr. Pepper?

PEPPER: (*Coughing*) Swell, swell, Sergeant. Well, Ellery?

ELLERY: When would I have to leave?

PEPPER: Tonight. Want you to go with *me*. I'm catching the midnight out of Grand Central.

NIKKI: A train, Mr. Pepper? I thought all Hollywood executives flew like birds.

PEPPER: Never use a plane myself — too fast. These cross-country train jumps between Hollywood and New York give me a marvelous opportunity to catch up on my sleep. What d'ye say, Ellery?

ELLERY: Rather like the idea. All right, Tony, you're on.

PEPPER: Old reliable. I'll leave your tickets at the station. No, don't bother, Inspector. (*He dashes off*) Have to rush. . . . (*He exits boisterously.*)

VELIE: (*Disconsolately*) There goes my picture career.

NIKKI: (*Happily*) And here *comes* mine. (*Alarmed*) Ellery . . . I *am* going with you, aren't I?

ELLERY: Of course you are, Nikki. Couldn't do without you. So run along and pack ——

NIKKI: Pack! *I'm* heading for a beauty parlor. . . . California, here I come!

SCENE 2: The Diner of a Transcontinental Train

NIKKI: Ellery, pass the cream. Where are we now?

ELLERY: Just left San Bernardino, Nikki. . . . Arrive in Los Angeles in about an hour. . . . Oh, Conductor!

CONDUCTOR: Yes, sir?

ELLERY: Have you seen Mr. Pepper this morning? Drawing Room A, car 915?

CONDUCTOR: Mr. Pepper? (*He chuckles*) No, sir. Be mighty surprised if I had. Mr. Pepper always leaves strict orders he's not to be disturbed for anything when he's hibernatin' on this run.

ELLERY: Thank you.

NIKKI: (*Fiercely*) What chance has a girl with a — a *hibernator* like Pepper? Lot of good it's doing me to travel with a famous Hollywood producer! We haven't laid eyes on him since we left Grand Central. He even kept out of sight when we changed trains at Chicago.

ELLERY: (*Chuckling*) Tony's got to have his rest cure.

NIKKI: But doesn't he ever *eat?*

ELLERY: Ask him yourself, Nikki. Here's Tony barging into the diner now. . . . Over here, Tony!

NIKKI: Hunnnnh. He hasn't even shaved. (*She instantly becomes charming*) Good *morning*, Mr. Pepper! (ELLERY *is amused.*)

PEPPER: (*Fading on*) Morning, morning. Where's the waiter? (*Bellowing*) Boy! I'm starved.

NEGRO WAITER: Yessuh, Mistuh Peppuh. Mawnin', Suh!

PEPPER: Breakfast!

WAITER: Da usu'l, suh? Double tomatuh juice, cereal, kippuhs, ham an'

aigs, hot buttered toast, *an'* coffee?

PEPPER: Sam, don't tantalize me. The works!

WAITER: (*Chuckling*) Yes, *suh.* (*He goes.*)

PEPPER: Ah, sweet rest. How I'd missed you. That sleep was just what I needed.

ELLERY: (*Chuckling*) That wasn't sleep, Tony — it was death.

NIKKI: You don't *look* rested, Mr. Pepper — not with those circles under your eyes.

PEPPER: Carefully cultivated, honey. Gives me that romantic look. (*Calling*) Sam. Stick a pin in that chef. . . . Mind if I borrow a hunk of your toast, dear? (NIKKI *is delighted.* PEPPER *munches.*)

ELLERY: By the way, Tony, here's a wire that was delivered to the train back in Buffalo. You'd left word not to be disturbed under any circumstances, so I accepted it for you.

PEPPER: (*Through the toast*) Huh? Oh. Thanks, Ellery. (PEPPER *tears open the envelope.*)

NIKKI: Mr. Pepper, don't you think I'd screen well?

PEPPER: (*Absently*) I wouldn't know, dear. . . . Hmm!

ELLERY: Bad news, Tony?

PEPPER: It's from Nina. (*Reading*) "Terribly frightened stop please Tony hurry back stop someone been tampering with lock on my bedroom door Nina."

NIKKI: You mean to say Nina's been living behind *locked doors?*

PEPPER: (*Grimly*) A special pick-proof lock on her bedroom door, iron bars on all her windows, never leaves the house, sees hardly anyone. . . . This sounds bad.

