THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

DECEMBER 1970 60¢

ALL-NEW Issue

last story	CORNELL WOOLRICH	New York Blues
Dr. Basil Willing	HELEN McCLOY	Pleasant Assassin
Inspector Dover	JOYCE PORTER	High Finance
crime and detection	BERKELY MATHER	Big Bite
C. Auguste Dupin	MICHAEL HARRISON	Murder
be-your-own detective	RON GOULART	Haunted Man
Captain Leopold	EDWARD D. HOCH	Christmas story
Ruby tells all	FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY	Doll Baby
book reviews	JOHN DICKSON CARR	monthly feature

11 NEW stories

COPIES ARE STILL AVAILABLE—

If you order NOW!

Yes! Copies are still available of the new Ellery Queen's 1971 Anthology, Volume #20. The best collection of mystery, suspense, crime and detective stories, some of them written by world-famous writers. This is the kind of reading that will keep you completely engrossed . . . for a week or a weekend.

If you have never read a mystery Anthology before, don't miss this one! It's crammed full of excitement. There are chills and thrills to satisfy the most demanding of mystery readers.

Be sure to get your copy . . . mail the handy coupon today.

ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY
Dept. DP-14
229 Park Avenue South
New York, N.Y. 10003

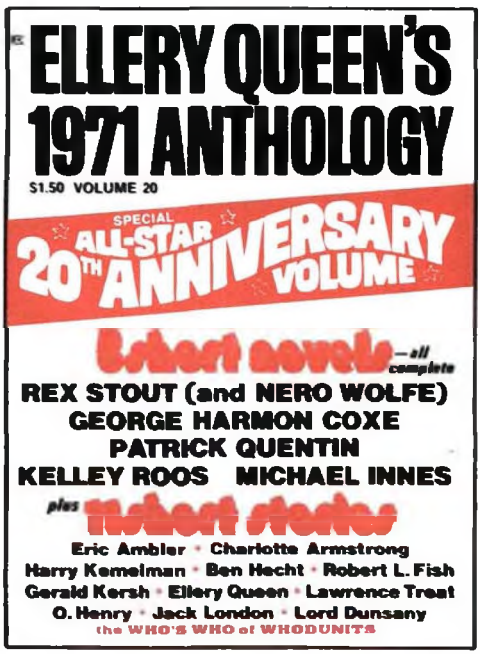
Please send me _____ copy(s) of the new ELLERY QUEEN'S 1971 ANTHOLOGY Volume 20. I am enclosing $1.50 PLUS 25¢ for postage and handling for each copy.

Name _____
(please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

(Turn to page 108 for extra coupon)



The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

ALL-NEW ISSUE

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 56, No. 6, Whole No. 325. DEC., 1970. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at 60¢ a copy. Annual subscription $7.00 in U.S.A., and possessions and Canada; $8.00 in the Pan American Union; $8.00 in all other countries. Editorial and General Offices, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, N. Y. 10003. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions and other mail items are to be sent to 229 Park Avenue South, New York, N. Y. 10003. Office of Publication —1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. 01040. Second-Class postage paid at Holyoke, Mass. 01040.

JOEL DAVIS, *President & Publisher*

VICTOR C. STABILE, *Vice Pres. & Treas.*—LEONARD F. PINTO, *Vice Pres. & General Manager*
ELEANOR SULLIVAN, *Managing Editor*—CONSTANCE DIRIENZO, *Executive Editorial Secretary*
DAVID MILLER, *Advg. Manager*—CARL BARTLE, *Prod. Director*—IRVING BERNSTEIN, *Art Director*

American Management Association

a splendid opportunity...

for the ambitious man who seriously wants the challenge, the high income, and the prestige of a top management position....and wants it soon

The key word is seriously

If you are serious about achieving outstanding success in your chosen field, then you must realize the vital importance of getting an advanced education in management.

Management today is just as much a profession as law or medicine. To practice it well and reap its rich rewards, you must prepare for it as diligently as a lawyer or physician prepares for his career. And you must do this within a structured learning environment.

But what if you cannot afford the time and money it takes to attend business school on some distant campus? Then we suggest that you enroll in **the AMA Extension Institute.**

The **AMA Extension Institute** trains capable men for top management through private, self-paced study at home under the guidance of a qualified AMA instructor. You do not have to leave your job or give up current earning power. Yet you can take management courses whose content and level of sophistication rate on a par with the best in management education.

In fact, Institute courses employ the same case method of instruction made famous by the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration.

Here you have a great opportunity to acquire the special viewpoints, the habits of thinking and keen judgment, and the skills of decision-making and problem-solving typical of top-level managers everywhere. There is no better way to qualify for rapid promotion and higher income.

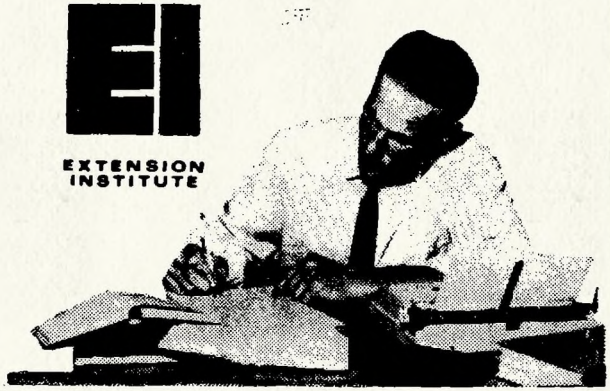
AMA is now accepting enrollments for its Extension Institute courses in Management and the Computer, General Management Skills, Marketing Management, and Managerial Finance and Control. Why not let us send you full information about these four courses?

Just mail the coupon below. We'll promptly send you our illustrated brochure carrying full details about the Institute and the management courses it offers to ambitious, serious-minded men.

AMERICAN MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

EI

EXTENSION INSTITUTE



American Management Association Dept. BP-18
Extension Institute
AMA Building
135 West 50th Street
New York, N. Y. 10020

Please send me your illustrated brochure giving full information about the AMA Extension Institute and its series of advanced courses in management. No obligation on my part.

Name.....

Title.....

Company.....

Address.....

City.....State.....Zip Code.....

a *NEW* suspense *NOVELET* by

CORNELL WOOLRICH

We've said it before and we'll say it again: no one put quite the same heartbeat into a story that Cornell Woolrich did . . . Here is Cornell Woolrich's last story—a novelet with the heartbeat of a Manhatan hotel room—and who knew more about New York hotel rooms than Cornell Woolrich? Here, too, is the story of a man in hiding, a man who "never leaves his room, has all his meals sent up to him, and keeps his door locked all the time." Who is he? What crime did he commit? What is he afraid of? Whom is he waiting for?

For the answers read this gripping new novelet by one of the masters of the emotional thriller, a writer who really got inside his character — deep inside, almost as if he were the character himself . . . Cornell Woolrich, a name and talent that will long be remembered.

NEW YORK BLUES

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

IT'S SIX O'CLOCK; MY DRINK IS at the three-quarter mark—three-quarters down not three-quarters up—and the night begins.

Across the way from me sits a little transistor radio, up on end, simmering away like a teakettle on a stove. It's been going steadily ever since I first came in here, two days, three nights ago; it chisels away the stony silence, takes the edge off the being-alone. It came with the room, not with me.

Now there's a punctuation of three lush chords, and it goes into a traffic report. "Good evening. The New York Municipal Communications Service presents the 6:00 P.M. Traffic Advisory. Traffic through the Holland and Lincoln Tunnels and over the George Washington Bridge, heavy westbound, light eastbound. Traffic on the crosscut between the

George Washington and Queens-Whitestone Bridges, heavy in both directions. Traffic through the Battery Tunnel, heavy outbound, very light inbound. Traffic on the West Side Highway, bumper to bumper all the way. Radar units in operation there. Traffic over the Long Island Expressway is beginning to build, due to tonight's game at Shea Stadium. West 70th Street between Amsterdam and West End Avenues is closed due to a water-main break. A power failure on the East Side I.R.T. line between Grand Central and 125th Street is causing delays of up to forty-five minutes. Otherwise all subways and buses, the Staten Island Ferry, the Jersey Central, the Delaware and Lackawanna, and the Pennsylvania Railroads, and all other commuter services, are operating normally. At the three airports, planes are arriving and departing on time. The next regularly scheduled traffic advisory will be given one-half hour from now—"

The big week-end rush is on. The big city emptying itself out at once. Just a skeleton crew left to keep it going until Monday morning. Everybody getting out—everybody but me, everybody but those who are coming here for me tonight. We're going to have the whole damned town to ourselves.

I go over to the window and open up a crevice between two of the tightly flattened slats in one of the blinds, and a little parallelogram of a New York street scene, Murray Hill section, six o'clock-evening hour, springs into view. Up in the sky the upper-echelon light tiers of the Pan Am Building are undulating and rippling in the humidity and carbon monoxide ("Air pollution index: normal, twelve percent; emergency level, fifty percent").

Down below, on the sidewalk, the glowing green blob of a street light, swollen to pumpkin size by foreshortened perspective, thrusts upward toward my window. And along the little slot that the parted slats make, lights keep passing along, like strung-up, shining, red and white beads. All going just one way, right to left, because 37th Street is westbound, and all going by twos, always by twos, headlights and tails, heads and tails, in a welter of slowed-down traffic and a paroxysm of vituperative horns. And directly under me I hear a taxi driver and would-be fares having an argument, the voices clearly audible, the participants unseen.

"But it's only to Fifty-ninth Street—"

"I don't *ca-a-are,* lady. Look, I already tolje. I'm not goin' up that way. Can'tje get it into your head?"

"Don't let's argue with him. Get inside. He can't put you out."

"No, but I can refuse to move. Lady, if your husband gets in here he's gonna sit still in one place, 'cause I ain't budgin'."

New York. The world's most dramatic city. Like a permanent short circuit, sputtering and sparking up into the night sky all night long. No place like it for living. And probably no place like it for dying.

I take away the little tire jack my fingers have made and the slats snap together again.

The first sign that the meal I phoned down for is approaching is the minor-key creak from a sharply swerved castor as the room-service waiter rounds a turn outside my door. I'm posted behind a high-backed wing chair, with my wrists crossed over the top of it and my hands dangling like loose claws, staring a little tensely at the door. Then there's the waiter's characteristically deferential knock. But I say, "Who is it?" anyway, before I go over to open it.

He's an elderly man. He's been up here twice before and by now I know the way he sounds.

"Room service," comes through in that high-pitched voice his old age has given him.

I release the double lock, then I turn the knob and open the door.

He wheels the little white-clothed dinner cart forward into the room, and as the hall perspective clears behind him I get a blurred glimpse of a figure in motion, just passing from view, then gone, too quickly to be brought into focus.

I stand there a moment, holding the door to a narrow slit, watching the hall. But it's empty now.

There's an innocuous explanation for everything. Everything is a coin that has two sides to it, and one side is innocuous but the other can be ominous. The hall makes a right-angle turn opposite my door, and to get to the elevators, those whose rooms are back of this turn have to pass the little setback that leads to my door.

On the other hand, if someone wanted to pinpoint me, to verify which room I was in, by sighting my face as I opened the door for the waiter, he would do just that: stand there an instant, then quickly step aside out of my line of vision. The optical snapshot I'd had was not of a figure in continuous motion going past my point of view, but of a figure that had first been static and then had flitted from sight.

And if it's that, now they know which room I'm in. Which room on which floor in which hotel.

"Did you notice anyone out there in the hall just now when you came along?" I ask. I try to sound casual, which only makes me not sound casual.

He answers with a question of

his own. "*Was* there somebody out in the hall, sir?"

"That's what I asked you, did you see anyone?"

He explains that years of experience in trundling these food-laden carts across the halls have taught him never to look up, never to take his eyes off them, because an unexpected bump on the floor under the carpet might splash ice water out of the glass and wet the tablecloth or spill consommé into its saucer.

It sounds plausible enough. And whether it is or not I know it's all I'm going to get.

I sign the check for the meal, add the tip, and tell him to put it on the bill. Then just as he turns to leave I remember something I want to do.

"Just a second; that reminds me." I shoot one of my cuffs forward and twist something out of it. Then the other one. And I hold out my hand to him with the two star-sapphire cuff links he admired so much last night. (Innocently, I'm sure, with no venal intent.)

He says I'm not serious, I must be joking. He says he can't take anything like that. He says all the things he's expected to say, and I override them. Then when he can't come up with anything else, he comes up with, half hopefully (hopeful for a yes answer): "You tired of them?"

"No," I say quite simply, "no—they're tired of me."

He thanks me over and thanks me under and thanks me over again, and then he's gone, and I'm glad he's gone.

Poor old man, wasting his life bringing people their meals up to their rooms for thirty-five, forty-odd years. He'll die in peace, though. Not in terror and in throes of resistance. I almost envy him.

I turn my head a little. The radio's caroling *Tonight,* velvety smooth and young and filled with plaintive desire. Maria's song from "West Side Story." I remember one beautiful night long ago at the Winter Garden, with a beautiful someone beside me. I tilt my nose and breathe in, and I can still smell her perfume, the ghost of her perfume from long ago. But where is she now, where did she go, what did I *do* with her?

Our paths ran along so close together they were almost like one, the one they were eventually going to be. Then fear came along, fear entered into it somehow, and split them wide apart.

Fear bred anxiety to justify. Anxiety to justify bred anger. The phone calls that wouldn't be answered, the door rings that wouldn't be opened. Anger bred sudden calamity.

Now there aren't two paths any more; there's only one, only mine.

Running downhill into the ground, running downhill into its doom.

Tonight, tonight—there will be no morning star—Right, kid, there won't. Not for me anyway.

There's a tap at the door, made with the tip of a key, not the tip of a finger. The voice doesn't wait, but comes right through before the signal has a chance to freeze me stiff. A woman's voice, soft-spoken, reassuring. "Night maid."

I wait a second to let a little of the white drain from my face before she sees me, and then I go over and let her in.

Her name is Ginny. She told me last night. I asked her, that's why she told me. I wanted to hear the sound of somebody's name, that's why I asked her. I was frightened and lonely, that's why I wanted to hear the sound of somebody's name.

On her face the beauty of two races blends, each contributing its individual hallmark. The golden-warm skin, the deep glowing eyes, the narrow-tipped nose, the economical underlip.

While she's turning back the bedcovers in a neat triangle over one corner I remark, "I notice you go around the outside of the room to get to the bed, instead of cutting across the middle, which would be much shorter. Why do you?"

She answers plausibly, "People are often watching their television sets at this time, when I come in, and I don't want to block them off."

I point out, "But mine isn't on, Ginny."

I see how the pupils of her eyes try to flee, to get as far away from looking at me as possible, all the way over into their outside corners. And that gives it away. She's afraid of me. The rumors have already reached her. A hotel is like a beehive when it comes to gossip. *He never leaves his room, has all his meals sent up to him, and keeps his door locked all the time.*

"I want to give you something," I say to her. "For that little girl of yours you were telling me about."

I take a hundred-dollar bill out of the wallet on my hip. I fold the bill a few times so that the corner numerals disappear, then thrust it between two of her fingers.

She sees the "1" first as the bill slowly uncoils. Her face is politely appreciative.

She sees the first zero next —that makes it a ten. Her face is delighted, more than grateful.

She sees the last zero. Suddenly her face is fearful, stunned into stone; in her eyes I can see steel filings of mistrust glittering. Her wrist flexes to shove the bill back to me, but I ward it off with my hand up-ended.

I catch the swift side glance she darts at the fifth of rye on the side table.

"No, it didn't come out of that. It's just an impulse—came out of my heart, I suppose you could say. Either take it or don't take it, but don't spoil it."

"But why? What for?"

"Does there have to be a reason for everything? Sometimes there isn't."

"I'll buy her a new coat," she says huskily. "A new pink coat like little girls all seem to want. With a little baby muff of lamb's wool to go with it. And I'll say a prayer for you when I take her to church with me next Sunday."

It won't work, but—"Make it a good one."

The last part is all she hears.

Something occurs to me. "You won't have to do any explaining to her father, will you?"

"She has no father," she says quite simply. "She's never had one. There's only me and her, sir."

Somehow I can tell by the quick chip-chop run of her feet away from my door that it's not lost time she's trying to make up; it's the tears starting in her eyes that she wants to hide.

I slosh a little rye into a glass—a fresh glass, not the one before; they get rancid from your downbreaths that cling like a stale mist around the inner rim. But it's no help; I know that by now, and I've been dousing myself in it for three days. It just doesn't take hold. I think fear neutralizes alcohol, weakens its anesthetic power. It's good for small fears; your boss, your wife, your bills, your dentist; all right then to take a drink. But for big ones it doesn't do any good. Like water on blazing gasoline, it will only quicken and compound it. It takes sand, in the literal and the slang sense, to smother the bonfire that is fear. And if you're out of sand, then you must burn up.

I have it out now, paying it off between my fingers like a rosary of murder. Those same fingers that did it to her. For three days now I've taken it out at intervals, looked at it, then hidden it away again. Each time wondering if it really happened, hoping that it didn't, dreading that it did.

It's a woman's scarf; that much I know about it. And that's about all. But whose? Hers? And how did I come by it? How did it get into the side pocket of my jacket, dangling on the outside, when I came in here e a r l y Wednesday morning in some sort of traumatic daze, looking for room walls to hide inside of as if they were a folding screen. (I didn't even know I had it there; the bellboy who was checking me in spotted it on the way up in the elevator, grinned, and said

something about a "heavy date.")

It's flimsy stuff, but it has great tensile strength when p u l l e d against its grain. The strength of the garotte. It's tinted in pastel colors that blend, graduate, into one another, all except one. It goes from a flamingo pink to a peach tone and then to a still paler flesh tint—and then suddenly an angry, jagged splash of blood color comes in, not even like the others. Not smooth, not artificed by some loom or by some dye vat. Like a star, like the scattered petals of a flower. Speaking of—I don't know how to say it—speaking of violence, of struggle, of life spilled out.

The blood isn't red any more. It's rusty brown now. But it's still blood all the same. Ten years from now, twenty, it'll still be blood; faded out, vanished, the pollen of, the dust of, blood. What was once warm and moving. And made blushes and rushed with anger and paled with fear. Like that night—

I can still see her eyes. They still come before me, wide and white and glistening with fright, out of the amnesiac darkness of our s u d d e n , unpremeditated meeting.

They were like two pools of fear. She saw something that I couldn't see. And fear kindled in them. I feared and I mistrusted, but I couldn't bear to see my fear reflected in her eyes. From her I wanted reassurance, consolation; only wanted to draw her close to me and hold her to me, to lean my head against her and rest and draw new belief in myself. Instead she met my fear with her fear. Eyes that should have been tender were glowing with unscreaming fear.

It wasn't an attack. We'd been together too many times before, made love together too many times before, for it to be that. It was just that fear had suddenly entered, and made us dangerous strangers.

She turned and tried to run. I caught the scarf from behind. Only in supplication, in pleading; trying to hold on to the only one who could save me. And the closer I tried to draw her to me, the less she was alive. Until finally I got her all the way back to me, where I wanted her to be, and she was dead.

I hadn't wanted that. It was only love, turned inside out. It was only loneliness, outgoing.

And now I'm alone, without any love.

And the radio, almost as if it were taking my pulse count, electrographing my heartbeats, echoes them back to me: *For, like caressing an empty glove, Is night without some love, The night was made for—*

The hotel room ashtrays are thick glass cubes, built to withstand cracking under heat of

almost any degree. I touch my lighter to it, to the scarf compressed inside the cube. The flame points upward like a sawtoothed orange knife. There goes love. After a while it stops burning. It looks like a black cabbage, each leaf tipped by thin red lines that waver and creep back and forth like tiny red worms. Then one by one they go out.

I dump it into the bathroom bowl and flip the lever down. What a hell of a place for your love to wind up. Like something disemboweled.

I go back and pour out a little more. It's the seatbelt against the imminent smash-up, the antidote for terror, the prescription against panic. Only it doesn't work. I sit there dejectedly, wrists looping down between my legs. I'm confused; I can't think it o u t. Something inside my mind keeps fogging over, like mist on a windshield. I use the back of my hand for a windshield wiper and draw it slowly across my forehead a couple times, and it clears up again for a little while.

"Remember," the little radio prattles. "Simple headache, take aspirin. Nervous tension, take—"

All I can say to myself is: there *is* no fix for the fix you're in now.

Suddenly the phone peals, sharp and shattering as the smashing of glass sealing up a vacuum. I never knew a sound could be so frightening, never knew a sound could be so dire. It's like a short circuit in my nervous system. Like springing a cork in my heart with a lopsided opener. Like a shot of sodium pentathol up my arm knocking out my will power.

All I keep thinking is: this is it. Here it is. It's not a hotel-service call, it can't be, not at this hour any more. The waiter's been and gone, the night maid's been and gone. It can't be an outside call, because nobody on the outside knows I'm here in the hotel. Not even where I work, where I used to work, they don't know. This is it; it's got to be.

How will they put it? A polite summons. "Would you m i n d coming down for a minute, sir?" And then if I do, a sudden preventive twisting of my arm behind my back as I step out of the elevator, an unnoticeable flurry tactfully covered up behind the backs of t h e bellboys—then quickly out and away.

Why don't they come right up here to my door and get me? Is it because this is a high-class hotel on a high-class s t r e e t? Maybe they don't want any commotion in the hall, for the sake of the other guests. Maybe this is the way they always do it.

Meanwhile it keeps ringing and ringing and ringing.

The damp zigzag path my spilled drink made, from where I was to where I am now, is slowly

soaking into the carpet and darkening it. The empty glass, dropped on the carpet, has finished rocking on its side by now and lies still. And I've fallen motionless into the grotesque posture of a badly frightened kid. Almost prone along the floor, legs sprawled out in back of me in scissors formation, just the backs of my two hands grasping the edge of the low stand the phone sits on, and the rim of it cutting across the bridge of my nose so that just two big staring straining eyes show up over the top.

And it rings on and on and on.

Then all at once an alternative occurs to me. Maybe it's a wrong-number call, meant for somebody else. Somebody in another room, or somebody in this room who was in it before I came. Hotel switchboards are overworked places; slip-ups like that can happen now and then.

I bet I haven't said a prayer since I finished my grammar school final-exam paper in trigonometry (and flunked it; maybe that's why I haven't said a prayer since), and that was more a crossed-fingers thing held behind my back than a genuine prayer. I say one now. What a funny thing to pray for. I bet nobody ever prayed for a wrong number before, not since telephones first began. Or since prayers first began either.

Please, make it a mistake and not for me. Make it a mistake.

Suddenly there's open space between the cradle and the receiver, and I've done it. I've picked it up. It's just as easy as pulling out one of your own teeth by the roots.

The prayer gets scratched. The call is for me, it's not a wrong number. For me all right, every inch of the way. I can tell from the opening words. Only—it's not the one I feared; it's friendly, a friendly call no different from what other people get.

A voice from another world, almost. Yet I know it so well. Always like this, never a cloud on it; always jovial, always noisy. When a thing should be said softly, it says it loudly; when a thing should be said loudly, it says it louder still. He never identifies himself, never has to. Once you've heard his voice, you'll always know him.