ELLERY: How many keys are there to that lock, Tony?

PEPPER: Just one. Nina had it made herself. Keeps it on a long gold chain around her neck — never takes the chain off. Fine thing to happen now!

NIKKI: What's she afraid of? Must be something pretty awful!

ELLERY: Some dark secret in Nina's past, and it's caught up with her, I imagine.

PEPPER: (*Worriedly*) This lock business. . . . Sorry now I took the slow train. The wire was delivered way back in Buffalo, you say? (ELLERY *says "yes"*) I hope nothing's happened to Nina. She lives in that bungalow with an old Mexican couple, Pedro and Maria Fernandez —

and they wouldn't be much use if there's trouble!

ELLERY: (*Quietly*) We'll be in Los Angeles in an hour, Tony . . . so we'll find out soon enough!

SCENE 3: Nina's House

NINA: (*She has a rich voice, but it is hysterical*) Oh, the door *won't* lock from inside my room — with or without the key! Pedro, what am I going to *do?*

PEDRO: (*An old Mexican*) Do'know how lock she get spoil, Mees Nina. Lemme try key. (*He jiggles the key in the lock*) Somepin' stuck inside, Señorita.

NINA: But *how?* Who could have done it?

MARIA: (*Approaching — she is an old Mexican*) Pedro, you no feex?

PEDRO: He hecho todos que yo puedo. . . . La cerradura es mal de salud. (*He tries the key again.*)

NINA: Maria! Did you send that telegram to Tony Pepper? Did you?

MARIA: (*Soothingly*) I just send, Mees Nina. Don' worry.

PEDRO: (*In triumph*) Key lock door from *outside*, Señorita!

NINA: (*Desperately*) Pedro, you've *got* to fix this lock so it works the way it ought to!

PEDRO: Take long time feex. Whole day, mebbe.

NINA: I don't care how long it takes! Do it!

MARIA: (*Nervously*) Mees Nina . . . Pedro no can do.

NINA: Why not, Maria? He's fixed locks before.

MARIA: You no remember, Mees Nina? Our younges' daughter, she gonna have baby. Rosita ver' sick, Señorita. We gotta go Agua Caliente see Rosita ——

PEDRO: You promise, Mees Nina.

NINA: But you can't leave me now! (*She begins to cry*) Alone . . . here . . . You can't! (*Her sobs are hysterical.*)

PEDRO: Que haremos, Maria?

MARIA: No se. . . . Debemos bajar a ver Rosita.

PEDRO: Es verdad. . . . Digasela usted.

MARIA: Mees Nina, we no go 'way for long time. Jus' take train Agua Caliente, see Rosita, come back. 'At's all!

PEDRO: (*Eagerly*) I call lock-feexer, Mees Nina. He feex lock pronto, you no

cry no more, hey?

NINA: No! I won't have a strange locksmith in my house! He might make a duplicate key on the sly — then what good would my lock be?

MARIA: (*Stubbornly*) But we gotta go, Mees Nina. . . .

NINA: (*Crying*) I'm sorry, Maria. Of course you do. I hope Rosita gets well. (*Fiercely*) But I won't stay here unprotected. Pedro!

PEDRO: Sí, Señorita.

NINA: I can't lock the door from inside, even though I can *un*lock it. (*Jangle of key and gold chain*) Take my key, leave me in the bedroom here, and lock the door from *outside*. Go on, Pedro!

PEDRO: Sí, Señorita. (*He closes the door and turns key in the lock.* NINA *tries the door from the bedroom side.*) It's lock good. Now what I do, Señorita?

NINA: Slip the key back to me under the door.

PEDRO: Sí. (*A faint jangle*) You get it?

NINA: (*Hysterical*) Yes!

MARIA: Pedro — come! We meess train!

PEDRO: Sí, Maria.

MARIA: Vamos, corres tu! Corres!

PEDRO: Bueno. Vengo tan vivamente que puedo. . . .

NINA: Pedro! Maria! (*She sobs*) Please . . . *please* . . . hurry back. I'm — afraid . . .

SCENE 4: A Running Car — A Street — Nina's House

(NIKKI, ELLERY, *and* PEPPER *are in a taxicab.*)

NIKKI: I can hardly wait to see her! She was *so* glamorous, Mr. Pepper! (*The taxi horn toots violently.*)

PEPPER: She hasn't changed a bit. . . . What's the matter, driver?