That's Johnny for you—the pal of a hundred parties. The bar-kick of scores of binges. The captain of the second-string team in how many foursome one-night stands? Every man has had a Johnny in his life sometime or other.

He says he's been calling my apartment since Wednesday and no answer; what happened to me?

I play it by ear. "Water started to pour down through the ceiling, so I had to clear out till they get it repaired . . . No, I'm not

on a tear . . . No, there's nobody with me, I'm by myself . . . Do I? Sound sort of peculiar? No, I'm all right, there's nothing the matter, not a thing."

I pass my free hand across the moist glisten on my forehead. It's tough enough to be in a jam, but it's tougher still to be in one and not be able to say you are.

"How did you know I was here? How did you track me to this place? . . . You went down the yellow pages, hotel by hotel, alphabetically. Since three o'clock yesterday afternoon? . . . Something to tell me?"

His new job had come through. He starts in Monday. With a direct line, and two, count 'em, two secretaries, not just one. And the old bunch is giving him a farewell party. A farewell party to end all farewell parties. Sardi's, on 44th. Then they'll move on later to some other place. But they'll wait here at Sardi's for me to catch up. Barb keeps asking, Why isn't your best-man-to-be here with us?

The noise of the party filters through into my ear. Ice clicking like dice in a fast-rolling game. Mixing sticks sounding like tiny tin flutes as they beat against glass. The laughter of girls, the laughter of men. Life is for the living, not the already dead.

"Sure, I'll be there. Sure."

If I say I won't be—and I won't because I can't—he'll never quit pestering and calling me the rest of the night. So I say that I will, to get off the hook. But how can I go there, drag my trouble before his party, before his friends, before his girl? And if I go it'll just happen there instead of here. Who wants a grandstand for his downfall? Who wants bleachers for his disgrace?

Johnny's gone now, and the night goes on.

Now the evening's at its noon, its meridian. The outgoing tide has simmered down, and there's a lull—like the calm in the eye of a hurricane—before the reverse tide starts to set in.

The last acts of the three-act plays are now on, and the after-theater eating places are beginning to fill up with early comers; Danny's and Lindy's—yes, and Horn & Hardart too. Everybody has got where they wanted to go—and that was out somewhere. Now everybody will want to get back where they came from—and that's home somewhere. Or as the coffee-grinder radio, always on the beam, puts it at about this point: *New York, New York, it's a helluva town, The Bronx is up, the Battery's down, And the people ride around in a hole in the ground—*

Now the incoming tide rolls in; the hours abruptly switch back to single digits again, and it's a little like the time you put your watch back on entering a different

time zone. Now the buses knock off and the subway expresses turn into locals and the locals space themselves far apart; and as Johnny Carson's face hits millions of screens all at one and the same time, the incoming tide reaches its crest and pounds against the shore. There's a sudden splurge, a slew of taxis arriving at the hotel entrance one by one as regularly as though they were on a conveyor belt, emptying out and then going away again.

Then this too dies down, and a deep still sets in. It's an around-the-clock town, but this is the stretch: from now until the garbage-grinding trucks come along and tear the dawn to shreds, it gets as quiet as it's ever going to get.

This is the deep of the night, the dregs, the sediment at the bottom of the coffee cup. The blue hours; when guys' nerves get tauter and women's fears get greater. Now guys and girls make love, or kill each other, or sometimes both. And as the windows on the "Late Show" title silhouette light up one by one, the real ones all around go dark. And from now on the silence is broken only by the occasional forlorn hoot of a bogged-down drunk or the gutted-cat squeal of a too sharply swerved axle coming around a turn. Or as Billy Daniels sang it in "Golden Boy": *While the city sleeps, And the streets are clear, There's a life that's happening here—*

In the pin-drop silence a taxi comes up with an unaccompanied girl in it. I can tell it's a taxi, I can tell it's a girl, and I can tell she's unaccompanied; I can tell all three just by her introductory remark.

"Benny," she says. "Will you come over and pay this for me?"

Benny is the hotel night-service man. I know his name; he brought drinks up to the room last night.

As the taxi drives away paid, Benny reminds her with aloof dignity, "You didn't give me my cut last week." Nothing personal, strictly business, you understand.

"I had a virus week before last," she explains. "And it took me all last week to pay off on my doctor bills. I'll square it with you tonight." Then she adds apprehensively, "I'm afraid he'll hurt me." Not her doctor, obviously.

"Na, he won't hurt you," Benny reassures.

"How would you know?" she asks not unreasonably.

Benny culls from his store of call-girl sponsorship experience. "These big guys never hurt you. They're meek as mice. It's the little shrimps got the sting."

She goes ahead in. A chore is a chore, she figures.

This of course is what is known in hotel-operational jargon as a "personal call." In the earthier slang of the night bellmen and

deskmen it is simply a "fix" or a "fix-up." The taxi fare of course will go down on the guest's bill, as "Misc." or "Sundries." Which actually is what it is. From my second-floor window I can figure it all out almost without any sound track to go with it.

So much for the recreational side of night life in the upper-bracket-income hotels of Manhattan. And in its root-origins the very word itself is implicit with implication: recreate. Analyze it and you'll see it also means to reproduce. But clever, ingenious Man has managed to sidetrack it into making life more livable.

The wafer of ice riding the surface of my drink has melted freakishly in its middle and not around its edges and now looks like an onion ring. Off in the distance an ambulance s t a r t s bansheeing with that new broken-blast siren they use, s c a l p-crimping as the cries of pain of a partly dismembered h o g. Somebody dead in the night? Somebody sick and going to be dead soon? Or maybe somebody going to be alive soon—did she wait too long to start for the hospital?

All of a sudden, with the last sound there's been all night, I can tell they're here. Don't ask me how, I only know they're here. It's beginning at last. No way out, no way aside and no way back.

Being silent is their business, and they know their business well. They make less sound than the dinner cart crunching along the carpeted hall, than Ginny's stifled sob when I gave her that hundred-dollar bill, than the contestants bickering over the taxi. Or that girl who was down there just a little while ago on her errand of fighting loneliness for a fee.

How can I tell that they're here? By the absence of sound more than by its presence. Or I should say, by the absence of a complementary s o u n d — t h e sound that belongs with another sound and yet fails to accompany it.

Like:

There's no sound of arrival, but suddenly two cars are in place down there along the hotel front. They must have come up on the glide, as noiselessly as a sailboat skimming over still water. No sound of tires, no sound of brakes. But there's one sound t h e y couldn't q u i t e obliterate—the cushioned thump of two doors closing after them in quick succession, staccato succession, as they spilled out and siphoned into the building. You can always tell a car door, no other door sounds quite like it.

There's only one other sound, a lesser one, a sort of follow-up: the scratch of a single sole against the abrasive sidewalk as they go hustling in. He either put it down off-balance or swiveled it too

acutely in treading at the heels of those in front of him. Which is a good average, just one to sound off, considering that six or eight pairs of them must have been all going in at the same time and moving fast.

I've sprung to my feet from the very first, and I'm standing there now like an upright slab of ice carved in the outline of a man—burning-cold and slippery-wet and glassy with congealment. I've put out all the lights—they all work on one switch over by the door as you come in. They've probably already seen the lights though if they've marked the window from outside, and anyway what difference does it make? Lighted up or dark, I'm still here inside the room. It's just some instinct as old as fear: you seek the dark when you hide, you seek the light when the need to hide is gone. All the animals have it too.

Now they're in, and it will take just a few minutes more while they make their arrangements. That's all I have left, a few minutes more. Out of a time allotment that once stretched so far and limitlessly ahead of me. Who short-changed me. I feel like crying out in protest, but I know that nobody did; I short-changed myself.

"It," the heartless little radio jeers, "takes the worry out of being close."

Why is it taking them such a long time? What do they have to do, improvise as they go along? What for? They already knew what they had to do when they set out to come here.

I'm sitting down again now, momentarily; knees too rocky for standing long. Those are the only two positions I have left; no more walking, no more running, no more anything else now. Only stand up and wait or sit down and wait. I need a cigarette terribly bad. It may be a funny time to need one, but I do. I dip my head down between my outspread legs and bring the lighter up from below, so its shine won't glow through the blind-crevices. As I said, it doesn't make sense, because they know I'm here. But I don't want to do anything to quicken them. Even two minutes of grace is better than one. Even one minute is better than none.

Then suddenly my head comes up again, alerted. I drop the cigarette, still unlit. First I think the little radio has s u d d e n l y jumped in tone, started to come on louder and more resonant, as if it were spooked. Until it almost sounds like a car radio out in the open. Then I turn my head toward the window. It is a car radio. It's coming from outside into the room.

And even before I get up and go over to take a look I think: there's something familiar about

it, I've heard it before, just like this, just the way it is now. This sounding-board effect, this walloping of the night like a drum, this ricochet of blast and din from side to side of the street, bouncing off the house fronts like a musical handball game.

Then it cuts off short, the after-silence swells up like a balloon ready to pop, and as I squint out it's standing still down there, the little white car, and Johnny is already out of it and standing alongside.

He's come to take me to the party.

He's parked on the opposite side. He starts to cross over to the hotel. Someone posted in some doorway whistles to attract his attention. I hear it up at the window. Johnny stops, turns to look around, doesn't see anyone.

He's frozen in the position in which the whistle caught him. Head and shoulders turned inquiringly half around, hips and legs still pointed forward. Then a man, some anonymous man, glides up beside him from the street.

I told you he talks loud; on the phone, in a bar, on a street late at night. Every word he says I hear; not a word the other man says.

First, "Who is? What kind of trouble?"

Then, "You must mean somebody else."

Next, "Room 207. Yeah, that's right, 207."

That's my room number.

"How'd you know I was coming here?"

Finally, "You bugged the call I made to him before!"

Then the anonymous man goes back into the shadows, leaving Johnny in mid-street, taking it for granted he'll follow him as he was briefed to do, commanded to do.

But Johnny stands out there, alone and undecided, feet still one way, head and shoulders still the other. And I watch him from the window crevice. And the stakeout watches him from his invisible doorway.

Not a crisis arises. Not in my life, because that's nearly over; but in my illusions.

Will he go to his friend and try to stand by him, or will he let his friend go by?

He can't make it, sure I know that, he can never get in here past them; but he *can* make the try, there's just enough slack for him to do that. There's still half the width of the street ahead of him clear and untrammeled, for him to try to bolt across, before they spring after him and rough him up and fling him back. It's the token of the thing that would count, not the completion.

But it doesn't happen that way, I keep telling myself knowingly and sadly. Only in our fraternity

pledges and masonic inductions, our cowboy movies and magazine stories, not in our real-life lives. For, the Seventeenth Century humanist to the contrary, each man *is* an island complete unto himself, and as he sinks, the moving feet go on around him, from nowhere to nowhere and with no time to lose. The world is long past the Boy Scout stage of its development; now each man dies as he was meant to die, and as he was born, and as he lived: alone, all alone. Without any God, without any hope, without any record to show for his life.

My throat feels stiff, and I want to swallow but I can't. Watching and waiting to see what my friend will do.

He doesn't move, doesn't make up his mind, for half a minute, and that half a minute seems like an hour. He's doped by what he's been told, I guess. And I keep asking myself while the seconds are ticking off: What would *I* do? If there were me down there, and he were up here: What would *I* do? And I keep trying not to look the answer in the face, though it's staring at me the whole time.

You haven't any right to expect your friends to be larger than yourself, larger than life. Just take them as they are, cut down to average size, and be glad you have them. To drink with, laugh with, borrow money from, lend money to, stay away from their special girls as you want them to stay away from yours, and above all, never break your word to once it's been given.

And that is all you have the obligation you have, all you have the right to expect.

The half minute is up, and Johnny turns, slowly and reluctantly, but he turns, and he goes back to the opposite side of the street. The side opposite to me.

And I knew all along that's what he would do, because I knew all along that's what I would have done too.

I think I hear a voice say slurredly somewhere in the shadows, "That's the smart thing to do," but I'm not sure. Maybe I don't, maybe it's me I hear.

He gets back in the car, shoulders sagging, and keys it on. And as he glides from sight the music seems to start up almost by itself; it's such second nature for him to have it on by now. It fades around the corner building, and then a wisp of it comes back just once more, carried by some cross-current of the wind: *Fools rush in, Where wise men never dare to go*—and then it dies away for good.

I bang my crushed-up fist against the center of my forehead, bring it away, then bang it again. Slow but hard. It hurts to lose a long-term friend, almost like losing an arm. But I never lost

an arm, so I really wouldn't know.

Now I can swallow, but it doesn't feel good any more.

I hear a marginal noise outside in the hall, and I swing around in instant alert. It's easy enough to decipher it. A woman is being taken from her room nearby—in case the going gets too rough around here in my immediate vicinity, I suppose.

I hear them tap, and then she comes out and accompanies them to safety. I hear the slap-slap of her bedroom slippers, like the soft little hands of children applauding in a kindergarten, as she goes hurrying by with someone. Several someones. You can't hear them, only her, but I know they're with her. I even hear the soft *sch sch* of her silk wrapper or kimono as it rustles past. A noticeable whiff of sachet drifts in through the door seam. She must have taken a bath and powdered herself liberally just moments ago.

Probably a nice sort of woman, unused to violence or emergencies of this sort, unsure of what to bring along or how to comport herself.

"I left my handbag in there," I hear her remark plaintively as she goes by. "Do you think it'll be all right to leave it there?"

Somebody's wife, come to meet him in the city and waiting for him to join her. Long ago I used to like that kind of woman. Objectively, of course, not close-up.

After she's gone, another brief lull sets in. This one is probably the last. But what good is a lull? It's only a breathing spell in which to get more frightened. Because anticipatory fear is always twice as strong as present fear. Anticipatory fear has both fears in it at once—the anticipatory one and the one that comes simultaneously with the dread happening itself. Present fear only has the one, because by that time anticipation is over.

I switch on the light for a moment, to see my way to a drink. The one I had is gone—just what used to be ice is sloshing colorlessly in the bottom of the glass. Then when I put the recharged glass down again, empty, it seems to pull me after it, as if it weighed so much I couldn't let go of it from an upright position. Don't ask me why this is, I don't know. P r o b a b l y simple loss of equilibrium for a second, due to the massive infusion of alcohol.

Then with no more warning, with no more waiting, with no more of anything, it begins. It gets under way at last.

There is a mild-mannered knuckle rapping at the door. They use my name. A voice, mild-mannered also, says in a conciliatory way, "Come out, please. We w a n t to talk to you." Punctilious, I guess, would be a better word for it. The etiquette of the forcible entry, of the break-

in. They're so considerate, so deferential, so attentive to all the niceties. Hold your head steady, please, we don't want to nick your chin while we're cutting your throat.

I don't answer.

I don't think they expected me to. If I had answered, it would have astonished them, thrown them off their timing for a moment.

The mild-voiced man leaves the door and somebody else takes his place. I can sense the shifting over more by intuition than by actual hearing.

A wooden toolbox or carryall of some sort settles down noisily on the floor outside the door. I can tell it's wooden, not by its floor impact but by the "settling" sound that accompanies it, as if a considerable number of loose and rolling objects in it are chinking against its insides. Nails and bolts and awls and screwdrivers and the like. That tells me that it's a kit commonly used by carpenters and locksmiths and their kind.

They're going to take the lock off bodily from the outside.

A cold surge goes through me that I can't describe. It isn't blood. It's too numbing and heavy and cold for that. And it breaks through the skin surface, which blood doesn't ordinarily do without a wound, and emerges into innumerable stinging pin pricks all over me. An ice-sweat.

I can see him (not literally, but just as surely as if I could), down on one knee, and scared, probably as scared as I am myself, pressing as far back to the side out of the direct line of the door as he can, while the others, bunched together farther back, stand ready to cover him, to pile on me and bring me down if I should suddenly break out and rush him.

And the radio tells me sarcastically to "Light up, you've got a good thing going."

I start backing away, with a sleepwalker's fixity, staring at the door as I retreat, or staring at where I last saw it, for I can't see it in the dark. What good would it do to stay close to it, for I can't hold it back, I can't stop it from opening. And as I go back step after step, my tongue keeps tracking the outside outline of *my* lips, as if I wondered what they were and what they were there for.

A very small sound begins. I don't know how to put it. Like someone twisting a small metal cap to open a small medicine bottle, but continuously, without ever getting it off. He's started already. He's started coming in.

It's terrible to hear that little thing move. As if it were animate, had a life of its own. Terrible to hear it move and to know that a hostile agency, a hostile

presence, just a few feet away from me, is what is making it move. Such a little thing, there is almost nothing smaller, only the size of a pinhead perhaps, and yet to create such terror and to be capable of bringing about such a shattering end-result: entry, capture, final loss of reason, and the darkness that is worse than death. All from a little thing like that, turning s l o w l y, secretively, but avidly, in t h e lockplate on the door, on the door into my room.

I have to get out of here. Out. I have to push these walls apart, these foursquare tightly seamed walls, and make space w i d e enough to run in, and keep running through it, running and running through it, and never stopping. Until I drop. And then still running on and on, inside my head. Like a watch with its case smashed open and lying on the ground, but with the works still going inside it. Or like a cockroach when you knock it over on its back so that it can't ambulate any more, but its legs still go spiraling around in the air.

The window. They're at the door, but the window—that way out is still open. I remember when I checked in here the small hours of Wednesday, I didn't ask to be given a room on the second floor, they just happened to give me one. Then when I saw it later that day in the light, I realized the drop to the ground from one of the little semicircular stone ledges outside the w i n d o w s wouldn't be dangerous, especially if you held a pillow in front of you, and remembered to keep your chin tilted upward as you went over. Just a sprawling shake-up fall maybe, that's all.

I pull at the blind cords with both hands, and it spasms upward with a sound like a lot of little twigs being stepped on a n d broken. I push up the window sash and assume a sitting position on the sill, then swing my legs across and I'm out in the clear, out in the open night.

The little stone apron has this spiked iron rail guard around it, with no space left on the outer side of it to plant your feet before you go over. You have to straddle it, which makes for tricky going. Still, necessity can make you dexterous, terror can make you agile. I won't go back inside for the pillow, there isn't time. I'll take the leap neat.

The two cars that brought them here are below, and for a moment, only for a moment, they look empty, dark and still and empty, standing bumper to bumper against the curb. Someone gives a warning whistle—a lip whistle I mean, not a metal one. I don't know who, I don't know where, somewhere around. Then an angry, ugly, smoldering, car-bound orange moon starts up,

lightens to yellow, then brightens to the dazzling white of a laundry detergent c o m m e r c i a l. The operator guiding it slants it too high at first, and it lands above my head. Like a halo. *Some* halo and *some time* for a halo. Then he brings it down and it hits me as if someone had belted me full across the face with a talcum powder puff. You can't s e e through it, you can't see around it.

Shoe leather comes padding from around the corner—maybe the guy that warded off Johnny—and stops directly under me. I sense somehow he's afraid just as I am. That won't keep him from doing what he has to do, because he's got the backing on his side. But he doesn't like this. I shield my eyes from the light on one side, and I can see his anxious face peering up at me. All guys are scared of each other, didn't you know that? I'm not the only one. We're all born afraid.

I can't shake the light off. It's like ghostly flypaper. It's like slapstick-thrown yoghurt. It clings to me whichever way I turn.

I hear his voice talking to me from below. Very near and clear. As if we were off together by ourselves somewhere, just chatting, the two of us.

"Go back into your room. We don't want you to get hurt." And then a second time: "Go back in. You'll only get hurt if you stand out here like this."

I'm thinking, detached as in a dream: I didn't know they were this considerate. Are they always this considerate? When I was a kid back in the Forties, I used to go to those tough-guy movies a lot. Humphrey Bogart, Jimmy Cagney. And when they had a guy penned in, they used to be tough about it, snarling: "Come on out of there, yuh rat, we've got yuh covered!" I wonder what has changed them? Maybe it's just that time has moved on. This is the Sixties now.

What's the good of jumping now? Where is there to run to now? And the light teases my eyes. I see all sorts of interlocked and colored soap bubbles that aren't there.

It's more awkward getting back inside than it was getting out. And with the light on me and them watching me there's a s e l f-consciousness that was missing in my uninhibited outward surge. I have to straighten out one leg first and dip it into the room toes forward, the way you test the water in a pool before you jump in. Then the other leg, and then I'm in. The roundness of the light beam is broken into long thin tatters as the blind rolls down over it, but it still stays on out there.

There are only two points of light in the whole room—I mean

in addition to the indirect reflection through the blind, which gives off a sort of phosphorescent haziness—two points so small that if you didn't know they were there and looked for them, you wouldn't see them. And small as both are, one is even smaller than the other. One is the tiny light in the radio which, because the lens shielding the dial is convex, glows like a miniature orange scimitar. I go over to it to turn it off. It can't keep the darkness away any more; the darkness is here.

"Here's to the losers," the radio is saying. "Here's to them all—"

The other point of light is over by the door. It's in the door itself. I go over there close to it, peering with my head bowed, as if I were mourning inconsolably. And I am. One of the four tiny screwheads set into the corners of the oblong plate that holds the lock is gone, is out now, and if you squint at an acute angle you can see a speck of orange light shining through it from the hall. Then while I'm standing t h e r e, s o m e t h i n g falls soundlessly, glances off the top of my shoe with no more weight than a grain of gravel, and there's a second speck of orange light at the opposite upper corner of the plate. Two more to go now. Two and a half minutes of deft work left, maybe not even that much.

What careful planning, what painstaking attention to detail, goes into extinguishing a man's life! Far more than the hit-or-miss, haphazard circumstances of igniting it.

I can't get out the window, I can't go out the door. But there *is* a way out, a third way. I can escape inward. If I can't get away from them on the outside, I can get away from them on the inside.

You're not supposed to have those things. But when you have money you can get anything, in New York. They were on a prescription, but that was where the money came in—getting the prescription. I remember now. Some doctor gave it to me—sold it to me—long ago. I don't remember why or when. Maybe when fear first came between the two of us and I couldn't reach her any more.

I came across it in my wallet on Wednesday, after I first came in here, and I sent it out to have it filled, knowing that this night would come. I remember the bellboy bringing it to the door afterward in a small bright-green paper wrapping that some pharmacists use. But where is it now?

I start a treasure hunt of terror, around the inside of the room in the dark. First into the clothes closet, wheeling and t w i r l i n g among the couple of things I have hanging in there like a hopped-up discotheque dancer, dipping in and out of pockets, patting some of them between my hands to

see if they're flat or hold a bulk. As if I were calling a little pet dog to me by clapping my hands to it. A little dog who is hiding away from me in there, a little dog called death.

Not in there. Then the drawers of the dresser, spading them in and out, fast as a card shuffle. A telephone directory, a complimentary shaving kit (if you're a man), a complimentary manicure kit (if you're a girl).

They must be down to the last screwhead by now.

Then around and into the bathroom, while the remorseless dismantling at the door keeps on. It's all white in there, white as my face must be. It's dark, but you can still see that it's white against the dark. Twilight-colored tiles. I don't put on the light to help me find them, because there isn't enough time left; the lights in here are fluorescent and take a few moments to come on, and by that time they'll be in here.

There's a catch phrase that you all must have heard at one time or another. You walk into a room or go over toward a group. Someone turns and says with huge emphasis: "*There* he is." As though you were the most important one of all. (And you're not.) As though you were the one they were just talking about. (And they weren't.) As though you were the only one that mattered. (And you're not.) It's a nice little tribute. and it don't cost anyone a cent.

And so I say this to them now, as I find them on the top glass slab of the shallow medicine cabinet: *There* you are. Glad to see you—you're important in my scheme of things.

As I bend for some running water, the shower curtain twines around me in descending spiral folds—don't ask me how, it must have been ballooning out. I sidestep like a drunken Roman staggering around his toga, pulling half the curtain down behind me, while the pins holding it to the rod above tinkle like little finger cymbals, dragging part of it with me over one shoulder, while I bend over the basin to drink.

No time to rummage for a tumbler. It's not there anyway—I'd been using it for the rye. So I use the hollow of one hand for a scoop, pumping it up and down to my open mouth and alternating with one of the nuggets from the little plastic container I'm holding uncapped in my other hand. I've been called a fast drinker at times. Johnny used to say—never mind that now.

I only miss one—that falls down in the gap between me and the basin to the floor. That's a damned good average. There were twelve of them in there, and I remember the label read: *Not more than three to be taken during any twenty-four-hour period.*

In other words, I've just killed myself three times, with a down payment on a fourth time for good measure.

I grab the sides of the basin suddenly and bend over it, on the point of getting them all out of me again in r e b e l l i o u s unheavel. *I* don't want to but they do. I fold both arms around my middle, hugging myself, squeezing myself, to hold them down. They stay put. They've caught on, taken hold. Only a pump can get them out now. And after a certain point of no return (I don't know how long that is), once they start being assimilated into the bloodstream, not even a pump can get them out.

Only a little brine taste shows up in my mouth and gagging a little, still holding my middle, I go back into the other room. Then I sit down to wait. To see which of them gets to me first.

It goes fast now, like a drumbeat quickening to a climax. An upended foot kicks at the door, and it suddenly spanks inward with a firecracker sound. The light comes fizzing through the empty oblong like gushing carbonation, too sudden against the dark to ray clearly at first.

They rush in like the splash of a wave that suddenly has splattered itself all around the room. Then the lights are on, and they're on all four sides of me, and they're holding me hard and fast, quicker than one eyelid can touch the other in a blink.

My arms go behind me into the cuffless convolutions of a strait jacket. Then as though unconvinced that this is enough precaution, someone standing back there has looped the curve of his arm around my throat and the back of the chair, and holds it there in tight restraint. Not choking-tight as in a mugging, but ready to pin me back if I should try to heave out of the chair.

Although the room is blazing-bright, several of them are holding flashlights, all lit and centered inward on my face from t h e perimeter around me, like the spokes of a blinding wheel. Probably to disable me still further by their dazzle. One beam, more skeptical than the others, travels slowly up and down my length, seeking out any bulges that might possibly spell a concealed offensive weapon. My only weapon is already used, and it was a defensive one.

I roll my eyes toward the ceiling to try and get away from the lights, and one by one they blink and go out.

There they stand. The assignment is over, completed. To me it's my life, to them just another incident. I don't know how many there are. The man in the coffin doesn't count the number who have come to the funeral. But as I look at them, as my eyes

go from face to face, on each one I read the key to what the man is thinking.

One face, soft with compunction: Poor guy, I might have been him, he might have been me.

One, hard with contempt: Just another of those creeps something went wrong with along the way.

Another, flexing with hate: I wish he'd show some fight; I'd like an excuse to—

Still another, rueful with impatience: I'd like to get this over so I could call her unexpectedly and catch her in a lie; I bet she never stayed home tonight like she told me she would.

And yet another, blank with indifference, its thoughts a thousand miles away: And what's a guy like Yastrzemski got plenty of other guys haven't got too? It's just the breaks that's all—

And I say to my own thoughts, dejectedly: Why weren't you that clear, that all-seeing, the other night, that terrible other night? It might have done you more good then.

There they stand. And there I am, seemingly in their hands but slowly slipping away from them.

They don't say anything. I'm not aware of any of them saying anything. They're waiting for someone to give them further orders. Or maybe waiting for something to come and take me away.

One of them hasn't got a uniform on or plainclothes either like the rest. He has on the white coat that is my nightmare and my horror. And in the crotch of one arm he is up-ending two long poles intertwined with canvas.

The long-drawn-out death within life. The burial-alive of the mind, covering it over with fresh graveyard earth each time it tries to struggle through to the light. In this kind of death you never finish dying.

In back of them, over by the door, I see the top of someone's head appear, then come forward, slowly, fearfully forward. Different from their short-clipped, starkly outlined heads, soft and rippling in contour and gentle. And as she comes forward into full-face view, I see who she is.

She comes up close to me, stops, and looks at me.

"Then it wasn't—you?" I whisper.

She shakes her head slightly with a mournful trace of smile. "It wasn't me," she whispers back, without taking them into it, just between the two of us, as in the days before. "I didn't go there to meet you. I didn't like the way you sounded."

But someone was there, I came across someone there. Someone whose face became hers in my waking dream. The scarf, the blood on the scarf. It's not my blood, it's not my scarf. It must belong to someone else. Someone they haven't even found yet, don't know even about yet.

The preventive has come too late.

She moves a step closer and bends toward me.

"Careful—watch it," a voice warns her.

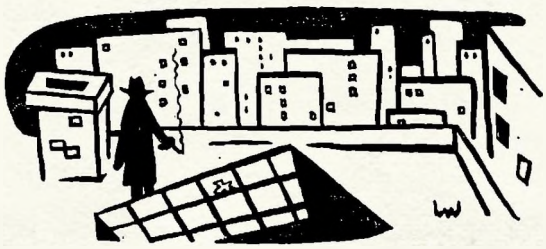
"He won't hurt me," she answers understandingly without taking her eyes from mine. "We used to be in love."

Used to? Then that's why I'm dying. Because I still am. And you aren't any more.

She bends and kisses me, on the forehead, between the eyes. Like a sort of last rite.

And in that last moment, as I'm straining upward to find her lips, as the light is leaving my eyes, the whole night passes before my mind, the way they say your past life does when you're drowning: the waiter, the night maid, the taxi argument, the call girl, Johnny—it all meshes into start-to-finish continuity. Just like in a story. An organized, step-by-step, timetabled story.

This story.



a *NEW* crime-detective story by

FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

Some stories almost defy description. Florence V. Mayberry's newest is one of these unclassifiable ones. It's about San Francisco and Doll Baby and her mother, Mrs. Clanahan, and her sisters, Clarissa (Sissie) and Josie, and her brother Murphy and her husband Henry and Mr. Bagliotti (Blobby Face)—all seen through the eyes and heard by the ears of ten-year-old Ruby. If we still believe that children should be seen and not heard, then we shouldn't live in glass houses and leave all the doors and windows open . . .

DOLL BABY

by FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

SHE DIDN'T LOOK LIKE A DOLL baby to me. She looked like an old lady of maybe 30, older than my mother who got married when she was 16 and now she's 27 and I'm ten. Doll Baby had droops beside her mouth. The few times I saw her in the morning, before she got up out of bed around noon, she had red eyes. Except the time one was black. I certainly never wanted any doll baby with droops and red eyes.

But Clarissa, my best friend who is one year older than me, called her Doll Baby and wiggled like a puppy bringing a ball when she carried in Doll Baby's breakfast on a tray. Mrs. Clanahan, Clarissa's mother, said Doll Baby was her first baby and she thought she'd never have another one because the hospital did horrible things to her insides. So because Doll Baby was so tiny and cute, like she could take a bath in a teacup, Mrs. Clanahan always called her Doll Baby instead of her real name, which nobody remembered. Clarissa's other sister, Josie, who is 18 now and works in a bakery, called her Doll Baby and when she was home hung around her asking how

she put on makeup. Murphy Clanahan, who is 20 and never worked except in pinball places, called his sister Doll Baby and got a sweet, sweet look when he said it. A sweet-sweet look on a weaselly face looks icky. And Murphy's face is weaselly.

Doll Baby's whole family was real icky about her. I always wondered why. She didn't grab me. Skinny old grownup lady staying in bed most of the day with droops and red eyes.

Oh, I forgot. Henry called her Doll Baby too. Henry was her husband. He slept in a room down the hall from Doll Baby. It bugged her to sleep with anybody, she said. Couldn't get her rest, and Doll Baby needed a lot of rest. So Henry always tiptoed past her door when he went to work, even though Henry didn't get up too early himself. He had some kind of job visiting franchise restaurants and had to drive a lot out of San Francisco where Mrs. Clanahan had her house. He was away from home most of the time. And, gee, I wished he wasn't. Henry was great, really great.

One morning I was upstairs with Clarissa and looked out of her room when Henry went down the hall on his way to work. He didn't see me, but I saw Henry. He stopped by Doll Baby's door, opened it a crack and got a silly smile—not icky on Henry, just silly—on his face. He softly closed the door.

Then, for crying out loud, what do you think he did? He kissed the door. The regular old wood. After that he went downstairs looking happy as anything.

I thought, what can I do to make people crazy about me like they're crazy about Doll Baby?

She had a littly tiny voice. Like one of those toy bells on cat collars. It carried though. It could tinkle clear through Mrs. Clanahan's house, which was two stories high. "Ma, where's Clarissa? I want my breakfast. Ma, has Josie gone to work yet, I want my pink suit ironed, then will you iron it, Ma? Murph, come in here, I got something for you."

Murphy was Doll Baby's favorite. She even looked icky herself when she saw him. Sometimes Murphy would come out of Doll Baby's room with a bill. Once I saw 20 on one of them as he was stuffing it in his pants pocket.

"Sissie, come rub my back, willya honey? I can't rest I'm so nervous." Sometimes Clarissa would get a quarter for rubbing her back, or washing her stockings, or picking up things in her room. But mostly Doll Baby just paid her by telling her stories.

"Sissie, hon, you want to remember this. Always play it big. Never no second-class—first-class or nothing."

"What do you mean, Doll Baby, what do you mean?"

"Well-l . . ." And then a story would come out. If I was there I'd sit outside the door and listen. And once in a while Doll Baby would let me come in too. Wow!

Like how Doll Baby was in the St. Francis Hotel lobby and a fella in a turtleneck shirt and tweed clothes from England came over and started talking, y'know, just started talking. You should of seen the diamond on his pinkie, Sissie. And a carved-looking gold watchband. So, because he was so nice, a real gentleman and hungry and a stranger in town, Doll Baby did him a favor by eating dinner with him. Oh man! Top of the Mark, then some place down in Eyetalian Town. He was a real gentleman, high-class and loaded.

"Don't ever tell Henry, hear?" And Clarissa would promise she wouldn't. The whole family never told Henry anything. But Doll Baby never said not to tell me.

Clarissa and I had a special secrets-place. It was a window seat in front of a stained-glass window on the second-floor landing. Clarissa was filling me in on what I didn't already hear, about the high-class man in English tweed. Just as she was doing it Henry walked down the stairs on his way to work. It made us giggle. He darn near caught us with Doll Baby's secret.

But Doll Baby's real thriller was the big-time cigarette and pinball machine man. Lots of other machines too, maybe even candy and gum ones. Imagine, every time anybody dropped in a nickel or a dime this man got it. Wow!

Well, when Doll Baby was in the St. Francis lobby she saw this fella staring at her from another divan. Pretty soon he walked over and sat beside her. He was dressed quiet, had a quiet voice too, real g e n t l e m a n l y, nothing flashy. Looked like a f a t h e r with a family, so Doll Baby knew it would be all right to be friendly, just a nice man passing the time of day.

What do you think? This was the man who owned practically all those nickel and dime and quarter machines in San Francisco!

"Then what happened?"

Well, most of the high-class men Doll Baby met down at the St. Francis spent plenty. But none like this guy. Man! Like money was water out of a faucet. You'd think he owned San Francisco with Oakland thrown in for good measure.

Not long after Clarissa told me this, Doll Baby began to clam up on stories. Or just told dopey big-nothing ones. Like flying to Reno in the morning and flying back the next day, but nothing about what happened in between.

That was one of the times Henry was out of town. But, gee, so she flew to Reno and back. Everybody flies fast. Big deal.

But it was a pretty good story the time Doll Baby flew to Las Vegas. A bad storm hit the plane, all of a sudden, and she smashed her eye against some kind of a corner. It hurt so bad she couldn't remember just what. Poor Doll Baby, Clarissa said. It was a terrible problem, because she didn't want Henry to know she went to Las Vegas.

"What did she tell Henry?"

"Doll Baby is always taking baths," Clarissa said. "Maybe two or three every day if she thinks she's not clean the first or second time. All the family knows she's always taking baths. So she told Henry she got dizzy in the shower and keeled over onto one of the water knobs. Now Henry is having a handrail put in the shower."

Just then Henry came down the stairs with a piece of beefsteak in his hand that he'd been putting on Doll Baby's eye. Clarissa and I were about split with the giggles.

"What you kids g i g g l i n g about?" Henry asked. Henry has a real nice smile. Like he really likes you. "How come little girls always get the giggles, heh? If I didn't have this beefsteak in my hand I'd tickle you, then you'd giggle but good! Maybe I will anyway."

He waved the beefsteak in front of our faces while we squealed and giggled some more. We knew he wouldn't do it, but it was scary fun. Mrs. Clanahan always said Henry shoulda had a dozen kids, he was so crazy about them, but poor little Doll Baby wasn't up to *that*. Good thing for those kids. She'd have been a lousy mother.

"Say, Clarissa pet," Henry said then. "Keep your ears peeled. So if Doll Baby calls for something. She's not feeling too good. Here," and he reached in his pocket with his free hand and pulled out a dollar bill for Clarissa. Then he must have felt bad seeing me with no money. So he reached in again and handed me a quarter. "That's for giggling quieter so Clarissa can hear Doll Baby."

So we giggled some more, but quieter. Henry sure was a nice man.

After Henry left, Clarissa went up to see if Doll Baby needed anything right that minute. "Rub my back, I'm so nervous," I heard Doll Baby say. "And get Ruby to help, she's a nice little kid."

Clarissa called me and I went up. Doll Baby took off the long-sleeved bedjacket she was wearing over her pajamas and pulled off the pajama top. Clarissa took one side of her back and I took the other. That's when I saw the other bruises. Wow! Everywhere. She'd have had to have fits in the airplane to get all those bruises.

"Go easy, kids," Doll Baby said

in her little bitty voice. Like a doll baby-doll with a tinny voice. She groaned and grunted, unh-h, unh-h, over and over. Tears began to stream down my face, and I snuffled. Doll Baby looked up at me with her purply red eye and got a soft wondering look. The nicest look she ever gave me. "Why, you sweet *little* kid! Honest to God, that's the sweetest thing. Look how sorry Ruby is for me, Sissie. Honey, you love Doll Baby too, don'tya?"

I knew better than to tell even Clarissa that I wasn't really very sorry. It was just that the groans set my teeth on edge and gave me the willies. Like a dog howls if he hears the right kind of noise, and he isn't a bit sorry about anything.

Doll Baby began to cry. Not sad crying. Or nervous, like mine. Mad. She swore too. Then she said, "Rat! Rat!"

"Oh, Doll Baby, was there a rat in the airplane?" Clarissa asked. "Imagine, a rat and all that storm too! Did the pilot have to come and catch it? Oooh, Ruby, it was a rat made Doll Baby slip and fall!"

"Don't be so dumb, Sissie!" Doll Baby said in her whiny voice. "Not that kinda rat. I'm just letting off steam because I hurt. Listen, don't you blab everything I say to you to Ma, hear? Because if you do I won't ever tell you nothing any more."

"Oh, I won't, I never do, cross my heart!"

"Don't you dare tell Ma I got bruises all over besides the black eye."

"I won't. I promise, forever and ever."

"Ma would have a tizzy. She'd break down and tell Henry and have *him* get a doctor. Mind what I say, Sissie. And don't ever tell Henry. Or even Murph."

"Josie?" Clarissa asked.

"Well-l-l—no, don't tell Josie either. She's not here enough to care and she's got a big mouth besides. And Ruby here—"

"Ruby don't ever tell things to grownups. Just to me."

Doll Baby gave me the purply red eye again, considering. "Yeah. I never hear a peep outa her. Just big eyes. Probably big ears too. Just keep it that way, Ruby, honey. Gee, Sissie, look, she's still got tears in her eyes. But remember, no big mouth or you and Sissie won't be playing together no more."

I began to cry again. Cry and rub. I wondered what Doll Baby would do if I poked a finger right in the middle of one of those ugly-looking bruises.

Doll Baby kept grunting and groaning, and swearing once in a while and saying how she was never going no more on no airplanes out of the state, there was more fun just hanging around the St. Francis, and how you

could get a guy for taking a woman out of the state. She must have been knocked a little cuckoo. Anybody knows that a pilot takes men and women and children out of the state all the time.

Doll Baby hung around the house, oh, maybe a week. She never did that before. The house wasn't very pretty. It was one of those old, old houses like all over San Francisco, with a curlicue fireplace mantel and knobs on the stair banisters and all dark woodwork. Mrs. Clanahan hung onto it because Mr. Clanahan, who was a dead streetcar motorman, had worked hard all his days to buy it and it kept that dear soul, she said, close to her. Doll Baby never could stand it much. She left it every day as quick as she could struggle out of bed.

That is, until this week. This week she sat a lot in a chair by her bedroom window, looking out at the street.

One afternoon when Clarissa and I were rubbing her feet, one to each foot, she let out a yip. Like a mouse that had figured how quick it could dodge the trap, but didn't. Clarissa and I looked up. Doll Baby had an expression like somebody had lifted her by her long blonde hair and was dangling her. Her eyes were spread open and her skin stretched tight.

"What's the matter, Doll Baby?" Clarissa asked. "You sick again? You want me to call Ma?"

"Shut up!" Doll Baby whispered. "Oh, God, I gotta get outa here! I gotta go down—"

She jumped up and started for her clothes closet. She threw a dress on the bed. "Get my new patent pumps, Sissie! Hand me that beige body stocking!" Hand me this, hand me that.

I looked out of the window. Big deal. Nothing scary out there. The Greek candy store across the street, and Weinheimer's Delicatessen and Fine Foods, and Joe's Cleaners. All those old brown flats. A few people were walking along, mostly women carrying shopping bags with vegetables sticking out the top.

Then I noticed this man in the long dark-green sedan. Directly across the street. Every few minutes he looked up at Clarissa's house, like he had a timer on him. Yicky! He had a knobby old face like it was made out of concrete and had set in blobs. His eyes squinted into little dark holes when he looked up at the second-floor window where I was peeking out.

What business did he have watching Clarissa's house?

I stood full in front of the window and stuck my tongue out at him. The next time the man's timer worked I stuck my tongue out again. Good thing. He reached for his key to turn on the motor.

"Get the hell away from there!"

Doll Baby screeched. She grabbed my shoulder and flung me away from the window. Then she stretched her mouth in a big frozen grin and waved at that man.

Boy oh boy was Doll Baby mad at me! I couldn't come to Clarissa's house and play for nearly a month. It hurt my feelings. I only stuck out my tongue because he was what made Doll Baby look so scared, his ugly old face staring at the house.

By the time I could come to play with Clarissa again, Doll Baby was all healed up from her bruises. But who wouldn't heal after getting that new mink coat Henry gave her? "She looked so cute when Henry gave it to her," Clarissa told me. "She's so little and got such a teensy-tiny face with such big blue eyes. She just looked up at Henry and cried and thanked him in baby talk. She talks the cutest baby talk to Henry, it's silly but it's cute. She still felt weak, so Henry carried her downstairs with her all wrapped up in the coat."

A mouse is little and has a teensy-tiny face with big eyes. But yicky! Cute, no.

"What do you think!" Clarissa said a few days later. "Murphy's got a fancy new job. After a while he may make a million dollars!"

"Did he quit his pinball machine job?"

"Silly! That wasn't a real job before. He just played 'em. This is with the big boss of the pinball machines, Mr. Bagliotti. It's a real job. Murphy drives a big beautiful green car. He's a chauffeur."

Clarissa was a year older than me, but she sounded like a baby. Anybody knows from television that chauffeurs don't make a million dollars. Unless they murder the millionaire they're driving around and get into his safe.

"Is Murphy going to be a murderer now?" I asked.

Clarissa slapped my face and cried. And I cried and explained how the television shows all said chauffeurs don't get to be millionaires unless they lead a life of crime, so blame television, don't blame me. Anyway Clarissa, not me, said Murphy might make a million dollars.

"I never either said it! I heard it. Doll Baby told Murphy. She told him to hang onto the job and watch his P's and Q's and he might end up a millionaire like Mr. Bagliotti. Mr. Bagliotti will tell him how to do it, so why would he want to murder Mr. Bagliotti? You want me to tell Doll Baby what you said?"

Wow! No! Not after she had just finished grounding me for almost a month. This might get me life.

"I didn't understand—please, please don't be mad, Clarissa. You didn't tell me all of it, so I didn't understand."

I did too understand. It was

still just like television movies. That ugly blobby-faced man was a gangster. And he was going to train Murphy to be a gangster. I couldn't have cared less about weaselly-faced Murphy. But Clarissa was my best friend. I wished I dared warn her.

After that Doll Baby went riding almost every day. Murphy would call for her about noon and off she'd go to some fancy lunch. Doll Baby told Clarissa that Murphy had a lot of free time and his boss was so nice, he let Murphy use the car and go anywhere he liked. Said he could take his family too. A couple of times Murphy took Mrs. Clanahan and Josie and Clarissa along with Doll Baby. His boss had given him a big tip for some special work and he took the whole bunch up to Lake Tahoe. For a whole weekend! That was the time Henry was back in Kansas City seeing about barbecued hamburgers or something.

After that weekend Clarissa said Henry got nervous about Doll Baby driving around in other people's cars. He offered to buy her a very own car of her own. "But she didn't want it. Doll Baby's too little to handle a car," Clarissa said, in that icky voice the family always got when they talked about Doll Baby. "She's got the littlest hands and little short legs, they wouldn't reach the brakes."

"They would so," I said. "I'm only ten years old. And one day when my folks were at work I got my mother's automobile keys and backed down the driveway. Then I drove the car back in the garage. And my legs reached. There's a gadget you shove the seat backwards and f o r w a r d s with."

"She's too little and nervous for traffic. It makes her heart beat fast. You calling Doll Baby a liar?"

So I had to apologize again before Clarissa would promise not to tell Doll Baby on me.

Henry had a nice car. Almost as big as the green sedan. I think he must have been jealous of Murphy's green sedan. Because one Saturday he polished his car up beautiful. Clarissa and I helped him. He gave us each 50 cents and took us for a ride to the gas station. When we came back to the house he ran upstairs to Doll Baby's bedroom. "Doll Baby, it's a beautiful day. Let's take off for the hills someplace for the weekend."

"Hen-n-reee! Shut the door, pul-l-leese!" That's the way she talked to Henry. Whiny. "My poooor itty head's splitting!"

He moved farther into the room instead of going back to the door to shut it. "That's because you stayed out so late last night. Doll Baby, honey, you're giving me ideas about why you're out late

so many times when I come home. It's always after midnight. Of course, I realize, Baby, you get lonesome with me away—"

"Hen-n-reee, honest, aw honneeee, Doll Baby's big boy-eee gonna be jealous? How'd I know Henry boy'd be back from Portland so quick? I told you last night, some of the girls and me went out on the town, just itty old girls and me."