TAXI DRIVER: It's this mob, Mister. In front of the house you told me to go to.

ELLERY: This *is* a reception committee, Tony! Is that Nina's bungalow?

PEPPER: Yes. We'll get out here, driver! (*They leave the cab, and immediately find themselves in a dense crowd*) Let us through, please!

ELLERY: Police — all over the place!

PEPPER: (*Panting*) I hope nothing's happened to Nina! One side!

NIKKI: Ellery! That police car pulling up — isn't that —? Ellery, it *is!*

Getting out of the car with that police lieutenant! *The Inspector and Sergeant Velie!*

ELLERY: Can't be, Nikki. We left them in New York — Sergeant! Dad!

INSPECTOR: (*Very grave*) Hullo! Meet Lieutenant Hatch of the local police. My son, his secretary, Mr. Pepper . . . (*Ad libs*).

HATCH: I know Mr. Pepper. Let's get into the house. Stand back, please — you people!

PEPPER: (*Going with* HATCH) But what's happened to Nina, Lieutenant?

NIKKI: (*To* SERGEANT VELIE) How in the world did you two get here? We left you both in New York — and here you are in Beverly Hills! Use a magic carpet? (*They cross the sidewalk.*)

VELIE: We flew in. Plane'll beat a train any day.

ELLERY: But what brought you out here, Dad?

INSPECTOR: Just after you left New York with Pepper we got a red-hot tip that that wife-killer we want, Strozzi, had been seen in Los Angeles.

VELIE: So we hop the next plane and we're settin' in Hatch's office gettin' the lowdown when the call comes in that Nina'd been found dead.

NIKKI: She's . . . *dead?* Oh, Ellery!

ELLERY: Dead! (*Quietly*) Murdered?

INSPECTOR: Suicide, apparently. One side! (*A door closes and the murmurs of the crowd die out.*)

PEPPER: But I can't believe it, Lieutenant! Where is the body? I ——

HATCH: Now don't get excited, Mr. Pepper. Murphy!

MURPHY: (*An Irish cop*) Yes, sor, Leftenant.

HATCH: As I understand it, the Mexican couple who kept house for Nina — Pedro and Maria Fernandez — called you?

MURPHY: Yes, sor. When they got back from Agua Caliente, Nina's bedroom door was still locked, but they couldn't get no answer, so they got scared an' I was passin' the house on me beat, so I hadda break the door in an' I found her body in the bedroom there. Looks like she's been dead twen'y-four hours, I says to meself, I says ——

ELLERY: Is this the door you broke down, Officer? (MURPHY: "*Yes, sor.*" ELLERY *tries the knob a few times*) Something wrong with the lock, all right, Lieutenant.

HATCH: Seems the lock had been tampered with recently and would lock with the key only from the outside.

ELLERY: (*Swiftly*) Was the only key still on the chain around Nina's neck?

MURPHY: Yes, sor. Found it there meself.

PEPPER: Took her own life! Remember that wire she sent me, Ellery? "Terribly frightened," she said. . . .

HATCH: Well, let's have a look. (*Reporters and cameramen are heard approaching*) What's this? A parade?

MURPHY: The noospaper boys, Leftenant.

1ST REPORTER: Man, what a picture *I* just got!

2D REPORTER: Gorgeous creature. I'll never forget that baby-smile.

1ST REPORTER: Hasn't changed a bit in two years. How do these dames do it?

HATCH: (*Roaring*) You buzzards! Scram! Murphy — Hobbs! Help me get these men out of here!

MURPHY: Come on, now, boys. . . . Leftenant's sore. . . . (*Reporters' grumbling dies away. A door slams.*)

INSPECTOR: (*Soberly*) So this is . . . was Nina. What a woman!

VELIE: She looks a heap better dead than some dames I know look breathin'!

PEPPER: (*Groaning*) There goes my picture!

NIKKI: There goes her life, Mr. Pepper! (*Softly*) Poor thing.

VELIE: Shot through the chest. Funny place for a suicide to shoot herself. Maybe they do it different in Hollywood.

ELLERY: Maybe they do, Sergeant! Lieutenant Hatch. (HATCH *returns with "Yes, Mr. Queen?"*) You say this woman committed suicide?