Nobody said anything for a minute.

"Since when did Murphy start tagging around with you and your girl friends, and them five to ten years older than he is? And in his boss's green car that Murphy—or somebody who looked a lot bigger than Murphy—took off with after you were dropped off here. I was watching for you, Doll Baby."

"Good God! You saying I'm a liar, it wasn't Murphy! You just ask Murph, you see what he says. And since when can't I be out with my own brother!"

Doll Baby screeched and screeched, and the bedsprings started banging and creaking. It sounded like she was having another fit, like she must have had in the airplane. Mrs. Clanahan rushed up from the kitchen with a pan of warm water and a washcloth, yelling for somebody to fetch her prescription bottle of pills. Henry ran to the head of the stairs, yelling, "Damn it, no! She has her own prescription." When he saw the pan and washcloth he said, "I'll wash her face myself. I'll take care of her. I'm her husband!"

He looked sick when he said that. Like he needed someone to wash his face.

After a while they got Doll Baby to sleep. It took a long time before the pills and Henry rubbing her back worked. She kept yipping in that teensy voice that went through you like a knife. I could even hear it clear into Clarissa's room with the door shut. I hid in there because the sound was making me cry.

When it got quiet, Clarissa found me in her room. "Ma! Henry! Lookit Ruby, she's crying about Doll Baby. Ruby just loves Doll Baby. Aw, Ruby, don't cry no more, Doll Baby's gonna be all right."

Henry and Ma came in and looked at me. Mrs. Clanahan kissed my forehead and stroked my hair. Henry patted my head and said, "Sissie, you sure have yourself a good little kid for a friend. Hey, now, I can't stand to see little girls cry, so I'll have to get you happy again. How would you kids like to take a long ride? For the whole day. Have lunch somewhere."

We squealed and jumped up and down. So Henry called my mother and we took off for Carmel. Henry looked so cute, that

is if he didn't have black circles under his eyes. He was wearing his favorite coat, his Canadian sport coat. Henry was from Canada and lots of times he was homesick and sad. So when he was he wore a funny kind of sport coat, dark blue with a colored emblem on the front and fancy brass buttons down by his wrists. He brought it down from Canada and I bet he was the only man in San Francisco with a coat like that. People stared at him a lot when he wore it. But I thought it was cute, like an admiral or something. I just loved those pretty brass buttons.

Golly! What a fun place Carmel was with all those stores and outdoor restaurants. Henry bought us each a wooden Swedish doll. He was such a nice man. "I don't know why Doll Baby likes the green sedan better than your car," I said as Henry drove us home. "It's almost as big as the green sedan. And you're better-looking than old Blobby Face."

The car began to wiggle on the freeway. When it straightened out Henry asked, "Who's Blobby Face?"

I was sitting in the back seat like I always did, like Henry was my chauffeur and Clarissa was my maid. So Clarissa had to turn around when she made faces at me. For me to shut up. "Oh, just the man Murphy works for," I said.

"What's Blobby Face got to do with Doll Baby liking to ride in the green sedan? I thought it was Murphy who drove her around."

"Uh-huh," I said. "Murphy does drive her. It was only that once I saw his boss. He's ugly. So I don't like his car."

Henry kind of snorted. "Neither do I," he said.

A few days later when I went to Clarissa's house the whole family was screeching and crying. Except for Henry who was out of town. But even with all that noise Doll Baby's whiny voice rode on top. I had to swallow hard to keep back the tears. I didn't want to distract them from telling me what they were yelling about.

It was about Murphy. It seems Murphy was shot and in the jail hospital. Poor Murphy, he was just driving Mr. Bagliotti around to a meeting. And after he dropped off Mr. Bagliotti, in a little while some dumb cops came up and shot him.

"We'll sue the damn city!" Mrs. Clanahan sobbed. "My poor little boy! Working steady on his first good job, minding his own business and look what happens! Doll Baby, you got him that job. You go see Mr. Bagliotti and have him get Murphy out. A big important man like that, it'll be better if *he* sues the police."

For a wonder Doll Baby shut

right up. She said, very reasonable, "Ma, we can't order a bigshot like Mr. Bagliotti what to do." Then real quick she added, "Come to think, though, you may have something. I'll call Dag—Mr. Bagliotti." Her voice got real prissy. "He may be kind enough to drive me downtown to a lawyer and to see Murph." Big sigh. "It would be such a help. Buses wear me out and taxis cost so much."

She went upstairs to her room to telephone. I went upstairs to go to the bathroom and walked slow and tiptoey by her door. And stopped. "Listen, listen, it's my *brother* who got caught. Whatever he was doing he was doing it for you. Now, listen, you and I got him into this, we gotta get him out!"

Doll Baby couldn't even whisper quiet. "Dagger, this is a"— right in here she said a horrible word—"mess. You got the power to spring him. No, Dagger, no! Of course I wouldn't tell them. I'd never open my peep on you, you know that, honey. Only, it's my brother and I'm crazy about the kid. Please come get me, I need to see you! Okay, okay."

I ran quick into the bathroom.

The green sedan never came. After a while Doll Baby came downstairs in her mink coat. "Murph's boss is terribly busy. But he's kindly sending a cab for me so I can consult him in his office. He's a real gentleman," she said.

Clarissa and I were more thrilled than sad about Murphy. Imagine, a member of your very own family shot and in jail!

"Let's go visit him," I said. "I never saw anybody shot."

"I don't know if Doll Baby would like that."

"Ask your mother."

"No. She'd want to go along. And she'd tell Doll Baby."

"Let's go alone. I've been saving Henry's money. We can go on the bus and buy something for Murphy."

"I don't know where the jail hospital is. Ruby, you ask your mother where the jail hospital is."

I thought about that, but it didn't have the right sound. "Let's go downtown to the City Hall and ask a policeman or the Mayor."

It was scary at the City Hall, with everybody but us grownups. Clarissa asked a man where the Mayor was because we had a favor to ask of him.

"Is that so?" the man said, grinning. "What kind of a favor?"

So Clarissa said her brother was in the jail hospital and she and her friend had a present for him but we didn't know where the jail hospital was.

Then a whole bunch of men came around us, grinning and patting us on the heads. "What

kind of a present?" one asked.

I whispered to Clarissa, "Better show them. They think we've got a key or a saw or something to spring Murphy."

So Clarissa showed them the hamburger.

They found out Murphy's name and our names and Clarissa's address and phone number. Then they bought us some hot chocolate out of a machine. Was it fun! I never knew they had all that fun at a City Hall.

Henry came down and picked us up. He had read the story about Murphy in a Fresno paper and drove home like crazy to see if he could help. When the men at City Hall told him about the present for Murphy and how we wanted to see how he was, Henry hugged us both, said one was his wife's little sister and both of us were his special girl friends. Gee! Henry was great.

He was so nice I wanted to help him. "Henry," I said as he drove us home, "old Blobby Face got Murphy in trouble and then let him take the rap."

"Huh! What's that?" Henry parked at the curb and looked back at me. "Where did you hear anything about 'rap'?"

"Oh, phooey, all the movies talk about 'taking a rap.' And Murphy's in jail and shot, isn't he? And Clarissa's Mom says Murphy's a good boy and working hard now. And he's working for Blobby Face. So it must be a rap."

Henry looked at me, very steady. "What gives you the idea Blobby Face did this? The paper said Murphy had his own racket—his own job, bothering pinball machine operators. And somebody—Murphy, they think—shot the operator."

"And then the operator shot Murphy!" Boy!

Henry looked tired. "They don't know. They can't find another gun. Only the one with Murphy's fingerprints on it."

"Why don't they ask the operator?"

Henry shook his head. "The shot hit his throat, so he can't talk. Hey, you brats, you've got me talking too much, you and your movies. But I'd like to know more about Blobby Face. How about it, Sissie?"

"I never saw him, ever," Clarissa said. "Ruby's the only one. She watched him through Doll Baby's window one day and stuck out her tongue at him. Remember when Ruby wasn't around for a whole month? Doll Baby grounded her for insulting Murphy's boss."

"Only he wasn't Murphy's boss yet," I said. "That came after."

"Tell me about Blobby Face, Ruby." Henry's voice was so quiet it almost whispered.

So I did. How Blobby Face was staring up at the house that

time Doll Baby was covered with bruises, that time she fell—I started to say "fell in the airplane going to Las Vegas" but I remembered in time. And when Doll Baby saw that awful face looking at the house it scared her so bad she said she had to get out of the house, like that face put a curse on it. So I looked out the window and stuck out my tongue. And I guessed Doll Baby thought it was impolite because she swore at me.

"He was in that green sedan Murphy drives now. So he must be Mr. Dagger Bagliotti. The one who's going to make Murphy a millionaire."

"Dagger?"

I nodded. "That's what Doll Baby calls him over the telephone."

Clarissa gritted her teeth at me. "You shut up! You promised never to tell anything about Doll Baby!"

"What did I tell? I never told any secrets you told me that Doll Baby said not to tell! I just told what I knew my own self!"

"Be quiet, Sissie," Henry said. "If you're going to be mad, be mad at me. When did she talk on the telephone to—Dagger?"

"Today. Just before we went downtown. She wants Mr. Dagger Bagliotti to spring Murphy because he's got the power and she'll never open her peep on Dagger. But he wouldn't come and get her. He sent a cab. Maybe she and Mr. Dagger Bagliotti are in the jail right now with Murphy."

"Sissie, here's some money. So you and Ruby can go on home on the bus. Your mother's worried about you—maybe Ruby's mother too, if your mother called her. So tell them you were good little girls, Henry said so, and you went to see Murphy because you were thoughtful. Tell them Henry gave you extra money to go to the movies—no, on second thought, stay out of those movies. Get a banana split instead."

That night Clarissa telephoned me. "Goodbye!" she said. Right at the beginning. "You're not my best friend any more, old blabbermouth!"

"I never told any secrets! You heard me. It was all my very own stuff."

"Old blabbermouth! You've got Doll Baby all bruised up again. What you said made Henry go downtown to see Murphy. And because Murphy was so sick—Henry told Doll Baby he was probably out of his head—he told Henry where Mr. Bagliotti's office was. And when Henry got to the office, Doll Baby was there too!" Clarissa began to cry. "It's awful. You ought to see Doll Baby. Her whole arm's black and blue. Maybe more of her too. Henry's with her in her room, I didn't see."

"Henry beat her up?" Wow!

Good old Henry!

"Dope." Clarissa snuffled "Henry don't beat up anything. But with Henry knocking on the office door and trying to come in while she was having a nervous talk with Mr. Bagliotti, why Doll Baby got more nervous and fell against the office furniture before Henry got inside."

"Clarissa, please don't be mad at me. I'm sick and tired of making up."

"Well-l-l—but if you blabbermouth again, I will never speak to you. Doll Baby hasn't blamed you yet. She's just talking about her bruises and how dumb Henry was to go barging in like that. So if you want to you can come over tomorrow morning."

It was a good thing it was school vacation. Clarissa and I got in on everything. Gee! Think what we'd have missed if we had to go to school. Because next morning when I went over to Clarissa's everybody was in an uproar again. It was the most fun place I ever knew.

Doll Baby had left home. Right in the middle of the night. Before Henry figured what was happening and while everybody else was asleep. Henry tried to follow her, Clarissa said. But he came back after a while because he couldn't find her. He even took out his car and went to Mr. Bagliotti's office. But a couple of thugs grabbed him by the arms and shoved him back in his car. "Henry says it's the end," Clarissa said. "Doll Baby's left him for good."

Mrs. Clanahan kept crying and saying, "Damn that Henry, he ought to have stayed home more. My poor little Doll Baby was alone too much."

It didn't seem to me Doll Baby was very alone with all those rich people down in the St. Francis lobby and eating all the time in fancy restaurants. But maybe they just ate and didn't talk.

"Henry's out looking for her again," Clarissa whispered to me. "He's got a broken heart. He didn't even take his clothes off last night, just walked up and down the stairs all night. You ought to see his face. Big black circles under his eyes."

"Maybe they're black like Doll Baby's. Maybe he fought Mr. Bagliotti. Because Mr. Bagliotti made Doll Baby nervous."

"Dumb!" Clarissa said. "Henry wouldn't fight anybody unless Doll Baby told him to, and she likes Mr. Bagliotti."

Henry came in the house. And he was dumber than me. Because he had on his pretty Canadian sport coat with the brass buttons, and it was all messed up from wearing it all night, dusty all over and wrinkled.

"You see Doll Baby or that Mr. Bagliotti?" Mrs. Clanahan asked.

Henry shook his head. "Tried," he said. "But no. It's like trying to see a general with an army all around. That first time I got to his office must have been a fluke."

"Murphy's boss is really important," Mrs. Clanahan said. "He'll be sure to get Murphy out when he explains Murphy got framed by the police. Now, Henry, you just sit tight. Doll Baby's had flareups before and always came back, she's a highstrung little thing."

Henry looked like he was going to throw up. He hurried up to Doll Baby's room and shut the door. The bedsprings went down, like he went to bed there instead of in his own room. Then he got up and started walking around. Still with his clothes on. Pretty soon he came downstairs and said he had to go down to Half Moon Bay on business, but he'd be back for supper in case Doll Baby telephoned.

Clarissa and I grabbed hold of him, hugged his arms and begged please, please, could we go with him. "Kids, it's business, you can't go this time."

We kept hanging onto him and promising we wouldn't bother his business talking and we'd be quiet and besides, we were nervous and needed a ride. Clarissa started to cry real hard and that did it. I just about drowned myself in tears.

Henry wiped our faces with his handkerchief and said okay.

Clarissa and I tried to make Henry feel good. We sang silly songs. Finally Henry joined in and made us laugh, his voice sounded so squeaky and tight. And he gave us each a candy bar he had stuffed in his glove compartment. I decided if Doll Baby would just stay away forever that I would grow up and marry Henry, and get him to do everything I wanted.

Henry parked the car before we got to Half Moon Bay, out where there was nobody, high on the cliffs overlooking the beach and the ocean. It was on a point away from the road and real great. Quiet except for the gulls squawking and the waves pounding. I guess Henry wanted it quiet so he could think, all alone. Because he said for Clarissa and me to stay put by the car, he was going to take a walk. He scrambled and slid down the cliff and went walking along the sand.

Gee! He stayed a long time. We could see him away down the beach. Finally we got chilly and hungry. We looked in the glove compartment for more candy bars. And then all over the car because Henry almost always had candy or peanuts around.

There weren't any anywhere. "Let's look in the trunk," I said. "He carries suitcases and things in there. I bet there's some candy there too."

"You can't. He took his car keys with him."

"Oh, phooey!" I said. "Robbers don't mess around with keys. Only it's not really robbing because Henry won't care if we eat his candy. I opened the trunk of my folks' car once without any key. Only I need a knife. Like a Boy Scout knife or something."

We looked in the glove compartment for maybe a knife. And there was a long skinny one with two blades, with a ring on its end. I opened one of the blades, stuck it in the keyhole of the trunk, and then slammed the end of it hard with a rock. Clarissa got afraid I was going to scratch the paint and squealed and ran back in the car. I slammed it a couple of more times and whump! The trunk lid flew up.

I wish it hadn't.

Doll Baby looked awful. Horrible. With her tongue sticking out and her face white and purple. Dead has an awful look, with everything gone but the outside.

I screamed. Clarissa came and started to scream, but it choked off. She fell down, almost fainted. When she got up she went to the cliff edge and was sick. I kept on screaming. Henry finally heard and started running back.

Clarissa and I couldn't talk. We just pointed, and cried. Henry looked dead too when he saw Doll Baby. Everything was so awful that Clarissa and I turned our backs. Henry could hardly get us into the car and then he went for the police.

Wow! They almost got Henry for murdering Doll Baby. Said he was jealous and killed her and stuffed her in the car trunk until he could hide her someplace else. But Henry's lawyer said would Henry invite a couple of kids to go on a ride and then leave them alone in the car with a dead body in the trunk, knowing they were the fooling-around kind of kids, would that be good sense? He would have gone by himself. And the whole family knew when Henry went out to find Doll Baby after she left in the night. No, they didn't know what time she left but Henry woke them up, saying she was gone and he was going to go find her. Henry had gone to Mr. Bagliotti's office looking for her and Mr. Bagliotti's thugs shoved him back in his car. The thugs knew exactly where Henry's car was because they took him right to it, so they could have put Doll Baby in it before they shoved Henry back.

The lawyer said lots more too. All about Murphy driving Mr. Bagliotti and getting shot and being a juvenile fall guy. All about Henry finding Doll Baby in Mr. Bagliotti's office all covered with bruises. A whole lot about those machines that Mr. Bagliotti owned and Murphy was collecting for. It was in all the papers.

You know what? My picture was even in the papers. Because when the reporters came around Clarissa's house I was there. Now that Doll Baby couldn't ground me I wasn't afraid of being a blabbermouth. Besides, good old Henry was in trouble. So I told them about old Blobby Face scaring Doll Baby. And me sticking out my tongue. And how Doll Baby fell in the airplane the time she went to Las Vegas after she met Mr. Bagliotti, and got a black eye and bruises. Only Henry thought she fell in the shower.

I told them maybe old Blobby Face pushed her that time, and later on too when she fell all over his office furniture. Because I heard Doll Baby talking over the telephone to Blobby—Mr. Bagliotti—trying to get him to spring Murphy. And he must have got mad because she said all excited she'd never open her peep on him even though they had both got Murphy into trouble, and then she went to see him in a taxi he sent for her. Only she didn't call him Blobby Face or Mr. Bagliotti, she called him Dagger.

Well, after Henry's lawyer got through telling everything, Mr. Bagliotti went to jail. So what good did his pinball machines do him then? They couldn't prove, not exactly, that he killed Doll Baby. What they thought was he had somebody else do it and then stuff Doll Baby in Henry's car trunk. What he went to jail for was for shooting Murphy after Murphy shot the pinball operator, because Murphy was stealing from him. They finally sewed up the operator's throat and he told all about it. So if Mr. Bagliotti shot Murphy, why wouldn't he shoot Doll Baby? Anyway, good old Henry didn't get blamed.

I never told anybody about the brass button off Henry's Canadian sport coat. The one that was caught in the fancy sequin trim around the neck of Doll Baby's dress. Right in front, the button was, where I saw it first thing when the car trunk lid flew up.

It wasn't there when the police took Doll Baby out of the trunk. Because I looked when they did it and the button wasn't there. And nobody ever said anything about finding a button. But later, when Henry had on his Canadian coat another time, all the buttons were on it. And they all matched. Only, one button on his left cuff was sewed on with a different color of thread, the dumb way my father sews on things when my mother isn't around.

But, gee, it could have been pulled off and stuck on those sequins any old time, couldn't it?

All the same, I've changed my mind. I'm not going to marry Henry after all. Maybe he wouldn't do everything I wanted him to.

a NEW African detective story by

JOAN RICHTER

Joan Richter has lived in Kenya, so she knows the people, their thoughts, their feelings, their loyalties. Her African stories are authentic and convincing, and a joy to read . . . Surely it has occurred to us all that what we may take for granted in our so-called civilized world, what we may even consider hackneyed or old hat, can seem fresh or novel in a newly independent nation; that what we regard as simple or commonplace may seem sophisticated or uncommon in an emerging nation. This temporal lag, this parallel and paradox of the old and the new, can be equally true about such things as clues and deductions and hiding places and the whole procedural technique of police investigation . . .

ONLY SO MUCH TO REVEAL

by JOAN RICHTER

WHEN THE POLICE LEFT—the two who had come from Nairobi by car and the two Africans who had walked over from the police station across the river—Matua locked up the main house and went to his quarters behind the line of pepper trees. He added a few more pieces of charcoal to the cook fire which had burned low during his absence, fanned it into a new flame, and put the pot of meat and beans back to cook again. Then he sat down on the stone steps to think.

Overhead the sky was a clear blue, with puffs of high white clouds. If he raised his eyes he might see the tops of the flame trees that grew down by the river, their scarlet blooms and broad green leaves obscuring the orange tile roof of the local police station just beyond.

Black or white, the police were the same, swollen by the authority

their uniforms gave them into thinking they were bigger men than they really were. His friend Tano was no different. Since Tano had become a policeman there was no kindness in him, none of the old good-natured laughter. Only when his heavy boots were undone and set aside, and a freshly brewed bowlful of *pombe* began to gurgle in his stomach and flow in his veins, did Tano's face soften, his lips curl, and laughter fill his mouth. But still not in the old way.

Today Tano had not come as a friend. Like the other three with him, he had come as the police, with his boots on. One lunge of a boot and a man would fall to his knees. Matua had seen it happen *many* times. And always it made the last meal he had eaten fight in his stomach.

The first time was in his village many years ago when he and Tano were boys. The police were all white men then and they came in their boots and uniforms, with their truncheons swinging at their sides. They were looking for a man. Matua could no longer remember of what crime the man had been accused, but he remembered how he and Tano had watched from the shadows of one of the huts as the man was found, kicked, beaten, and finally dragged away.

Matua shook off the recollection and leaned back against the stone of the step, sighing. Things had changed, but not in the way he had dreamed of. Independence had come and now Africans wore police uniforms side by side with Europeans. Tano was one of them. It bothered Matua more to see an African kick an African.

Yet today there had been a timidity about Tano that surprised him. It was the same with the other man who had come from the station house across the river, but Matua's quick mind found an explanation. The two black men were ill at ease in front of the big red-haired Englishman from Nairobi whose uniform was more elaborate than theirs and who had arrived by car with an Indian policeman as his driver. The Englishman's face was puffy and discolored, with streaks of purple in his cheeks. Rusty brows frowned over hard blue eyes and a bushy mustache twitched about his wet mouth like the tassels on a ripe ear of maize. The Indian wore a starched Sikh turban instead of the regulation hat and stared at Matua with bright hard eyes, but he too was silent as the questioning began.

"When was the last time you saw the Bwana alive?" the Englishman asked.

Matua opened his mouth but did not speak. Long ago he had learned it did not serve an African of his station to acknowledge how well he understood the white

man's language. Feigned ignorance allowed one to say less and learn more. His silence was rewarded. The question was repeated, as he had hoped, in Swahili.

"After dinner," he answered. "The Bwana said he did not want anything else, so I went to my room to sleep. It was no later than nine o'clock."

"What noises did you hear during the night?"

Had he heard something? Some small cry? Or perhaps even a scream. How could he be sure? It might have been a tree toad or an owl or the wild screech of a civet cat thwarted in its search of prey. Perhaps what he had heard had been only the sound of his own snoring. But his answer to the red-haired European showed none of his uncertainty. "I heard nothing," he said.

"Nothing!" The mustache twitched, the bloodshot cheeks reddened. "How could you not hear some sound? Look at this!" They were in the sitting room then where kapok lay in heaps on the floor and clung in clumps to the sisal rug that Matua had brushed and swept only yesterday. A white powder clouded the border of polished wood. Every seat had been slashed, every piece of furniture overturned and ripped apart. In the bedroom it was the same—the mattress in pieces, the pillows in shreds, feathers lying like fallen leaves around the room, as in a henhouse after a cockfight.

"My house is behind the trees." Matua pointed out the window. "It was very cold last night." It was true—he had even wished for another blanket. "My window was shut. I heard nothing."

The Indian turned to the Englishman, his head and turban moving as one plastered unit, his sallow face sly. "They sleep and it is as good as dead. But I think this one lies."

Matua gave no sign that he understood the English-spoken aside, but an old anger leaped in his stomach. It was eased a little when he saw the look that Tano gave the Indian. In it was his own hidden hatred, and once again he felt united with his friend, because together they were seeing in that sallow face the countenance of all the Indians at whose shop counters they had been cheated and abused.

Long ago the British had brought Indian laborers to East Africa—hundreds of them, and their families—to work on the railway. A few returned to their homeland, but the others settled along the coast of East Africa and inland. They became shopkeepers and merchants and gained control of all the commerce and trade in East Africa. In small villages and towns the Indian *duka* was the only shop.

In large communities *dukas* were side by side, connected like beads on a string by hidden passageways where prices were set and word was passed when an African buyer appeared. If the price in one shop seemed too high it did no good to go to the one next door. The price was fixed and inflated, down the line, for everything—rice, tea, sugar, cloth, thread, a single needle. It is easy to learn to hate a man who will give you only half the amount of rice your money should buy, when half is not enough to feed your family, and the coin in your hand is all the money you have.

The British policeman scowled at the Indian's comment, but made no reply. Matua had learned early there was no love between them either. The policeman turned to Matua and continued his questioning.

"When did you return to the house?"

"At six thirty this morning."

"Is that your usual time?"

"Yes."

"But you did not ring up the police station until fifteen minutes after seven. Is that correct?"

"It is correct."

"Why did you not call immediately? What were you doing from six thirty to seven fifteen?"

"I was making scones."

The mustache twitched and the words that came from the moist lips were punctuated with spittle. "What are you talking about? Scones! Your master had been murdered!"

"I did not know the Bwana was dead. I did not go into the bedroom right away."

"Why not? Did not this mess tell you something was wrong?"

Matua shook his head.

The Indian took a step forward. "Do not shake your head! Speak!" The Swahili command was an explosion of garlic breath in Matua's face. "You are taking time to think up some lies!"

Matua swallowed but looked straight into the Indian's small black eyes. "I do not know what you mean by lies. It is I who called the police." Matua glanced at Tano to see if he would support his statement, but Tano was staring straight ahead. The Englishman spoke, angrily, "I want to know when you discovered the Bwana was dead!"

"It was six thirty when I came into the house, by the kitchen door. Always I go to the sitting room to open the curtains, but this morning with the scones to make I did not go. I would do it later, while the scones were in the oven, after I had brought the Bwana his first cup of tea.

"It was seven o'clock when I took the tea tray down the hall to the bedroom. The door was closed. I knocked and went in. It was dark and I set the tray down on the small table inside

the door and went to open the blinds. I stumbled over something lying on the floor. 'Bwana,' I called, but there was no answer. I backed away and turned on the light. The Bwana was lying on the floor dead."

"How did you know he was dead? Did you touch him?"

Matua frowned. "He did not need touching for me to know. There were many wounds and much blood. He was dead."

"When did you call the police?"

"Then." The answer was almost the truth. There was no need for him to say that he had run from the house first, to his own room, that he had sat on the edge of the bed shivering with terror and wondering what he should do, that he had even thought of running away.

But why should he run? He had done nothing. Where would he go? His village was far away and he did not have enough money for the bus fare. And what of the tea tray he had left in the Bwana's bedroom? And the scones still baking in the oven? He could not leave without cleaning the kitchen, or when the police came—and he knew they would come sometime—they would know he had been in the house and had run away. They would think he was the one who had killed the Bwana and they would come after him to his village. They would track him down as though he were nothing more than a wild pig.

Matua had covered his face with his hands, had tried to shut out the pictures forming in his mind of his children clinging to one another in the shadow of their hut, of his wife standing with the other women, watching as he was beaten and dragged away. It had not been the sight of the dead Bwana that had filled him with terror, but of the *panga*, lying next to him, its broad blade caked with dried earth and newly clotted with blood.

"I telephoned the police station where my friend Tano works. Tano was not there, but the others came. They took the body away and told me not to clean the room. Now you are here." He did not have to tell anyone about how he had almost run away. There is only so much that a man has to reveal of himself to other men.

"And the *panga*? Where is that?"

"They took the *panga* when they took the Bwana." He thought again of the knife as it had lain beside the dead body. Every African owned a *panga*, sometimes two. They were protection in the forest, a hoe in the field, an ax for splitting bamboo or chopping fire wood, a knife to cut a paw-paw in half and scrape out the seeds. All alike, with their solid wooden handles and broad blades,

they could be bought at an Indian *duka* for fifteen shillings each. One was hardly recognizable from another. But a man knew his own *panga*, just as a man knew his own woman.

"The *panga* was mine," Matua said, and saw the Englishman lift his head and look at him. The Indian looked too, and so did Tano and the African policeman beside him. "I had worked in my *shamba* yesterday, hoeing beans. When I was done I left my *panga* standing outside the door to my room, with the earth still on it. It was there when I went to sleep last night, but it was gone this morning. I would like to have my *panga* back when the police are through with it."

"Of all the bloody nerve!" the Indian exclaimed. "He'd like to have his *panga* back!"

The African policeman beside Tano stepped forward and spoke for the first time. Matua did not know his name, but he had seen him with Tano once in a while in town. "A *panga* costs fifteen shillings. It is Matua's right to have it back."

"It's a murder weapon, you idiot!" the Indian shouted.

"What will be done with it when the investigation is over?" Tano asked quietly.

"How should I know," the Indian said.

"You know." Tano's voice was louder now. "You will take it! And then you will sell it to someone for *more* than fifteen shillings. The *panga* is Matua's. It will be returned to him."

The hate that gleamed in Tano's eyes warmed Matua. Once more they were boys together.

"Enough of that," the Englishman commanded and turned his attention to Matua. "You heard no one come to your house last night?"

"I heard nothing."

"What was the murderer looking for?"

Matua frowned, not certain that he understood. "I do not know what you mean."

"The murderer was looking for something. Why else would he have done all this?" The Englishman nodded at the ruined furniture.

"I do not know. Perhaps it was money."

"But didn't the Bwana keep his money in the bedroom safe?"

"Yes, but I do not think there was very much money there. It is the end of the month now and the Bwana always went to the bank on the first day."

"Whatever was there is gone," the Englishman said.

"The Bwana said it was not a very good safe. That is why he did not keep much money."

"What did he keep in the house?"

Again Matua frowned. "I do not understand."

"The murderer wanted more than what he found in the safe. He tore up this whole bloody place to find it. What was it? What was he looking for?"

Matua shook his head. "I do not know."

The questioning went on for a while longer and then suddenly it ended. Matua was glad, because there was no more to be said. The Englishman told him to clean up the house. The landlord had been informed of his tenant's death and already had someone interested in renting the house. They would be coming from Nairobi tomorrow.

Matua rose from the step and went to look at his cook fire. He had begun to smell the sweet odor of the beans and meat cooking together and he realized he was hungry. He was thinking how good it would be to have someone to share his meal with when he heard a footstep along the path on the other side of the pepper trees. He was not certain whether it was real or his imagination. And then all at once his breath froze in his chest. Not until that instant did he realize that if the murderer had not found what he was looking for, he might come back.

"*Jambo*," came a greeting through the trees.

"*Jambo*." Matua replied, his heart beating like a trapped bird in his chest.

"*Habari gani*, how are things?"

Matua felt his heart quiet. He recognized the voice. "Ah, Tano. You have smelled my meat and beans even from across the river."

They sat on the steps and ate with their fingers, dipping balls of cooked cornmeal into the stew. They spoke of unimportant things at first and then Matua asked, "What do the police think about the Bwana's murder? Do they know who did it?"

"A robber."

"A robber? But who?"

"How can they know who? He did not leave his name."

Matua frowned. He did not like Tano's joke. "But the police are clever. They have ways of finding things out."

"What things? What can be found out in the house? Have you discovered something?"

Matua shook his head. "I have discovered nothing. I only think it strange that the Bwana was killed with my *panga*, but that another knife was used to do the rest."

"And how do you know that?"

"The blood would have been gone from my *panga*, so would the earth left from my bean patch, if it had been used to open up the mattress and to rip the cushions."

Tano looked at him strangely, his eyes narrowing. "And what do you think is the meaning of that?"

Matua shook his head. "I do not know. Perhaps the murderer is someone not comfortable using a *panga* for very long. What was done to the furniture took a long time."

Tano frowned. "That is a good thought, Matua. I am sure the English policeman from Nairobi did not think of it. Tell me though, why did you tell him the *panga* was yours? You do not need the fifteen shillings that much."

Matua looked up from the bowl. "Why should I let the Indian have it?"

Tano shrugged. "But that is not why you spoke of it."

"It is better I tell the police it is my *panga* than if they find out later. There would be trouble."

"How could they find out? One *panga* is like any other."

"There are differences. And the police are clever." Matua paused, realizing he had been talking about the police as if Tano were not one of them. "Besides, it is easier to tell the truth than it is to lie. A lie can be forgotten. But the truth never."

Tano laughed and sucked the juice of the meat off his fingers. "Why then did you not tell the truth about what the murderer was looking for?"

Matua raised his head, startled. "What do you mean?"

"You have said it is easier to speak the truth than it is to lie. So why lie to me, your old friend?"

"I do not know what you are talking about, Tano."

"A long time ago when you first came to work for the Bwana, when the Memsab was still alive, you told me they showed you diamonds—diamonds the Bwana had taken from the Congo which, if they were found, would put him in jail. That is why they had to be kept in the house, carefully hidden. But where, Matua? Where did the Bwana hide the diamonds?"

Diamonds. Matua heard Tano say the word again and thought to himself what a fool he had been to have forgotten. Too late he saw that Tano had caught the look of recollection in his face.

"Now you remember!"

"I have not thought of them for many years."

"Well, think of them now. Where are they?"

Matua frowned—only a fool or an old man could forget something he once knew. Why is it that I cannot remember? The Memsab once spoke of them to me, and so did the Bwana. They said that some day if the coffee crop failed there would be the diamonds. But it is not the kind of thing for a European to tell a servant. Why was it I had to know? And why was I such a fool to boast about it to Tano?

But that was long ago before Tano wore the uniform of a policeman.

"Come, Matua. We are old friends. Tell me where the diamonds are."

"I do not know where they are." Matua spoke with impatience, looking straight into Tano's eyes. Then he reached for the empty bowl and took it to the outside faucet to rinse it clean. "I must go back to the house now. There is much to do, with new people coming tomorrow."

Tano rose. "I will help you. Perhaps while you clean you will begin to remember. Perhaps together we can find them. Lend me one of your shirts, Matua. I cannot return to the police station looking like a houseboy."

Matua looked at the starched uniform and the polished black boots and at the new gold watch that gleamed on Tano's wrist. He did not think the job of a policeman paid so well. Without a word he went into his room to get Tano the shirt he had asked for. He wanted Tano to go, to leave him to his cleaning, but he would not say this because Tano would think he wanted to be left alone, so he could find the diamonds. And in a way that was so, but not for the reason Tano would think. Just as clothes were in the closet, meat was in the refrigerator, and money was in the safe, the diamonds too were somewhere. But they were not his, so he had not thought of them. What would he do with a handful of diamonds? What good had they done the Bwana?

While Matua swept and dusted and carried the stuffings of furniture out to a rubbish pile in the garden, Tano examined the furniture, probing into corners with a shiny knife he had taken from his trouser pocket.

Once Matua called to him. "Help me with this rug, Tano. I cannot clean it in here. I must put it outside on the line and beat it."

With a flick of his wrist Tano sent the bright knife into the wooden arm of a chair where it landed upright and quivering. Matua pretended not to notice. Since he had become a policeman a *panga* was not good enough for Tano. But what good was a small knife like that? It could not hoe, nor could it chop down a bamboo tree. Matua bent over the rolled-up rug while Tano took his end.

"The safe in the bedroom—" Tano started to say as they heaved the large rug over the wire line outside the kitchen door—"why did the Bwana not keep the diamonds there?"

"The safe was not strong." Matua squinted against the sun slanting through the curtain of pepper tree leaves and looked over the rug barrier between them. How could Tano be so sure the

murderer had not finally found what he had been looking for?

They went back in to the house and with the rug out of the way it was easier to clean the sitting room. Tano helped him carry some of the broken furniture out onto the veranda and stack it in a corner. They took the mattress to the rubbish pile. Then Matua put on his sheepskin footpads and began skating over the wooden floors, rubbing in the coconut oil that made the wide boards gleam.

"I am thirsty after all this work," Tano said as he came upon the cupboard where the Bwana kept his whiskey. "Let us have a drink."

Matua shook his head. He liked *pombe,* the African beer of his village, but he had no taste for the white man's whiskey.

"What is this?" Tano held up a small green bottle. "I have not seen this kind of whiskey before."

Matua looked across the room at the bottle Tano was examining. "It is not whiskey. It is something called ginger ale, to be mixed with whiskey. When the Memsab was alive that is what she and the Bwana would drink, with a little ice. But afterwards the Bwana did not want anything but whiskey."

"Fix me a drink, Matua. A drink like the Bwana used to have. Pretend I am the Bwana of the house now and you are my servant."

Matua looked at him. "I will fix you one drink. And then you will go. You are keeping me from my work. There is more to clean if new people are coming tomorrow. Perhaps if I have the house to their liking they will ask me to stay and work for them." He took the bottle of ginger ale and the whiskey from Tano and started toward the kitchen.

Tano called after him. "I will have my drink and I will stay while you clean the rest of the house. I am not satisfied that you do not know where the diamonds are."

Matua turned around. "I have told you I do not know. The Memsab and the Bwana spoke of them once, a long time ago. And never again. What good would they do you anyhow?"

"Diamonds are worth a lot of money, Matua."

"Who would give you money for them?"

"Merchants in the bazaar."

"Indians."

Tano shrugged. "If I have diamonds and I want money for them, I must go to who has money and who wants diamonds. Yes, Indians."

Matua shook his head. "They would cheat you and then they would report you to the police."

Tano threw his head back and laughed. "You forget, Matua. I am the police."

Matua smiled sadly. "Yes, sometimes I do forget." He turned

then and went into the kitchen and took two tall glasses from a side cupboard. It was automatic. Whiskey and ginger ale belonged in two tall glasses. One for the Memsab and one for the Bwana. But that was a long time ago. He put one glass back on the shelf and went into the pantry to the refrigerator for some ice.

He reached for the small tray on the right. That, too, was automatic. Always the tray on the right. Why never the other? He stood for a moment staring into the open coldness and felt a small smile move on his lips. He reached for the tray on the left and carried both trays into the kitchen and put them on the counter near the sink. The refrigerator would need cleaning too.

Tano was leaning in the doorway, fingering the blade of his small knife, watching M a t u a thoughtfully. "What you have said about the Indian merchant is true. If *you* would go to him with the diamonds he would report *you* to the police, but he would not tell them you had brought him many diamonds—only one or two. But one or two would be enough to put you in jail for a long time. And the Indian would have all the rest."

"Why do you say this to me?"

"Because I want you to know that without me to help you with the diamonds they will do you no good."

"And what makes you think that with your help they would do me good? What good did they do the Bwana? I do not need your advice, Tano."

"And what do you mean by that?"

"I mean that if I knew where the diamonds were I would not touch them. And if they came into my hands I would get rid of them."

"You are either a fool or a liar!"

"Perhaps a fool, Tano, but I do not lie. Now here is your drink." Two ice cubes tinkled against the glass as he held it out.

Tano took it from him with his left hand, but his right hand shot forward, pointing the knife. "If I learn some day that you have lied to me, Matua, that the diamonds are already yours—"

Matua stared into the eyes of the man, who as a boy had been his friend, and then l o o k e d deliberately at the clean blade of the knife in his hand. He was not afraid. Tano would not hurt him. Two murders in the same house would cause the European policeman with the mustache like the tassels on a ripe ear of maize to become suspicious. Perhaps he was suspicious already. Matua had admitted that the *panga* used to kill the Bwana belonged to him, but what of the other knife, the knife that had been used to

slash up the furniture. To whom did it belong? The Englishman could not be the fool that Tano thought him to be.

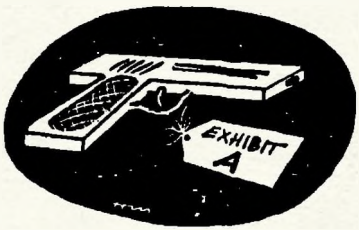
Their glances met over the point of the knife and Matua found himself wondering if the uniform could be blamed for the man. He did not think the Bwana had minded dying. He was not young any more. He had grown old quickly after the Memsab's death. That Tano had killed him was a great misdeed, but that he had used an old friend's *panga* was the greater misdeed.

Tano raised the glass to his lips and took a long swallow. "It is good. Why do you not have one?"

Matua shook his head. "I have work to do," he said and turned to the sink. He emptied the two trays of ice cubes there and let water pour over the cubes. As they became small he got rid of them by sweeping them down the drain with his hands. He let the water run as he rinsed the trays and set them aside to dry. Later, after he had cleaned the refrigerator, he would fill the trays with fresh water and put them back in their place. For a while it would still be automatic for him to reach for the tray on the right, never to touch the one on the left. But now he realized that it did not matter any more.

Beside him Tano made a noise as he sucked up the last of his drink and then tossed the ice cubes into the sink.

Matua turned his head away as he reached for the faucet to flush down the last two cubes. He smiled to himself. It had been a good hiding place.



a *NEW* crime-detective story by

BERKELY MATHER

"The real professional never takes a lot of bites. He takes one big one, and leaves it alone thereafter. Coming back again and again can have awkward repercussions. People can be driven to do silly things—they sometimes leave notes to coroners and the police."

A fascinating yarn by one of England's most expert mystery writers . . .

THE BIG BITE

by BERKELY MATHER

WHEN THE ANCIENT TAXI HAD lurched and rattled to the crest of the hill, Fenton could see the cliff-enclosed cove below. There was a sandy beach, perhaps 300 yards long, and behind it, the house. The grounds ran back up the slope to the downland, smooth-turfed and landscaped, and they were shielded to the north and east by a belt of timber. A stone jetty ran out from the beach, curving at the end to form a breakwater, and to it was moored a long, lean, white motor cruiser.

The taxi driver caught Fenton's eye in the rear-view mirror. He grinned—grudging admiration tempering raw envy—and said, "Aye, got it all, our Mr. Coomber, ain't he? Wait till you see the house though. Reckon it cost thirty-five thousand pound to *build*—apart from the grounds and the beach and all. And that was ten year ago."

Fenton didn't answer, so the driver went on, "Will I be coming back for you? There's only one fast train to London this afternoon. That'll be at four."

"I'll phone the railway station if I want you," Fenton said shortly, and then they had entered the drive and were sweeping up toward the house.

"Is it Mr. Coomber himself you'll be wanting?" the driver asked, "or Mr. Garcia?"

"Who's Mr. Garcia?" Fenton looked a little startled.

"He's the butler. Spanish," the driver explained, and Fenton smiled twistedly.

"I see what you mean," he said. "We'll skip the butler. Mr. Coomber and I are old friends."

"Didn't mean to be clever-like," the driver said hastily, thinking of his tip. "It's just that I got chewed up rotten for taking a business gent to the wrong door last week."

Fenton paid him off, waiting for his change, and tipping him the bare minimum, then walked up the steps. The double plate-glass doors opened before he had a chance to ring, and a small simian figure in a white jacket stood before him, holding a silver salver.

"Never mind my card," said Fenton, his self-possession now back with him. "Just tell Mr. Coomber that Mr. Charles Wentworth Fenton, late of Haddersleigh, is here."

The butler bowed, put down the salver, and held his hand out for Fenton's hat, but the latter, fully aware of its sweat-stained band and torn lining, pitched it onto a sofa, thrust his hands into his jacket pockets, whistled softly, and looked around the hall with casual, almost bored, half interest. The butler hesitated a moment, then bowed again, slightly more perfunctorily, crossed the hall, and walked down a passage. He did not ask Fenton to be seated.

Left alone, Fenton crossed to a mirror over the fireplace that reflected a vista of sunlit garden and the beach and sea beyond it. He straightened his Old Haddersleigh tie, tucking the slightly frayed edge under the knot out of sight, then smoothed his graying hair down with both palms.

"Ex-gent," he murmured to himself. "Rather the worse for wear, but still reasonably serviceable. Savile Row suit—a bit tatty round the seat and elbows if viewed in a strong light. Shoes run down at the heels—but beautifully shined. Could be a former officer—short on bank balance but long on pride. *Could* be."

And then the butler was back. "The senor asks you to his study, sir," he said, and led the way.

"But didn't come to ask himself," thought Fenton wryly, padding after the other over Persian rugs that littered the polished floors like autumn leaves.

Coomber rose from behind the ping-pong-table-sized desk and said, "Fenton!" in tones of mild surprise. "Let's see, it must be—?"

"Twenty-five, thirty years," Fenton supplied. "Let's not depress each other. A hell of a long time, anyhow. And it's treated you well, Porky." They shook hands and Fenton dropped into the deep

visitor's chair that faced the light and gave the other the advantage.

"Porky, eh?" said Coomber a little distantly. "I haven't heard *that* for many a long day." He slapped his m i d r i f f. "Do something about it now. Golf and tennis when I can find the time. A good masseur when I can't. But tell me, what brings you to this part of the country?"

"A spot of business." Fenton shrugged.

"Wish you could have let me know in advance," Coomber said. "We might have had lunch. As it is, my wife's away and I'm due out in"— he glanced at his watch —"very shortly." And then, so there would be no mistake about it, he added. "But I can just stretch it to the extent of one glass of sherry," and reached for the bell.

"Not for me, thanks," Fenton said.

"Then I won't bother either," said the other, relieved. "Tell me, what do you do for a living nowadays?"

"This and that," F e n t o n answered. "A bit of free-lance journalism at the moment."

Coomber raised his eyebrows slightly. "Any money in that?"

"Damn little," Fenton told him. "But beggars can't be choosers. One rather loses touch in prison."

There was a moment of silence, then Coomber looked at his watch again and said, "Oh—er—quite. Well, look here, I'm afraid I really must scoot now." He felt for his wallet and extracted a five-pound note. "Er—if this would help—"

"Shove it," said Fenton quietly.

"As you wish," said Coomber with icy dignity. "But I must ask you not to call here again. I try to keep this place as a retreat from the cares and worries of London, and—"

"And you don't want jailbirds giving the dump a bad name." Fenton grinned. "I should have explained that the prison was a Jap one in Burma, during the war. I was a P.O.W."

"Damn you, Fenton," fumed the other, wiping his brow. "That wasn't funny." He l a u g h e d sheepishly. "Quite had me going for the moment. Fenton the Joker. You haven't changed much since our Haddersleigh days. Remember the grass snake in the science master's bedroom? What was his name?"

"Mr. Ellis was the master's name. The snake was called Horace. Yes, I remember."

"And the stinkbombs in the chapel organ pipes?"

"You bet—and the bottle I crowned a policeman with in Piccadilly the night of the Haddersleigh Reunion Dinner—and got fined t w e n t y - f i v e quid for—and fired out of the Company by your father—"

Coomber halted Fenton in mid-reminiscence and smiled sadly.