HATCH: Of course. The locked door ——

ELLERY: (*Dryly*) Then where's the revolver she's supposed to have shot herself with?

HATCH: (*Startled*) The suicide gun? Murphy, where is it?

MURPHY: (*Blankly*) The gun, Leftenant? I ain't seen no gun.

HATCH: You —! Murphy, did you search this room when you broke the door down?

MURPHY: I did that, sor. An' now I think of it . . . there wasn't no gun anywheres in the room.

HATCH: Murphy, take the air! (MURPHY *hastily retreats*) Gun taken away! Not suicide, hang it — murder!

VELIE: But how'd the killer git in?

INSPECTOR: Nina let him in, Velie. She couldn't lock the door from inside this room, but she could *un*lock it!

NIKKI: But if Nina unlocked the door to let the murderer in —

ELLERY: Right, Nikki. It means the murderer was well known to her. Eh, Tony?

PEPPER: Must have been. In the state of her nerves, she wouldn't have opened except to someone she trusted. (*Muttering*) There goes my whole scheme!

ELLERY: But there's something even more extraordinary about this crime. Has it occurred to you, Lieutenant Hatch?

HATCH: Things are moving so fast I don't know where I am. What's that, Mr. Queen?

ELLERY: *How did the murderer leave the room after the crime?*

HATCH: (*Quickly*) That's just exactly what I've — (*Blankly*) Huh?

INSPECTOR: That's right, Lieutenant. The door your man Murphy broke down was locked when he found it — locked from the *outside!*

ELLERY: And to lock it from *outside* the bedroom, the killer needed the key. And the *only* key is around Nina's neck *inside* the bedroom!

VELIE: I'm gettin' dizzy.

ELLERY: (*Thoughtfully*) It *is* a puzzle. Can't be suicide because the revolver is gone, and now it seems it can't be murder, either!

HATCH: (*Groaning*) Can't be suicide . . . can't be murder. . . . Inspector — Mr. Queen — how about sort of . . . acting in an advisory capacity on this case? East meets West sort of stuff?

INSPECTOR: Glad to help out, Lieutenant, if we can.

NIKKI: (*Sotto voce*) Any idea who did it, Ellery?

ELLERY: (*Grimly*) Just now, Nikki — it could be anyone in the wide, wide world!

SCENE 5: Police Headquarters, Los Angeles

(NIKKI, SERGEANT VELIE, *and* ELLERY *are walking up a corridor.*)

VELIE: So now I find out that Strozzi tip was hot air! It's fate, that's what it is, Miss Porter.

NIKKI: I'm so mad I could chew nail-polish! Come all the way to Hollywood — for a murder case. I haven't seen but one movie star, and *she's* dead.

ELLERY: (*Ruefully*) How about me, Nikki? I came here to write — and remained to detect.

VELIE: (*Dryly*) And you ain't done too much of that, Mr. Queen. (ELLERY's

rueful "Don't rub it in, Sergeant" . . . their steps stop) Here's Lootenant Hatch's office. Hatch an' the Inspector are waitin' for us. (*They go in.*)

INSPECTOR: Well, we got a break this morning!

NIKKI: Thank goodness somebody's getting *something.*

ELLERY: (*Eagerly*) What did you turn up, Dad?

INSPECTOR: Something belonging to Nina was stolen by the killer from the scene of the crime!

ELLERY: Ah. What was it, Dad?

INSPECTOR: Nina's U. S. Postal Savings passbook! We've established through Maria Fernandez that the passbook was in Nina's bureau drawer in the bedroom. The Fernandez woman saw it there just before she and her husband left to go to Agua Caliente.

ELLERY: Postal Savings! Have you checked the account?

INSPECTOR: The entire amount of twenty-five hundred dollars was withdrawn from the post office *this morning*, and the account closed out.

ELLERY: What!

VELIE: The gall! To swipe Nina's passbook after killin' the dame yesterday, an' then cash in the victim's account today!

NIKKI: But how could the murderer get away with it? . . . I know! *Nina's signature was forged!*

INSPECTOR: (*Grimly*) It probably took a bit of practising, Nikki, but that's what must have been done.

VELIE: Twen'y-five hundred bucks for a movie star ain't much savin's, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: That's all Nina had, though, Velie. (NIKKI: "*What!*") Fact. We checked back her old accounts. At the time she retired she was wealthy. But when she died she didn't have a cent in the world except that measly Postal Savings Account.