"Yes, rather unfortunate that," he said. "But you know what a Victorian stickler the old man was."

"You're damn right I do," Fenton agreed. "I had reason to know—and to remember—considering it wrecked my whole career."

"Oh, come now," Coomber protested. "Not as bad as all that. You got another job."

"Almost immediately. War was declared a couple of weeks later and I enlisted."

"Yes, so I heard."

"You bet you heard. I wrote and told you—and asked you to intercede with your father after it was over—if I came through in one piece. You didn't even answer."

"Probably never received the letter," Coomber said. "Damn it all, surely you remember what those early war days were like. Everybody scuttling round like—"

"Like bloody rabbits trying to dodge the draft. Sure, I remember that too."

"If that was meant for me," said Coomber with dignity, "I'd like to point out that I made several attempts to get into uniform—but I was turned down because the Company was engaged on defense work of national importance. I think you've got a chip on your shoulder, Fenton. Bit pointless after all these years, isn't it? After all, I got you the job in the first place, but it was my father who fired you. Why pick on *me?*"

"I'm not. You started the 'I remember, I remember' spiel, not me. I was just tagging along."

Coomber rose pointedly. "Well, it's been pleasant meeting you again, but I really must excuse myself now."

"Sit down," Fenton told him grimly. "I said I had business in these parts. I have. With you."

"I can't think of any business I would be likely to have with you—" Coomber began.

Fenton said, "Dolly Pereira."

Coomber sat down hurriedly and stared at him.

"Yes, you heard me," Fenton said. "Dolly Pereira."

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about," Coomber said, and there was the slightest shake in his voice.

"I gave you the name," said Fenton. "Now, do you want to discuss it further or would you prefer to leave it to a couple of Scotland Yard dicks—plus another couple, probably wearing turbans? Up to you."

Coomber sat staring at the blotting pad before him, his fingers beating a tattoo on the morocco desk top. "Go on."

"I'll be as brief as I can," Fenton said. "No dice from you after two or three letters, so I called the office one day from the training camp I was in up Yorkshire way. They told me

you'd been sent out to take charge of the Bombay branch of the Company—so that was it. I wrote you off as a heel and forgot about things—until December 1941, when I found myself on a troopship in Bombay harbor. We had been given a twenty-four-hour shore leave before continuing on our way to Singapore.

"I thought I'd have one last shot at seeing you, so I called at the office—in Hornby Road. They told me there that you'd shifted your own office up to Poona, to be nearer the big military installations the Company was doing business with. It was a two-hour run by train to Poona, so I thought I'd get it out of my system once and for all. I went up. You weren't there, but I saw a little Goanese clerk—fellow by the name of Braganza. That mean anything to you?"

Coomber nodded and moistened his lips.

"He wasn't helpful," Fenton went on. "In fact, he was almost rude, so I bawled him out—and he burst into tears and apologized. It appeared that you'd fired him—for getting drunk at his cousin's wedding and having a fight with a cop—and he was just clearing up before leaving."

Coomber moistened his lips again and muttered, "A drunken little jerk who'd been helping himself to the petty cash."

"Well, that's as maybe," Fenton said. "To me it was an instant case of fellow feeling. I took him out for a drink—to that Italian place, Muratores. I wasn't prying—not at first. I was just sorry for the poor little guy and I had four hours to wait for a train back to Bombay. But three or four local rums on top of a solid foundation of beer opened the floodgates. He talked. Boy, how he talked! All about Miss Dolly Pereira and the little lovenest you'd taken for her—a lonely bungalow near the Kirkee station. Remember?"

"Go on," said Coomber dully.

"You had certainly settled in. It cast quite a new light on the one-time secretary of the dear old school's Christian Union—with a little wife back in England working her pretty fingers to the bone in a military hospital. I could hardly believe it at first, but he assured me that every word was true. He offered to show me the bungalow. He said he was fairly certain that was where you were at that very moment. I took him up on it, because I couldn't resist the opportunity of seeing your face when I walked in on you.

"We got a taxi outside Poona station and went down—but we were only half successful. She was there, but you were in Sholapur, she told us. And was she angry! Things had been coming up to the boil for some time, apparently.

She had just found out that you were married, and it seemed that the poor gal had had ambitions of becoming Mrs. Coomber, Junior herself. She told us that she was thinking of writing to your father and your wife and spilling the beans, because she was convinced that this Sholapur move by you was the final brushoff. Yes, she sure spilled the lot to us."

"All right," Coomber spat at him. "So I had a mistress out in India. What's so odd about that? So have a hell of a lot of other men."

"Yes," said Fenton gently. "But most other guys pension them off when they've finished. They don't *bump* them off."

Coomber got up quickly, walked to the window, and stood with his back to Fenton. For a long time he didn't speak, then he said slowly, "You're mad."

"Maybe," said Fenton coolly. "But hear me out. We had a couple of drinks with the lady and listened to her tale of woe. It was certainly Fenton's day to be a Wailing Wall. We had to leave then because it was getting near my train time. We drove back to Poona because I didn't realize then that I could have caught it at Kirkee station which was close by. I think the taxi driver was trying to jack the fare up actually. Anyhow—"

"Come to the point, Fenton," said Coomber harshly. "I know what you're getting at. She was murdered in December 1941—"

"On the night of the fourteenth, to be accurate."

"Exactly—and I was in Sholapur at the time."

"So you said at the inquest. But you were lying."

"Prove it."

"Then you'd better listen carefully," Fenton told him, "because it's a little complicated. The last train of the day, if you remember, was the Secundurabad Express, which stops at Sholapur, Poona, and Kirkee. That was the one I caught. Again, if you remember, the Ladies Welfare Committee in Bombay always used to arrange excursion trips for troops passing through during the war—usually to Poona because it wasn't far but was always much cooler. They had one that day, so I found myself in a compartment with four other fellows from the troopship.

"Well, ten minutes after leaving Poona we stopped at Kirkee. It was almost dark about this time, and I was half dozing. I was awakened by the other chaps laughing, and one of them yelled through the window, "Hey! You can't do that. I'll report you to Gandhi—"

"My God," breathed Coomber.

"Remember, do you?" Fenton said triumphantly. "Yes, it was you. You turned, startled, and I

saw your face in the overhead light. You had just swung a suitcase over the railings and were squeezing through after it—as if to avoid having to give up a ticket at the barrier as the other passengers were doing. The action of a man who was either trying to dodge paying his fare—or one who didn't wish to be seen and recognized later. Yes, Coomber, that was the night of December fourteenth, 1941."

"And you waited twenty-eight years—" Coomber said in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

"Waited hell," Fenton laughed dryly. "I didn't *know*. I remember telling the others that I knew you—in fact, I shoved my head out of the window and yelled—but you'd already hared off into the darkness. I told them that I'd come up to see you, and why, and what a louse I thought you were. And they agreed, and we discussed bosses we had known, and loathed, in civilian life until we got back in Bombay—and things were happening there that put the whole thing out of our minds for a hell of a long time to come. The military police were at Victoria Terminus hustling all troopship personnel back on board and we sailed at midnight, blacked-out and under radio silence, and a week later we were in Singapore—and ten days after that we were in the Jap bag. We had a lot of other things on our minds for the next three and a half years. Things like staying alive."

"Your word against mine," Coomber breathed, and Fenton laughed again and shook his head.

"Not quite," he said. "Of those four in that compartment, two, to my knowledge, have survived. One I met less than a month ago at a regimental reunion. He'd remember all right. He's an architect now, in a big way—a good, sound, reliable witness, a prosecuting lawyer's dream."

"But why are you bringing it all up *now*?" Coomber insisted.

"I told you—I didn't know," Fenton said. "I also told you what my job is nowadays. Free-lance journalist. That's a beautiful euphemism actually. I collect dry-as-dust market figures from the past for a two-bit agency. It involves going through stock market figures over the years—delving through newspaper morgues and the British Museum—and the punks pay me for what they use, not what I collect. A month ago they asked me to get them world jute prices from right back to 1935. God, what a job. I'm not a very good researcher, not disciplined enough. If I see an interesting story in an old paper I'm apt to stay with it. I saw a *very* interesting one in the *Bombay Times* a couple of days ago—datelined the fifteenth of December, 1941. I certainly

stayed with that one—right through to the inquest—where the verdict was 'murder by a person unknown.' The sultry and lovely Miss Pereira was found strangled in her bungalow. So there you have it. I came to see you."

Coomber returned to his desk, fumbled in a huge ormolu box, and took out a cigarette. He lit it with trembling hands and pushed the box toward Fenton, who shook his head.

"What do you want of me?" Coomber asked.

"Fifty thousand pounds," said Fenton levelly.

"That's blackmail," Coomber said accusingly, and Fenton roared his amusement.

"For a flat categorical statement of the obvious that takes today's star prize," he said. "You're damned right it's blackmail."

"And suppose you meet with a flat categorical invitation to go to hell?"

"Good question. I wondered that myself, so I went to see a pal of mine—a lawyer's chief clerk. I put it to him—as a hypothetical case, of course. He said one little anonymous note to the Bombay C.I.D. would put the whole thing in motion."

"Bosh!" said Coomber. He seemed now to be regaining his self-possession. "Twenty-eight years ago. We're out of India now, and the case will be closed."

Fenton shook his head. "Apparently not. A murder case is never closed until solved—and we have an extradition treaty with them, remember. He, my pal, thinks it's just the sort of thing they'd rather like. You know, the elephant and the Indian Police never forget. A good prestige builder."

"Of course, fifty thousand pounds is completely out of the question," Coomber said.

"Too bad." Fenton looked genuinely sorrowful. "That's my price—take it or leave it."

"How long would you give me to raise it?"

"Twenty-four hours."

Coomber spread his hands hopelessly. "You quite obviously know nothing at all about finance," he said. "I'm a company—five companies to be precise. In my personal account at the moment I'd probably have a thousand, fifteen hundred. My wife might have roughly the same. If I needed money, big money out of the company funds, I'd have to give reasons, valid ones. They're not fools, you know."

Fenton yawned. "Your problem," he said.

"I'm just trying to explain things," Coomber went on. "To raise that amount I'd have to sell something."

"Then sell it," Fenton snapped.

"But that will take more than twenty-four hours."

"How much more?"

"Give me ninety-six."

Fenton shook his head. "Forty-eight," he said. "That's the limit. I'll be here this time the day after tomorrow. In two large suitcases—nothing over a fiver—and all old notes, if you don't mind."

"You seem to be an expert at this sort of thing," said Coomber dryly, and Fenton winked and clicked his tongue waggishly.

"Yes," he answered. "But I'll be honest with you. Never a touch as big as this before."

"How do I know you won't come back—again and again?"

"You don't," Fenton told him. "But to put your mind at rest I'll tell you something. The real professional never takes a lot of little bites. He takes one big one, and leaves it alone thereafter. Coming back again and again can have awkward repercussions. People can be driven to do silly things—they sometimes leave notes to coroners and the police."

Fenton smiled genially. "Cheer up, you'll get over it. And now would you mind my using your telephone? I'll need a taxi to get back to the station."

"Tell Garcia to drive you down," Coomber said, and checked the other's ironic thanks with an upraised hand. "Frankly I'd rather have you off the premises than waiting around."

"You wound me," grinned Fenton. "Until Wednesday then."

At the door he turned and waved gaily, but Coomber was staring glumly at the blotting pad in front of him.

On Wednesday the butler admitted him again and showed him straight to the study without question—but it was not Coomber who rose to greet him from the other side of the big desk. This was a tall thin man smartly but not obtrusively dressed in summer tweeds.

Fenton, poker-faced but with warning bells ringing in his head, said, "Sorry, I thought I'd find Mr. Coomber here."

"Come in, come in," said the other affably. "Mr.—er—?"

"Fenton."

"Mr. Fenton. Friend of Mr. Coomber's, are you?"

"We were at school together," said Fenton cautiously.

"I see. So this is purely a social visit?"

"Hardly a visit. I just happened to be passing and I thought I'd take a glass of sherry with him."

The other man took a pipe from his side pocket and blew noisily down the stem before filling it from a worn pouch.

"And not a bad drop of sherry either," he said confidentially. "Imports it specially through Pentonberry and Sons in the City. Does himself well, does our George. Live down these parts, Mr. Findon?"

"Fenton." He felt his confidence returning. The other apologized expansively.

"I don't think I caught *your* name, by the way," Fenton went on pointedly.

"Sorry," said the other. "I talk too damn much, that's my trouble. Wartnaby. Harold Wartnaby." He put out his hand and Fenton shook it perfunctorily. "You say you *do* live down here?"

"I didn't," Fenton said. "I happen to have some business here, that's all." He glanced at his watch. "Well, if Mr. Coomber isn't about, I'd better get on my way." He moved toward the door. "You might tell him I dropped in, will you?"

"Oh, no need to dash off," said Wartnaby.

"I'm afraid I must be the best judge of that," said Fenton with a touch of asperity. "Good morning, Mr. Wartnaby."

"You wouldn't mind telling me what business it is that brings you down today—so hard on the heels of your last visit," Wartnaby said almost wheedlingly.

"I bloody well *would* mind!" exploded Fenton. "I said *good morning.*" And he went to the door quickly—but not quite quickly enough, because Wartnaby, with a speed surprising for one so lankily built, reached the door first.

"Sorry," he said, still apologetically. "I'm afraid I didn't make matters quite clear." And he flashed a leather-bound card complete with photograph under Fenton's nose.

"Superintendent H. Wartnaby, City of London Police," Fenton read.

"Fraud Squad," Wartnaby added in explanation.

Fenton swallowed hard. "I can't see what you want with me," he said in a voice not quite his own.

"Not a thing," Wartnaby reassured him. "*We* only deal with companies—things like that. Very dull most of it. We've got to be lawyers and accountants mixed, and we get paid as coppers. No, actually I came down to arrest old Coomber. Shouldn't be telling you this, of course, but the papers will be full of it before the evening."

"Arrest *Coomber*?" Fenton gawped at him. "What the hell for?"

"Can't tell you that, of course," Wartnaby said. *"Sub judice.* We didn't expect him to light out for the palms and sunshine for at least a week, but something seemed to have scared him—probably you—and he was off in that lovely big white boat of his yesterday—off like an Apollo rocket to the moon."

The Superintendent turned and looked out of the window as the sound of an approaching car came to them. "Ah, here's the local

boys," he said with some relief. "You've got to watch it on a job like this. They don't like outsiders horning in, and my warrant only covers Coomber."

"Then you won't be wanting me," said Fenton, and started once more for the door.

"No, but *he* will," said Wartnaby as a large and rather bucolic man entered. "Inspector Blythe of the local force." He grinned and opened the big cigarette box on the desk. There was a slight scratching noise, then with awful clarity came a voice that Fenton instantly recognized as Coomber's.

"What do you want of me?"

"Fifty thousand pounds," he heard himself answering.

"That's blackmail," said Coomber's voice.

There was a shout of laughter followed by his own voice again: *"For a flat categorical statement of the obvious—"*

Wartnaby switched it off. "The whole lot's inside this thing," he said, with some admiration. "Bugged you, he did. Bugged you blind."

Some half-forgotten fragment of crooks' law came to Fenton, and he blustered, "You've got nothing on me. You can't convict on tape-recorded evidence alone."

"And he's right, you know, Inspector," said Wartnaby with the air of a father showing off a smart child.

"Yeah," said Inspector Blythe. "But you ought to hear what Mr. Coomber's been saying about him down at the station. He'll back the tape all right—it was Coomber first told us about it. Stinking angry he is, too."

"Wouldn't *you* be?" Wartnaby asked. "Million and a half in the bag, four busted companies behind you, everything set for a leisurely flit in your own time—then some jerk comes along with a false alarm and makes you jump the gun ahead of your schedule. Enough to make a saint spit."

"You said he'd gone," Fenton gasped.

"I said he'd pushed off in his lovely big white boat," Wartnaby corrected gently. "He did, but he ran out of fuel a few miles out, and the coast guard brought him back this morning. Seems like somebody had been monkeying about with his tanks. None of your boys been behaving illegally, I hope, Inspector?"

Inspector Blythe looked coy, then took Fenton by the arm. "Quite apart from Mr. Wartnaby's bit of business with Mr. Coomber, I'm arresting you on a charge of attempted blackmail," he said. "And it's my duty to warn you that anything you say will be taken down in writing and may be given in evidence at a time and place appropriate in the future."

"All right," said Fenton viciously. "I might get five years—*if* it sticks—but I still wouldn't swap mine for his. Hanging's still on the books in India."

"Oh, *that?*" smiled Wartnaby. "He was just stringing you along to stall for time, I'm afraid. He's in the clear. They got the fellow who did it. A former boy friend by the name of Braganza. You didn't read *far* enough in those papers, Mr. Fenton. Take him away, Inspector—and congratulations. Makes quite a change from chicken stealing, doesn't it?"

Inspector Blythe said something decidedly uncomplimentary under his breath.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Eden, Matthew	FLIGHT OF HAWKS	Abelard-Schuman	$ 5.95	11/23
Heyer, Georgette	NO WIND OF BLAME	E. P. Dutton	4.95	11/5
Queen, Ellery (Editor)	ELLERY QUEEN'S THE GOLDEN 13, PART I	World Publishing	6.95	11/15

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Buchan, John	THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS	Popular Library	.60	11/17
Procter, Maurice	EXERCISE HOODWINK	Popular Library	.60	11/3
Procter, Maurice	HIDEAWAY	Popular Library	.60	11/3
Procter, Maurice	HIS WEIGHT IN GOLD	Popular Library	.60	11/3
Procter, Maurice	ROGUE RUNNING	Popular Library	.60	11/3

Titles and Data Supplied by the Publishers

"After all, what's a mother for, if it isn't to take care of her boys?"

HOUSE CALL

by ELSIN ANN GARDNER

SHE DIALED THE NUMBER AND waited. Two rings, three—maybe he wasn't in on a Saturday, maybe—

"Hello? Dr. Reed? This is Joe's mother, Mrs. Forte. Yes. Well, please, you've *got* to come over and see my Joe! He looks awful bad and I'm so worried. What? Oh, no, he can't come to your office. He's—he don't look good at all. You can come here, maybe? You will? In a half hour? Oh, thank you, thank you so much, Doctor!"

She hung up the telephone slowly and smoothed back stray strands of gray hair. Her fingers were gnarled, but strong and muscular from forty years of taking care of her boys. Her boys. There had been five of them once, but now all she had left with her was her Joe. A good boy, he was; nothing bad would ever happen to her Joe. That's why she had to make the doctor come to her home, had to get everything taken care of.

She tiptoed down the hall to Joe's bedroom and carefully opened the door. He was sitting on the edge of the bed, his body rigid and his face as vacant as it had been the last five times she'd looked in on him.

"Joe?" she whispered.

He didn't look at her.

"Joe, everything will be all right. You wait and see. I'll take care of you."

Closing the door as softly as she had opened it, she looked at the hands of the old clock in the hall. Twenty-five minutes to wait. She'd go crazy just sitting, waiting—

Going into the living room she picked up her knitting and began to work on the sweater she'd started the week before. A bright shade of blue, it was Joe's favorite color. He'd be real surprised when he saw it.

"Oh, Ma," he'd say, "you shouldn't have gone to all that trouble for me!"

But he'd slip it over his head and grin at her like a little boy. Yes, her Joe would be pleased with the sweater. It was worth the pain from the arthritis in her

fingers to make her boy happy. After all, what's a mother *for*, if it isn't to take care of her boys?

She dropped the yarn when the doorbell rang and went to the door. Peeking around the side of the curtain, she was relieved to see the doctor standing there.

"Dr. Reed, oh, thank you so much for coming over so quick. I'm so grateful—"

He brushed past her and strode into the hall.

"That's all right, Mrs. Forte. Where is he?"

"What?"

"Joe. Where is he?"

"Oh. Well, if you could—if we could just talk for a bit first, in the kitchen, maybe?"

He sighed impatiently.

"I really haven't too much time, Mrs. Forte. It *is* Saturday afternoon, you know, and my office hours were supposed to be over an hour ago."

"Please, Doctor?"

She stood there, her eyes pleading, and when she turned and went ahead of him into the kitchen he shrugged and followed her.

"A cup of coffee for you, Doctor?"

"No, I—"

"Ah, coffee for the good doctor. No matter how rich and important he gets, he still comes to our house to take care of us. For the good doctor a nice cup of coffee. Here, let me—"

She poured the steaming liquid into one of her two best china cups and pushed it across the table to him.

Sighing again, he picked it up and sipped.

"These old women. These *old women*!" he thought with exasperation. "'A cup of tea? A cup of coffee?' And if you decline their hospitality they get so damned offended."

"Now," he said aloud, "what about Joe?"

"He's in his room, Doctor, just sitting on his bed, staring at nothing. Been like that since he got home last night. He wouldn't talk to me or nothing. Couple of hours ago he sort of came out of it for a few minutes and told me what the matter was, but then he turned his head away. He had tears in his eyes—tears! My Joe!"

She shook her head and closed her eyes with the memory of it.

"You're not drinking your coffee, Doctor," she said then.

"I am. I am. Please go *on*."

"Well, my Joe, he's an important man, really. In this group, you know?"

"No, I don't know." He drank the last of the coffee and started to rise.

"Doctor!"

The tone of her voice startled him, and he sat down.

"The group," she went on,

"they call it 'Our Thing.' "

Ignoring the intent look on the man's face she said. "They—the bosses, they gave Joe a job to do. And he *has* to do it. When they say do something, you do it or else, right?"

"Uh-huh," replied the doctor.

"But my Joe, he's so *sensitive*! He was always the most delicate of my boys."

She smiled "You remember the time when, oh, he was only eight or nine, he fell off his bike and you had to sew up his knee? He fainted, remember? That's how he is, Doctor. A real man, you understand, but so *sensitive*."

Dr. Reed grunted.

"Well, it seems like there's this man around the neighborhood who's been—how did Joe put it?—'horning in on the drug traffic' or something like that. And, see, they told Joe to get rid of him—to kill him, you know. Because they don't like no competition, they don't like that at *all*.

"But my Joe, he just couldn't *do* it. 'Maybe a stranger, Ma,' he said, 'but not—' And he started to cry. Cry! Think of how I felt, his *mother*, when I saw the tears running down his face!"

"Ah," said the doctor.

"This man Joe's supposed to kill, he's a real respected man around here. A doctor . . . Doctor?"

She watched impassively as the doctor slid off the chair and landed on her kitchen floor with a thud.

He hadn't, she noted with relief, broken her china cup in his fall. She picked it up and carried it over to the sink, scoured it and the coffee pot with extra care; then stepping over the doctor she went to her son's room.

"Joe? Joe!"

He turned and looked at her dully.

"What, Ma?"

"It's all taken care of, just like I said. Come into the kitchen and look!"

That's Ma for you. She always takes care of her boys.

a *NEW* story by RON GOULART

A strange story, a very curious one about a fantastically successful cartoonist and a mean-looking Great Dane . . . Can such things be, as Shakespeare said, that "imagination bodies forth / The forms of things unknown"?

THE HAUNTED MAN

by RON GOULART

IT MAY HAVE BEEN WATCHING him for several minutes. He looked up from his drawing board and turned to his right and there it was at the window. It seemed to be gray in the light that fell on it through the studio windows. Rog Fillbaker leaned slowly back, his eyes on the big dog outside. He wiped off his pen on the fresh white rag tacked to the far edge of his drawing board, capped the ink bottle. The big Great Dane lowered its head and the hair on its broad back bristled.

Rog pushed back from his work and stood up. "Go away," he said.

The big dog's head dipped lower and its teeth showed. A wind was blowing across Long Island Sound and a swirl of dead leaves came swooping over the animal's arched back.

Rog rapped on the windowpane with his fist. "Come on, go away. Whoever you belong to."

The Great Dane snarled and began to bark, a harsh rumbling bark. It kept glaring at Rog as it barked.

"This has got to stop," Rog said. "I'm behind on a deadline as it is. Go away and stop bothering me." He strode across the mat-rugged floor and opened the sea-facing door of his studio. "Go home, whoever you are. Come on, no dogs allowed."

The sea wind brushed at Rog, causing him to shiver. The trees were rattling in the wind, dead leaves spinning free. Rog didn't hear the dog now. He glanced at the lights of Bridgeport far across the black night waters, listened to the sound of the surf four hundred feet below him. He

absently buttoned the bottom two buttons of the old green cardigan he liked to work in.

The dog was gone when Rog got around to the side of his shingle three-room studio. Rog squinted, studying the trees that began a few hundred feet away and stretched for several acres. He didn't see the big dog, didn't hear it. He stood outside his window and looked in at his drawing board and at the sheet of drawing paper tacked to it. The drawing was of a big gray Great Dane.

Dr. Zansky relaxed behind his desk and rubbed hand lotion into the palms of his long-fingered windburned hands. "I often think I'd be more comfortable in California," he said.

"What about my problems?" asked Rog from the black leather chair on the other side of the desk. "We always seem to start lately talking about yours."

Dr. Zansky squirted another dab of white hand cream into the palm of his left hand. "Does that bother you, Rog?"

"I don't know." Rog watched the closed Venetian blinds behind the psychiatrist's lean head. "I've been feeling upset. I get this fear that I can't keep up with all the deadlines."

Finishing the inside of his hands, Dr. Zansky started on the backs.

"You know," continued Rog, "because it's quite a responsibility. Drawing one of the most successful cartoon panels in the country. I mean, *Blue* appears in six hundred papers. And we've added a lot of by-products, merchandising, in the last year."

"You ought to hire an assistant."

"No, I don't want anyone else touching *Blue*," said Rog. "Some cartoonists don't care. I do. No. I'm not really complaining about all the work. That's what I love most, the drawing. We just sold TV cartoon rights to *Blue*. Now they'll be animating in Hollywood if the show gets sold. All I'll do is what they call the character sheets. No, the drawing is fun."

"You're happy then?"

Rog said, "Well, no. I don't know." He put his right hand on his knee. "You're probably worried because I took those pills two years ago when I was really depressed about all the tensions I was under. No, but I don't have that kind of impulse any more."

"Good," said Dr. Zansky.

"You know, Dorothy Ann isn't somebody I can much talk to about the cartoon. About *Blue*, I mean. It bores her," said Rog. "That's funny. A lot of guys in CAA—that's the Cartoonists Association of America. I've told you about it before. A lot of the CAA guys, they don't even want to talk about their work with their wives. They'd love Dorothy Ann."

"You don't, though?"

"Sure, I do. She's a lovely girl and intelligent. She's only twenty-seven, too—eight years younger than me. It's just that she doesn't much care for *Blue*. She doesn't even like the old folksong I got his name from. 'Old Blue, he's a good dog, too,' it goes." Rog grinned. "The money that *Blue* makes is okay by her, though. This place we have at Still Harbor. Ten acres of the best Long Island coastline, private beach, ocean front—*Blue* bought all that. He's going to buy a lot more, too. We just licensed the stuffed-toy rights. Do you realize that alone is going to bring in $50,000 a year? Just to me, that's after the newspaper syndicate takes its half and after my business manager takes his twenty percent. $50,000 coming in from stuffed *Blue* toys. Imagine."

"You want me to be impressed?" Dr. Zansky put the top back on the tube of hand lotion.

"No," said Rog. "Well, yes. I suppose so." He paused, bit his lip. "Look, Doctor, I'm not the type to have—"

Dr. Zansky waited, then asked, "Have what?"

"I was thinking of last night," explained Rog. "I was down at my studio. You know, I had a three-room cottage built down at the cliff's edge. Beautiful view of the Sound and peaceful."

"What happened?"

"Nothing really," said Rog. "We've talked about this before. You know, I guess it's funny. I'm drawing this fantastically successful cartoon panel about a dog and I don't really much like dogs. Don't like to have them around me anyway. They make a mess and they're always howling and barking and they want attention at odd times." He grinned. "Well, if you read the panel you know about the trouble a dog can be." He rubbed at his knee again. "I didn't quite think this at the time. But I got to wondering while I was driving into Smithtown today to see you. Last night there was this dog watching me."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I was working late. I have to design some kids' lunch boxes and I was doing the rough sketches and I looked out the window and there was Blue—I mean, there was this big mean-looking Great Dane."

"You thought it was the dog you draw?"

"No, not really," said Rog. "Still, it struck me funny today. I mean, I do draw a cartoon panel about a big mean-looking Great Dane. And there was one staring at me. A coincidence."

"Neighbor's dog?"

"No, I don't think so. We only have one other house up at the end of the road. They're cat people." He grinned. "I mean, they have three ugly Angoras."

"A stray dog then?"

"I guess so."

Dr. Zansky said, "You're worried, though. You think perhaps there was really nothing there at all."

"I saw it, I tell you," said Rog. He put both hands on his knees. "The pressures of *Blue* and his success, Doctor, are r e a l l y something. Well, no, I can't look you in the eye and tell you I'm one hundred percent certain that damn dog was actually out there."

The psychiatrist said, "It's not always necessary to be one hundred percent sure of everything, Rog." He touched a small alarm clock which sat on the desk facing him. "We'll talk about it again on Friday if you'd like. Time's up for today."

"This is Wednesday," said Rog. "I guess I can make it through Friday without letting a dog, real or otherwise, bother me t o o much."

It scratched on the door of the shower stall and barked once. Rog swung a hand for the door handle. He slipped on the slick tile and went down, cracking his knee and elbow. Hot water needled at his head and dug into his eyes. He made a blubbering exhalation, got up gingerly, and opened the rippled-glass stall door.

There was no sign of the dog.

Not bothering to dry himself, Rog grabbed a yellow terrycloth robe and went rushing barefoot across the long narrow cottage bathroom.

It was twilight now and the air was still. There was a sharp clear feel to everything outside. Rog hurried out of the studio and onto the gravel path that led away from the door. A dozen yards from the rim of the path was the edge of the hillside. Straight below were the big tan and gray rocks and then the small strip of beach, tan sand freckled with bright pebbles.

Shivering, Rog stood on his path and listened. He heard the dog going away. Over in the woods leaves crunched a n d branches rattled. Rog followed the noise. The light was thinning and a sharp clear darkness came flowing into the forest, blacking in the spaces between the stiff trees. Rog ran for several minutes, then stopped. He heard nothing now and turned back.

He brought in fresh clothes and stood in front of the small real fireplace to dress. He didn't keep anything but beer down here in the studio. Walking into the small kitchen alcove he opened the refrigerator and took out a can. Sitting on the black leather sofa he pulled open the beer, took a sip, watched the kindling in the fireplace burn away as the two stubby logs took fire.

Rog picked up the phone and dialed.

"Hello," answered a girl's voice after five rings.

"Hi, Bobbi."

"Oh, Rog. Hello."

"Home tonight?"

"Yes, but I thought you had a deadline to meet."

"I always do. But I feel like seeing you."

"I'd like that. How about her, though?"

"She's out somewhere. She's not even up at the main house. Some kind of concert at Stony Brook, I think. I'll be over in about fifteen minutes."

"Good, fine. Rog, you sound down or something."

"I'm being haunted, but outside of that I'm in great shape." He hung up.

Dr. Zansky still had his muffler and gloves on. A harsh wind was rattling the decorative shutters outside his office windows. "California, here I come," he muttered as he unwound the red-striped muffler.

"See?" Rog slouched deeper in the patient's chair. "You're always talking about your problems."

The psychiatrist slid off one fleece-lined glove. "How are yours?"

"Why'd you settle on Long Island if the cold bothers you so much?"

"I was born here."

"Well, I'm still seeing the dog."

"Blue?"

"I guess you can call him that. He's big and dumb enough looking."

Keeping one glove on, Dr. Zansky rubbed at his wind-red cheeks. "When did you see him?"

"Last night again," said Rog. "He came right inside the cottage and tried to get me."

"He tried to get you how?"

"Well, I guess I'm exaggerating. He scratched at the stall-shower door while I was taking a shower. See, I have this rippled-glass door and you can't see out of it very well. All I know is all of a sudden there was old Blue scratching on the glass. I mean, I saw this gray eminence out there."

"You suspect he meant you no good?"

"Yes. I don't like dogs and they don't like me." Rog grinned. "Here I'm earning—what did Moe say? A million bucks a year. All because of *Blue*—and I don't like dogs."

"Moe is your business manager?"

"Yes, Moe Albers. I've told you about him. Big handsome guy. I think he's got a crush on Dorothy Ann."

"Your wife?"

"You don't remember anything today, do you? And why don't you take off that other glove?"

Dr. Zansky frowned at his hand, then removed the glove. "What did you do?"

"About Moe Albers being in-

terested in my wife? I stopped inviting him to our cocktail parties. Not that we have many of those any more. Too much work to do." Rog rubbed at his knee.

"What did you do when the dog came into your house?"

"Not the house. The studio," corrected Rog. "Dorothy Ann was out at some concert or other and I was down at my studio. We just recently signed a contract for a series of *Blue* cocktail napkins and I was going to work on the rough sketches. I have my own bath and shower down there. I never did get around to the damn napkins."

"Why?"

"I chased the dog, this big ugly Great Dane. Lost him in the woods," explained Rog. "So I didn't feel much like working, so I called Bobbi."

"Bobbi Perregrin, the young girl who used to work for your newspaper syndicate in New York."

"Her you remember, huh? Yes, that Bobbi. She's doing graduate work at Stony Brook College now. Yes, I went over to see her." He paused, rubbed at his knee. "I guess the last time I mentioned Bobbi I told you I'd resolved not to keep on seeing her. The thing is, I can relax with Bobbi. She's intelligent but she's no cartoon buff. I can relax with her and forget deadlines."

"Not like Dorothy Ann?"

"Okay, I was complaining about my wife not caring about my work. A wife is different. She should be interested in your career. A mistress it doesn't matter."

Dr. Zansky asked, "What do you think about the dog? Is he real?"

Rog nodded. "I'm sure he is."

Rog dozed off and the dog came back. To the window again. It scratched with its big paws and then barked. Rog jumped awake off his studio sofa. He ran to the window. The angry Great Dane growled at him, then barked again. It snarled, turned, and ran.

Rog was still dressed. He picked up his flashlight and headed outside. The night was clear. It must have been about 3:00 A.M. Rog came around the side of the studio, swinging the beam of the light.

The dog was gone, but in the soft ground beneath the window Rog saw a paw print. Deep and distinct. He hurried back into his studio, tore off a sheet of sketch paper, and put it on top of the paw print. He weighted the paper with four small rocks, one at each corner.

The dog didn't bother him any more that night and Rog was able to get almost four hours of sleep. He was spending most of his time in the studio now. He and Dorothy Ann seemed to argue

when they were together and Rog decided to stay out here as much as possible. He knew if he could once get caught up on all the deadlines he'd be able to relax more.

When he went out to examine the paw print by daylight it wasn't there. The sheet of paper was still in place, the four small rocks on the corners. But underneath he found only loose earth.

Rog was smiling on his Friday visit to Dr. Zansky a week later. The wind outside was blowing thirty miles an hour and the temperature was barely in the forties. Dr. Zansky was wearing earmuffs.

"Take those off and listen to me," said Rog. "I have some things to tell you."

Dr. Zansky was rubbing his hands together. He unfastened the earmuffs, saying, "Good. I have something to tell you."

"Later, later." Rog sat down in the chair. "I've got it all figured out, Doctor."

Dr. Zansky hooked the earmuffs around his alarm clock and nodded.

"Now," said Rog, "I have to admit this dog has been annoying me. More than annoying, since I haven't been getting much sleep. I've been seeing Bobbi more again lately, too. Drinking a little more, too, but mostly beer. You know, when I used to drink before, I'd call people on the phone. I have to admit I've been doing a little of that again. Calling people. You know, friends, guys I know in the cartoon business, and so on. I complained to them about this damn dog haunting me. I admit all that."

"Still, you seem happy today."

"Because I think I've figured things out," said Rog. "Not that it's terrific news I guess, but still it's nice to know I'm not having delusions or hallucinations or something."

"Yes?"

"I was talking to an artist I know and he asked if I was looking for an assistant. You know, somebody to help me with *Blue*. Of course, as I've explained, I have to do it all myself. The point is, this guy says he heard that Moe Albers has been quietly looking for somebody who can work in my style."

"You didn't ask your business manager to do this?"

"Of course not," said Rog. "I think Moe is planning to get himself more than twenty percent of *Blue*."

"How exactly?"

"Wait. Another friend of mine teaches at Stony Brook College," said Rog. "He's been attending this series of concerts that Dorothy Ann claims she's going to faithfully. I mentioned this and he says she's never been there."

"He might have missed her in the crowd."

"What crowd? There's never more than fifty people at any one concert. It's baroque music or something."

"So you suspect Moe Albers and your wife are seeing each other?"

"Well, yes. That would explain things."

"How so?"

"Okay," said Rog, leaning toward the psychiatrist. "You know my history. A suicide attempt three years ago, a couple of near breakdowns. The small drinking problem and so on. Then I've even started calling up people and telling them I'm being haunted by a dog. Not any dog, mind you, but the very dog I'm drawing in my panel. You see it?"

"You tell me."

"Well, Dorothy Ann and Moe Albers could make a million a year off *Blue* whether I draw it or not," said Rog. "See, I actually own the feature. I was in a good position when I signed my contracts and I, actually Moe and I, got the syndicate to let me hold on to my rights. So if I were locked up somewhere, say if I were committed to an institution, Dorothy Ann would own *Blue*. There'd be just her and Moe Albers and my syndicate to share all the income and profits and royalties."

"You've been worried about this before, Rog."

"Granted," he said, "which is probably what gave them the idea."

"It's not that easy to put someone in an institution."

"They could do it," said Rog. "I mean, I've been cooperating. Telling people Blue has come to life and is bothering me, haunting me. Let's say I think they could do it. Toss me into a nice quiet rubber room somewhere and have fun with my million a year."

Dr. Zansky said, "You feel you don't really deserve all that money, don't you, Rog? You're afraid someone will come along and take it away."

"Yes, well, that's a possibility," said Rog. "Look, though, Doctor. Moe Albers has all sorts of professional contacts. In publishing, television, show business. It would have been easy for him to get hold of a trained dog and use it to try to spook me. That dog isn't coming around just on a whim. Someone is ordering him, someone is removing all traces of him afterwards." He sank back in the chair. "I don't know. Maybe I am worrying too much. Obviously you're not going to let anybody commit me. Because you know the facts."

"I have something to tell you, Rog. I alluded to it earlier. I'm afraid this will have to be our last session."

"How come?"

"I've been hired to take over

a teaching assignment in California," said the psychiatrist. "Where it's warm the whole year round."

"That's good for you," said Rog. "Only I wasn't expecting it."

"A very quick decision had to be made," said Dr. Zansky. "I'm sure someone, perhaps my colleague Dr. Estling, will be happy to work with you. I've talked to him and he has a free hour."

"Well, okay," said Rog. "Now how does what I've said about the dog and their plan to frame me sound?"

"Far-fetched," said Dr. Zansky.

Biting at a thumb knuckle, Rog stood up and left his drawing board. Nothing he had drawn in the last hour looked funny. He was already three days' overdue on the weekly panels. He rubbed at his chin with the thumb. Snatching a mackinaw from his sofa he left the studio and walked toward the woods.

The night was warmer than usual and there was only a faint breeze coming up across the sea. Rog left the trees and walked along the cliff's edge. Across the water Connecticut was only a few tiny lights flickering.

"Maybe Dr. Zansky was right," Rog said half aloud. "That's what's bothering me, I guess."

He put his hands in the pockets of his work slacks and stopped strolling. "Yes, it probably would be difficult for them to have me put away somewhere. There'd have to be all kinds of legal proceedings probably, hearings and stuff. Even now that Dr. Zansky's gone, probably someone would be brought in to take my part. And my lawyers would fight for me, to keep me out."

Rog bit his thumb again. "But I know I'm right. I know Moe and Dorothy Ann are behind this. They're trying to pressure me, unsettle me. They're trying to make it look as though I'm having a nervous breakdown."

He dropped his hand back into his pocket. The surf far below was hissing, foaming in white across the pebbled sand. "If they don't want to get me committed, what could they be after? How else could they get that million bucks a year?"

He blinked, inhaled. "Of course," he said slowly. "Everyone knows I tried to kill myself once. So all they have to do is kill me and make it look like suicide. That's much simpler. Well, they won't get away with that now."

He took his hands out of his pockets and rubbed them together. As he gave a relieved sigh and smiled at the dark ocean

We interrupt this story just before the end of its final sentence, and give you three variations of the ending:

ENDING NUMBER ONE:
As he gave a relieved sigh and smiled at the dark ocean, a mean-looking Great Dane came bounding out of the woods and with one quick leap pushed Rog over the edge of the cliff.

ENDING NUMBER TWO:
As he gave a relieved sigh and smiled at the dark ocean, Blue came bounding out of the woods and with one quick leap pushed Rog over the edge of the cliff.

ENDING NUMBER THREE:
As he gave a relieved sigh and smiled at the dark ocean, *Blue* came bounding out of the woods and with one quick leap pushed Rog over the edge of the cliff.

Which ending do you prefer? Each one gives a subtly different meaning to the story. (Your Editors prefer ENDING NUMBER THREE — a choice that may surprise you . . .)

ENTERTAINING
RATIOCINATION

IN A PASTICHE
FOR
DEVOTEES

Another pastiche, in the purest tradition, of E. A. Poe and the Chevalier Dupin . . . a tale of murder most foul, an alibi, and a clue—a clue which, to the best of our knowledge and recollection, has never been used before, yet is peculiarly of the Poe period and paradoxically (on two counts), timeless—a clue that can only be described as "classic" . . .

MURDER IN THE RUE ST. ANDRE DES ARTS

another "hitherto unpublished" tale of C. Auguste Dupin

by MICHAEL HARRISON

ON A BRIGHT JUNE MORNING in the year 183—, Monsieur Hippolyte de St. Dizier, dealer in *objets d'art* and (so it was said) banker *sub rosâ* to some members of France's highest, was found dead in his shabby apartment, No. 14 Rue St. André des Arts. His throat had been cut from ear to ear.

Though the room in which this atrocious deed had been perpetrated exhibited no such appalling disorder as that, for instance, we once encountered in the Rue Morgue, every drawer in Monsieur de St. Dizier's bedchamber had been opened and turned over, every strong-box forced. It seemed plain, at first sight, that robbery had been the prime motive of the villain who had invaded the dead man's apartment.

The discovery of the murder had been made by Madame Laffont, *bonne-à-tout-faire*, who customarily awakened Monsieur de St. Dizier at about 7:30 A.M. It was the hysterical screams of Madame Laffont which had roused the house to an awareness of a peculiarly heinous crime.

At times of violent social unrest, such as had lately convulsed France, the ordinary activities of the police strike the normal individual as business somewhat at variance with (if not exactly opposed to) those forces which are threatening to overturn the whole social order. The man in the street feels, at such times, an astonishment that the police can concern themselves with such *trivial* affairs as larceny, burglary, fraud, and even murder, while the State rocks ominously on its foundations.

Indeed, I said as much to G——, when the Prefect of the Parisian police called on us, at our mansion, No. 33 Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain, to sketch for us the antecedents of the late Monsieur de St. Dizier.

"I have heard that argument—that protest—before," said G. "But what would you have us do? Sit idle in the face of crime—simply because the State is in a turmoil? Believe me, there is more crime at a time of social crisis than at any other: the police, at such epochs, have *more* to do, not *less*. Besides," he added, in a careless manner, "crime and the police stay, whoever—or whatever—may depart. *The King is dead, long live the King!* So say our friends the English, and there at least I agree with them!

"But, my dear sir, in this case I do not have to defend my bringing you a simple matter of murder, even though one King is in England and another most insecurely on the throne of France. If this is not what we at the Rue de Jérusalem call a 'political' murder, it nevertheless promises results whose repercussions could more than merely embarrass certain exalted personages. My dear Chevalier," he added, addressing himself to my friend, the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, "I can assure you that grave political considerations—no less!—have brought me here. I am not so much concerned with the death of Monsieur de St. Dizier; I am deeply concerned with something which was among the jewels taken by the felon who murdered him."

"And what," murmured Dupin, "is this object of such interest that its theft might involve His Majesty in an embarrassing *contretemps?*"

"Let me say this, Chevalier," said G——, obviously nettled by my friend's bantering tone. "Were Messrs. Christie of London to of-

fer this—this *object*—at auction, there would be a scandal of such proportions that even the affair of the Queen's Necklace would pale into insignificance beside it."

"Indeed! And what, pray, is this object?"

"The Jewel of Lothaire, my dear Dupin!"

"Diable!" cried Dupin, almost springing from his fauteuil in his agitation. "This Monsieur de St. Dizier accepted it in pledge, I take it, for a loan? Just so. But the Jewel of Lothaire! Of all the dangerous indiscretions! To pledge a treasure from the ancient Regalia of France! I take it, G——, that it was the Duke of —"

"Mention no names, I beg of you!" said the Prefect fearfully.

"—who made this most foolish of all foolish gifts?" continued Dupin gravely.

"Exactly. And, of course, to the Baroness—you know who—to whom his Excellency can refuse nothing. But now that you know the essential fact of this distressing affair, may I count upon your assistance, Dupin?"

"You may indeed, my dear *Préfet,"* said Dupin, strangely moved; but now, pray, tell us all that you know of the affair of Monsieur de St. Dizier's murder."

Monsieur de St. Dizier, a widower, aged about 60, rented a large but shabby apartment in the Rue St. André des Arts, not far from his curiosity shop in the Rue de l'Université, which was also the office at which he transacted his business with his aristocratic but impecunious patrons. The *success* of his business, G—— pointed out, rested in the fact that he was prepared to lend money on securities which ought never to have been offered in pledge.

"Unlike the owner of an ordinary *mont-de-piété,"* said G——, "Monsieur de St. Dizier never had unredeemed pledges left on his hands. He lent money on certain valuables, knowing well that the owners would make every effort to avoid the objects going on public sale. Oh, yes, my dear Chevalier, there was not a little of the blackmailer in our late unlamented — and unlicensed — pawnbroker."

"Do you suspect any one of these *aristocratic* clients of having done away with him?"