ELLERY: (*Suddenly*) Does Tony Pepper know about this, Dad?

INSPECTOR: Pepper was the one tipped us off to how much money Nina used to have. . . . Come into the next room. Hatch is questioning the old Mexican couple. (*They all go into another room.*)

HATCH: (*Desperately*) Morning. They're a tough old couple, these Mexicans. Can't get a thing out of 'em. Try your luck, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: (*Barking*) Pedro and Maria Fernandez! (MARIA *and* PEDRO *utter a stolid "Sí?"*) You both took the choo-choo to Agua Caliente, eh? Leaving Nina alone in the bungalow?

MARIA: Sí, Señor. That is da true.

PEDRO: Maria say right, Señor. We take train ——

MARIA: We see our Rosita — she got fine baby! ——

PEDRO: Doctor say Rosita gonna be okay ——

MARIA: So we take train, come back, no can make Nina open bedroom door — we holler loud ——

PEDRO: So we call da cop ——

INSPECTOR: We know all that! And you can stop lying!

MARIA (*Indignantly*) Who's lying? We no lie!

PEDRO: We go, we come back. . . .

MARIA: Decimos la verdad.

PEDRO: Cierto, es verdad. Creis mentimos.

MARIA: Pedro, creen hayamos matado Señorita Nina!

NIKKI: Ellery! Do you suppose the Inspector ——

ELLERY: (*Intently*) Not now, Nikki. I want to hear this.

VELIE: Aw, the old man's bluffin', Miss Porter. An' when a guy bluffs, he's on'y holdin' a pair o' dooces.

INSPECTOR: One of you — maybe both of you — murdered your mistress Nina!

MARIA: (*Gasping*) We keel Nina? For why?

INSPECTOR: For twenty-five hundred dollars' savings, that's for why, Mrs. Fernandez! You write better English than you talk — I've checked you! — and you've been in Nina's employ long enough to have perfected a forgery of her signature!

PEDRO: But how we do, Señor? We was on train, going, coming. . . .

INSPECTOR: I know that train alibi! But what you actually did was to get off at the first stop of the train, double back to Beverly Hills, commit the crime . . . and then take a plane to Agua Caliente to make up for lost time! Eh, Lieutenant Hatch?

HATCH: (*Quickly*) Right, Inspector! By using a plane they could have committed the crime and still landed in Agua Caliente in plenty of time to make it seem they'd arrived on the train. (*Low*) Think that's what happened, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: (*Low*) Blessed if I know! I'm guessing, too. (*Higher*) Now if you'll confess, Lieutenant Hatch will try . . .

MARIA: We confess nuttin'!

PEDRO: We don' do nuttin'!

INSPECTOR: Your problem, Lieutenant. They're too cagey for me.

WATCH: Just have to check their movements again, take a whack at the airports. . . . (*Louder*) All right, you two. Come along! (*The three of them exit.*)

NIKKI: Now may I go see some movie stars?

ELLERY: I think you may, Nikki.

VELIE: Givin' up, huh, Mr. Queen? Well, I don't blame you. This one's a sooper-dooper.

ELLERY: Giving up, Sergeant? What gave you that idea?

INSPECTOR: Don't tell me you've seen some light, son!

ELLERY: *All* the light. (*They exclaim.*)

NIKKI: But Ellery — only yesterday you said the murderer could be anyone in the wide world!

ELLERY: (*Grimly*) That was yesterday, Nikki. Today, I say the murderer can be only *one* person in the wide world . . . and I know *which* one!

Ellery Queen has just said he knows who the murderer is. Do you? You can have some additional fun by stopping here and trying to get the solution before Ellery gives it. Getting the correct criminal is not enough, if you play the game. You must get the correct reasoning, too! Now go ahead and read Ellery's own solution to The Adventure of the Frightened Star.

THE SOLUTION

SCENE 6: Lieutenant Hatch's Office

HATCH: (*Breathlessly entering*) Mr. Queen! I understand you've solved the case!

ELLERY: Yes, Lieutenant. The clue that gave me the answer was the Postal Savings passbook the murderer took from Nina's bureau.

HATCH: (*Puzzled*) The passbook?

INSPECTOR: But how, son?

ELLERY: The murderer went to the post-office where Nina had her Postal Savings account, presented Nina's passbook, and closed out the account. Now, I admit that a murderer might have forged Nina's signature and fooled the U. S. postal authorities, improbable as that is, *except for one thing.*

NIKKI: What's that?

ELLERY: Anyone who has ever had as little as two dollars in a United States

Postal Savings account knows that when you open a postal-savings account not only is your signature filed away, *but your fingerprints, too!*

VELIE: (*Groaning*) Holy smoke! I forgot all about that!

ELLERY: And what's more, you can't *close out the account*, whether for two dollars or for the maximum of twenty-five hundred dollars, *without having your fingerprints taken again and checked against those on file!* No money will be turned over to the depositor in the closing of an account unless those two sets of prints match.

NIKKI: Oh, dear! I never thought of that.

ELLERY: So while the murderer might have forged Nina's signature, no one could forge Nina's *fingerprints*. Yet the account was closed out. Conclusion: Only one person in the world could have done it — *the depositor*. And who was the depositor?

HATCH: *Nina! Nina herself!*

ELLERY: Yes — Nina. — *Therefore Nina was alive and in that post-office AFTER she was shot to death in her bedroom!*

INSPECTOR: What are you talking about, son? That's impossible!

ELLERY: Yes, it's impossible. *Therefore the woman who was shot to death in Nina's bedroom*, the woman whose body we found, *was NOT Nina!*

NIKKI: (*Bewildered*) Was not Nina? But ——

HATCH: But Mr. Queen, it *must* be Nina's body! It certainly *looks* like Nina ——

VELIE: And all those noospaper guys — they even took pictures of the body, Mr. Queen — *they* thought it was Nina ——

INSPECTOR: Even Tony Pepper thought it was Nina ——

ELLERY: Which is what tells me whose body it really is.

HATCH: I don't get this at all! *That* tells you?

ELLERY: Certainly, Lieutenant. Since so many people who knew Nina's features accepted the dead woman *as* Nina, when we know it *wasn't* Nina, the dead woman must obviously be someone who bears a remarkable *resemblance* to Nina — close enough to fool even the man who knew her best!

NIKKI: Resemblance . . . movie star. . . . Oh!

ELLERY: Yes, Nikki. Are there people in Hollywood who make a career out of looking exactly like movie stars? Indeed there are — movie *doubles*, used for difficult scenes, or as stand-ins. So I knew the dead woman must be Nina's movie-double. And who killed the double? Obviously,

Nina herself.

INSPECTOR: Sure! This double paid a visit to Nina, Nina let her in, killed her, changed clothes, took her own passbook, relocked the door from outside, cashed in her Postal Savings account, and disappeared ——

VELIE: Whoa, Inspector. How could Nina relock the door from *outside* the room? She left the key around her double's neck . . . *inside* the room!

HATCH: That's right. Must be a mistake somewhere, Mr. Queen.

ELLERY: No mistake, Lieutenant. As a matter of fact, the answer to Sergeant Velie's question confirms the theory that Nina is the murderer. We believed the key left around the victim's neck to be the *only* key to that special lock. But who had had that key made? *Nina herself*, and it never left her possession. Therefore, Nina, and Nina alone, could have made a *duplicate* key!

NIKKI: So she simply left the original around her double's neck and locked the door from outside with her duplicate.

HATCH: That's it! But the motive, Mr. Queen. Why did this woman murder her double?

ELLERY: The disappearance of practically all of Nina's once-large fortune tells us that, Lieutenant . . . *blackmail.* Yes — the double had something on Nina, something devastating, I should say, to make Nina retire and give up every cent she had in the world except a nest-egg of twenty-five hundred dollars. Something so serious it made Nina plot the double's death — tamper with her own lock and pretend it had been done by someone else — pretend terror — build up a whole structure to account for her later "suicide" — except that she forgot to leave the gun behind!

INSPECTOR: (*Thoughtfully*) We won't know what the double had on her unless we find Nina.

HATCH: (*Grimly*) Now that we know she's at large, we'll find her, Inspector! Mr. Queen, I can't tell you how much I appreciate ——

ELLERY: (*Hastily*) Don't thank me, Lieutenant — thank the United States Government! (*Chuckling*) Without the post-office ruling about fingerprints, this case would never have been solved! (*The music comes up.*)