"It is a possibility that I have to consider, of course. But there is a suspect so much nearer to hand, so much more likely, so—as you say—excessively *obvious,* that I would greatly prefer to eliminate him from the affair before turning my attention to the inhabitants of the Royal palaces."

"You do not suspect Madame Laffont, the *bonne-à-tout-faire,* of any complicity?"

"None whatever. The *natural*

suspect, if I may use the term, is a step-son, Jules Rocquet, who shared the apartment with the deceased. To be honest with you, Dupin, we have really nothing against him, save that he was—and knew himself to be—his step-father's sole heir; that he is a *bon vivant* and up to his eyes in the wrong kind of debt; and that, like Monsieur de St. Dizier himself, a certain air of—how shall I express it?—sharp practice seems always to hang about him.

"But, so far, we have only suspicion to connect him with the crime. One would say that he certainly had motive—whoever robbed the dead man collected millions; and, in any case, his death leaves this Jules Rocquet rich. One would say that he had the means—there is a razor in every man's bedroom or dressing-room. But—ah!—when we come to opportunity—"

"Very well, then," asked Dupin, from the thick cloud of Latakia that he was puffing from his meerschaum pipe, "what happens when we come, as you invite us, to opportunity?"

"He had none!" said G——, laying his finger along his nose in that vulgar manner which was so much his own.

"An alibi? They may be broken."

"Not this one."

"An unimpeachable witness?"

"The *most* unimpeachable."

"How so?"

"An *agent-de-ville.*"

"Even *agents-de-ville* may be corrupted."

"Not this *agent.* I know him well. Besides, there are several—perhaps I should say many—other witnesses, who can account for the young man's time, for every minute of the period during which the old man must have been killed."

"Indeed!" said Dupin, puffing away at his meerschaum, and quite concealing himself in the dense cloud of smoke that the pipe was emitting. "And when must the old man have been killed?"

"Between eight o'clock at night—that is to say, last night—and half-past seven this morning, when Madame Laffont discovered that her employer was no longer in the land of the living."

"What makes you so certain that he was not murdered before eight P.M. last night?"

"Because, my dear Dupin, he was known to be alive at that time."

"How?"

"He was seen to light a lamp—a lamp which stands in the window of his sleeping-chamber. It was this lamp—or, rather, the lighting of this lamp—that my *agent* saw. And, as he was, at that moment, conversing with the

step-son, Rocquet, we have two essential items of evidence: *imprimis,* that Monsieur de St. Dizier was alive at eight P.M., and, *secundo,* that the step-son, Rocquet, was not in the murder room."

"But he could have gone there later?"

"No, Dupin. Let me explain. From where my *agent* was standing when he saw the lamp lit, it is possible to see the back windows of Number 14 Rue St. André des Arts. At night these windows are closed by interior wooden shutters, themselves secured by the customary iron bars. Now, in one of these interior wooden shutters, a small hole—only about the size of a 12-sol piece—has been cut. I shall explain why.

"On shutting up shop in the Rue de l'Université, Monsieur de St. Dizier was wont to go to a small but respectable café in the Rue Gillaume, and there to eat his modest dinner. After dinner he would walk on home, perhaps stopping to take a tisane or a sirop at another small café nearer to his apartment. And so home.

"By arrangement with my *agent,* to whom Monsieur de St. Dizier paid a small but regular gratuity for his services, Monsieur de St. Dizier signaled to this *agent* that all was well by lighting a lamp which stood on a table by a back window, so that the light of the lamp showed through the hole in the shutter. When my *agent,* who kept, you may be sure, an eye upon this back window, saw the light go on, he knew that Monsieur de St. Dizier had arrived home for the night, and —so long as the lamp continued to shine through the hole in the shutter—my *agent* was satisfied that all was well in Monsieur de St. Dizier's apartment."

"Even for a clod of a Parisian *agent-de-ville,*" said Dupin coolly, "your man seems to have been pretty easily satisfied. Have you not told me that the unfortunate Monsieur de St. Dizier had his throat cut from ear to ear?"

"Unfortunately, that is so."

"Despite the regular and normal lighting of the lamp in the window?"

"Despite that. But, still, even if the lighting of the lamp in no way insured Monsieur de St. Dizier's protection, at least it proved that the step-son was in no way involved in the murder."

"He could have had an accomplice."

"True. But his alibi for himself is one that we must accept."

"We shall see. Does this alibi prove that Monsieur Jules Rocquet was not in the apartment when the old man's throat was cut?"

"It seems undeniable. Customarily, Rocquet, as I told you, lodges with his step-father. But last night—the night of the

murder, that is to say—he did not visit Number 14 Rue St. André des Arts."

"Indeed. And where, pray, was this otherwise estimable young man?"

"With a *midinette,* with whom he maintains an irregular connection. Apart from this, she is of good reputation—hardworking, serious, sober, and respected by her neighbors and the local tradesmen. Now, on leaving the café in front of which he talked with my *agent,* at the very moment the lamp went on in the upper window, Rocquet went straight to his mistress's apartment in the Rue Mazarine, and I for one am prepared to accept her statement, on oath, that, from the time that Rocquet entered her apartment at about eight thirty P.M. to eight A.M. this morning—when he left her—he was nowhere else than in her apartment in the Rue Mazarine."

"You have considered that the Rue Mazarine is not far from the Rue St. André des Arts? Could he not have slipped out, while the young person was attending to her toilet?"

"No. She has been questioned by the Examining Magistrate. It is certain that Rocquet was with her, as she says. One knows when one is getting the truth in these matters—I mean to say, getting the truth from an honest, inexperienced young person. The alibi will be exceedingly hard to disprove, Dupin."

"This Rocquet left her apartment at about eight o'clock this morning, you say? How does it come about that the young person was not at her place of business? This looks remarkably like something meticulously arranged so as to provide Monsieur Rocquet with the alibi of which he stood in need."

"Perhaps—but not on her part. The *midinettes* have a holiday today—though I am not forgetting that Rocquet knew of this and profited by that knowledge."

"Just so," said Dupin, reaching out for the large pewter pot in which he kept his Latakia; "just so. Now, to return for a moment to this alibi: it would please me to run over it with you in a little more detail.

"At almost precisely eight P.M. last night, Rocquet is sitting outside a café—"

"The Café de l'Empereur Julien."

"Just so. He engages in conversation one of your *agents*—the one whose duty it is to look up at the back windows of Number 14 Rue St. André des Arts and watch for the appearance of Monsieur de St. Dizier's lamp-signal—for I think that we may call it that. Very well then: we certainly know where the young man was at eight o'clock—at the time, indeed, when his step-

father's lamp began to shine through the hole in the shutter.

"But, nevertheless, the Café de l'Empereur Julien is only a few minutes' walk, for an active young man, from the Rue Mazarine. His friend, the *midinette,* says that he arrived at her apartment at about eight thirty P.M. Can she be more exact than that?"

"She has no need to be. We have traced Rocquet's movements from the moment that he said good-night to our *agent,* paid his bill, and began to walk off in the direction of the Rue Mazarine. The waiter remembers his remarking: 'Ah, well, the old gentleman's come in—there's his light. So I'll just toddle off and see to my own affairs.' He winked here, to let the waiter know that he had made a pun in rather bad taste."

"And doubtless so that the waiter would better remember the conversation! But you say that you have traced his movements from the café to the young person's apartment?"

"Yes," said G—— drily. "He volunteered with the utmost candor to recall his movements: a stop at the *tabac,* for some cigars and a box of Congreves—and a chat about the proposed new boulevard nearby; a stop at the cobbler's, to inquire after some repairs to his best boots; another stop at a café, for a *fine a l'eau;* and—but why should I further trouble you? We are most exact in these matters, Dupin, as you know. I have checked and checked again—there are dozens of witnesses to the truth of his statement. This is a first-class alibi, Dupin."

"From a connoisseur of such things," replied my friend, with a smile, "that is high praise. And now, what of Monsieur de St. Dizier? What of his movements? Have you checked *them* with the same meticulous care?"

"The movements of Monsieur de St. Dizier? But—but—we know what he did, what he always did. From the shop to his dinner; from his dinner to another café for a tisane or sirop; from there to his apartment, where he lit the lamp for my *agent* to see. What on earth is there to check?"

"Nevertheless," said Dupin imperturbably, "I consider it essential that you check the movements of the dead man with the same care that you checked the movements of the living. Now, let us visit the scene of the crime. But, one thought: if this Rocquet is indeed the heir-in-law to his stepfather's estate, he—assuming that he is the murderer—should not have taken away the money which, *now that his step-father was dead,* belonged to him. The law may now be unable to pass it over to him, and the law, equally, will wish to know where his wealth has come from, should

he imprudently begin to pay off creditors."

"He had to create this imaginary burglar—this murderous burglar—and burglars," said G—— sarcastically, "break in to steal."

"They are often frightened off before they have found what they came for. But—ah, the Jewel of Lothaire! Blackmail! The young man would not need the other wealth if he could so easily grow rich on what the Jewel would yield! You are right, G——. This is grave indeed. All seals have been placed on the apartment in the Rue St. André des Arts by the Justice of the Peace? Just so. Well, then, let us see what the sleeping-chamber of the dead man may tell us."

But a few minutes sufficed to cover the distance between our little back library or book-closet, *au-troisième,* and the gloomy, time-eaten house in which Monsieur de St. Dizier had met his death.

On our arrival in the courtyard of this ill-omened house, G—— ordered a waiting *agent* to proceed to the office of the Justice of the Peace, so that functionary might return quickly to break his own official seals.

As we were awaiting the Justice of the Peace, Dupin expressed a wish that Madame Laffont be summoned. The son of the concierge was sent off post-haste to fetch the *bonne-à-tout-faire.*

As it happened, the Justice of the Peace, Maître Cordet, and Madame Laffont arrive together.

"Before we enter the apartment," said Dupin, "I wish to ask Madame Laffont if she dusted the room in which Monsieur de St. Dizier was found dead? That is, did Madame Laffont dust it *after* her employer was killed?"

"No, sir," said the woman, in a shaking voice. "I was so distressed that I"—and here she burst into violent weeping. "I'm sure that I have always done my work well, but—"

"There, there, my good woman!" Dupin consoled her. "No one doubts your diligence. But since these rooms have not been tidied since Monsieur de St. Dizier's death, I must request that nothing be touched until after I shall have inspected the entire apartment. Is that clearly understood?"

"I am happy," said Maître Cordet gravely, "to be guided in these matters by Monsieur le Chevalier Dupin."

On that concordant note we entered the apartment.

Though the shutters—of the solid type known as *volets*—were still fastened inside the three windows of the large sleeping-chamber, sufficient light came through the open door so that we might distinguish clearly what

remained in the room of death.

But, after a hasty inspection of the shutters which had no lamp before them, Dupin gestured to G—— to order one of his *agents* to fold back these pairs of shutters. This was done, and the room of a sudden was filled with the sunshine of a bright Parisian day.

Dupin now walked over to the single still-shuttered window. Through a small hole, drilled at a height some four inches above the lower edge of the shutter, a pencil of brilliant light poured, illuminating a brass lamp, with a shade of green glass, which stood immediately before, but at a distance of some ten inches from, the hole in the shutter. The small table, on which the lamp rested, bore also the necessaries for lighting and trimming the lamp.

Without turning, Dupin asked, "Madame Laffont, was this lamp still burning when you arrived this morning, with Monsieur de St. Dizier's coffee?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was this as usual?"

"Yes, sir. The lamp was always burning when I got here. Since Monsieur de St. Dizier always drew the heavy curtains of his bed before going to sleep, the light did not worry him."

There was a slight flush upon Dupin's cheek, and his dark eyes sparkled with the excitement of the *chase* that I had come to know so well during the years we had shared our mansion in the Rue Dunôt. He said, "And you have touched nothing on this table, Madame Laffont?"

"Nothing, your Excellency, I swear it!"

"I am happy to believe it. Madame Laffont, you know well, I am sure, the inhabitants of this *arrondissement?* Could we have, I wonder, the services of an artist? Does one live nearby?"

"Monsieur Catulle Mahé, sir, lives above us here—*au sixiéme*. Do you wish me to fetch him down, sir? I know the gentleman quite well."

"Excellent. Yes, pray ask him to be so good as to come down here—and to bring with him his ox-gall fixative and insufflator."

As Madame Laffont departed on her errand, Dupin motioned to G—— to draw near to the lamp-bearing table. As the Prefect of the Parisian Police bent over the table's polished but dusty surface, Dupin murmured, "We may well thank Providence for the bright sunshine of today! Had the day been gloomy, we might have missed what is now clearly to be seen." He pointed to the space between the lamp and window. "What do you see, *Monsieur le Préfet?*"

"A circular patch in the dust. Something has been standing here—that is evident," said G——. "Something was standing

here which has been moved. See, the dust is not so thick on this circular patch as it is all around. But what could it have been? Dupin"—dropping his voice to what is called a "stage whisper" and looking conspiratorially around—"could there have been some mechanical or chemical or electrical device used to light the lamp at a pre-determined time?"

Dupin, smiling, shook his head as he reached into his coat-skirts and drew out a pair of calipers. Silently he measured the diameter of the circular patch.

"Just over ten centimeters," he murmured. "And something fairly light. See how the object—whatever it was—has left no indentation in this soft wood. Even so, the object was put down carefully, and as gently removed. Well, we shall see. And —hello!—this must be Monsieur Catulle Mahé!"

It was the *artiste-peintre,* who had evidently been summoned while sleeping rather than painting. His shaggy hair was uncombed, and he had not shaved; but his eye was alert, and he instantly agreed to "fix" the dust-free circle on the table with the ox-gall with which artists "fix" pastel drawings.

Taking a tinned-iron "spray" from the pocket of his baggy velvet pantaloons, Monsieur Mahé uncorked the bottle of ox-gall, and, putting the thin tube of the spray into the open bottle, blew through the mouthpiece, sending a vaporized cloud of ox-gall over the entire surface of the table—Dupin having previously lifted, with extreme care, every object from the table's surface.

"Thank you, sir," said Dupin. "We have now an exact record of the position of every object which has been on this table—*even of the object which has been removed*—an object that we are now about to find."

Bidding Monsieur Mahé a courteous farewell, Dupin now advanced toward the bed which stood in a far corner of the room. The corpse had been removed, but when Dupin threw back the covers, he revealed a mattress shockingly stained with the gore of the victim.

Dupin stood by the bed, examining the blood-stains upon the sheets and pillows. He then examined the hangings of faded *toile de Jouy,* especially paying the closest attention to the valance. He drew the bed-mounting step toward him, climbed it, and inhaled delicately of the valance at the head of the bed.

Dismounting from the step, Dupin signed to G—— to mount the step, and to smell at the pleated frill. Monsieur G. did so, and looked his inquiry at Dupin. But my friend, placing a finger on his lips, shook his head.

"Later," he said cautiously, and

then, turning to Madame Laffont, he asked, "Was your employer, madame, a tall man?"

"No, monsieur, he was rather under the middle height."

"Thank you," said Dupin, and bent down to smell of the pillow. "Now, madame, do not be frightened at what I am about to ask, but when you brought in the tray bearing Monsieur de St. Dizier's coffee and rolls, *what did you do with the tray?*"

"I put it down, sir, on a table. I had to do so before I could pull back the bed-curtains, so as to arouse Monsieur de St. Dizier."

"You did not put the tray on the table by the window?"

"How could I, sir? That bore the lamp, tinder-lighter, wick-snuffers, and so on. Oh, far too many things, sir, as you saw."

"As I saw, madame? But, this morning, what did *you* see?"

"What you saw, sir," Madame Laffont said, turning toward the still-shuttered window and the table which stood before it: "a lamp, tinder-box, snuffers, box of Congreves."

"Very well, madame. Now, this other table of which you speak—the one on which you put the morning tray. Where is it?"

Madame Laffont looked around, and shook her head.

"It certainly is no longer here—a small tambour table, sir. It always stood by the side of the bed. Only Monsieur de St. Dizier's candlestick and watch-stand were upon it, so that there was always sufficient room for the tray. Perhaps it was moved when they brought in the trestles—by the men whom Monsieur Rocquet ordered to bring trestles and a board on which to lay out Monsieur de St. Dizier's body."

"Monsieur Rocquet was summoned?"

"Yes, the son of the concierge, Aristide, was sent to the shop in the Rue de l'Université to fetch him. Do you wish me to look for the table, sir?"

Dupin found the small table in another room. There was a drawer in the table, unlocked—and the drawer was empty.

"One more question, Madame Laffont, and you may leave: did your master use a scented pomatum on his hair?"

"On his hair, sir! *Pomatum*, sir? Why, poor Monsieur de St. Dizier was as bald as a monk!"

"Thank you, madame," said Dupin, with a satisfied air. "We are all much obliged to you for your assistance."

The woman, evidently gratified, left the room.

"And now," said Dupin, "let us consider the facts. *Monsieur le Préjet*: you smelled what I drew to your attention?"

"Pomatum, heavily scented with oil of roses."

"On the outer edge of the valance—that the hair of a tall

man might have touched. And no such smell on the pillow, even had we not been assured by Madame Laffont that the dead man had no need of pomatum.

"Next: the circular mark on the table, indicating that something with a circular base had stood there. Now that Madame Laffont has left us, I have no hesitation in picking up the object—from this mantel-piece—which formerly stood on the table."

And suiting his action to his words, my friend picked up—*an hour-glass!*

"See!" he cried triumphantly, carefully comparing the hour-glass's base with the mark on the table. "See how *exactly* the circumference of the base matches the circular patch in the dust! Now, gentlemen, let me demonstrate to you how it was that, in a room empty of all save the atrociously murdered occupant of this sleeping-chamber, a lamp lit itself—at precisely eight o'clock, at precisely the time that Monsieur Rocquet, in full sight of the lamp's light, exchanged affabilities with the *agent* whose duty it was to observe that light.

"But first, let us have Monsieur Rocquet here. It is he, above all, who ought to hear the explanation; it is he who must be most concerned with this affair of the lamp—this *intended* beacon of reassurance, behind whose sheltering light the thief was able to rob, the murderer to kill. Yes, let us have him here."

"Monsieur Rocquet," began Dupin, when the murdered man's step-son, not without notable self-assurance, entered the room, "we are endeavoring to arrange this matter of your step-father's murder."

Rocquet bowed. "I am entirely at your disposal, gentlemen."

"Good. Pray be seated. Were you entirely in the confidence of the late Monsieur de St. Dizier?"

"Entirely? No, not entirely. But, since I was what may be described as my step-father's secretary, I was, naturally, cognizant of much of his business."

"You knew that Monsieur de St. Dizier had accepted, in pledge, that ancient treasure from the Regalia of France known as the Jewel of Lothaire? Yes? Did you also know that the Baroness—we will mention no names—had no moral right to pledge this priceless relic of Merovingian France?"

"No," said the young man, with a smirk. "What my step-father did, I always assumed he had a perfect right to do. My own duties, as his secretary, were confined to the noting of purchases and sales, to the conduct of confidential inquiries, to the running of my step-father's private errrands, and—well, generally, to do what secretaries have always been expected to do. I resent," he added,

in a more vigorous tone, "any suggestion that I was an accomplice in any act of my step-father's which might have been beyond the permission of the law."

"Did you know," G—— asked, "that your step-father secreted a large amount in gold and jewels about this apartment?"

"So I believe—though I have never seen it. I have, of course, seen individual items of great worth."

"Had you the keys to the strong-boxes?"

"No. My step-father entrusted no one with the keys."

Dupin now resumed the questioning. "Monsieur Rocquet, it appears that your step-father was murdered at some time between eight o'clock last night and seven thirty this morning, when Madame Laffont discovered that he had been killed during the night. The earlier time is established by the fact that you and an *agent-de-ville*, talking together in the Café de l'Empereur Julien, saw the lamp suddenly gleam through the hole in that shutter. This proves, it is said, that you cannot have been in this room when your step-father was murdered."

" 'It is said,' monsieur? Surely it is obvious that I could not have been?"

"It has also been suggested, Monsieur Rocquet, that, as you stood to gain the most by Monsieur de St. Dizier's death, the obvious suspect is yourself?"

"I am not astonished," said the young man, in no way discomposed by this blunt, even brutal, accusation. "On the other hand, as the police already know, I can account for every minute of my time between the moment that the light came on and the moment that I was summoned to see my step-father's corpse. *Someone* must have lit the lamp—presumably my step-father. But, in any case, whoever lit it, it was not *I*. I was talking to the *agent* when we both saw the light go on."

"Tell me, Monsieur Rocquet," said Dupin, fixing the young man with a direct glance, "you place absolute reliance upon the fact that you were with the *agent* when he saw the light of the lamp appear through this hole in the shutter?"

"Well, naturally, monsieur! It proves that I was not here when my step-father was murdered."

"It proves, monsieur," said Dupin sternly, "only that you were not here when the lamp flashed forth. It proves *that*, to be sure. But it proves *nothing else*. Do you see this round mark on the dusty table?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"It is the mark made by the base of an hour-glass—this hour-glass, in fact, as we have proved by examination. It is a two-hour

glass—see: *2h.* has been stamped into the wooden frame by the maker. Would you say that this was an *innocent* object to find in a room? You would? So, indeed, would I. Why, then, was it removed from its place on the table and put on the mantelshelf?"

Monsieur Rocquet had grown noticeably pale, but he kept his composure admirably.

"What should I know of my step-father's hour-glass, monsieur? *He* used it, not *I!*"

"I am of the opinion," said Dupin drawlingly, "that we have had enough talking. Come now: let me demonstrate to you gentlemen—particularly to you, Monsieur Rocquet—how a lamp can light itself at any hour that one may select in advance, even though there be no one in the room to snap a tinder-lighter or strike a Congreve. Let us light the lamp."

It was an Argand, of the kind where lamp-holder and glass shade are balanced by a tubular brass oil-vessel.

"Now," said Dupin, standing back, "it is clear that, the lamp being lit, its light shines through the small hole in the shutter—thus reassuring the worthy *agent,* who is on the *qui vive* for the sudden illumination that he expects at about eight o'clock. Ah, yes—but wait!"

And Dupin, dexterously reversing the hour-glass that he held in his hand, placed it carefully upon the circular dust-free patch between the lamp and the shutter. The upper half of the hour-glass, filled with red sand, now interposed itself between the hole in the shutter and the flame of the lamp.

"Peste!" said G——. "What does *this* mean?"

"It means, my dear G——," said Dupin coolly, "that if one were first to reverse the hour-glass, as I have just done, and place it between lamp and shutter, and then light the lamp, no light would be seen through the hole *until the sand in the upper half of the hour-glass had fallen into the bottom half.*

"So, gentlemen, if I—the assassin—wished to come here *before* the hour at which the light was expected by the *agent,* I would ask Monsieur de St. Dizier to meet me here at some time earlier than that at which he customarily returned. I would send him a note, ask him to use the back staircase, so as not to be seen by the concierge. Monsieur de St. Dizier, dealing in matters almost, if not quite, beyond the law, would not find such a request unusual. He would enter his apartment as secretly as would his assassin.

"It is still daylight, remember. The assassin pushes the frail old man onto the bed, suffocates him,

and then, *under the sheets*—since there are no blood-stains on the bed-hangings—cuts his throat. It is a tall man—and Monsieur Rocquet, as we see, is a tall man—who had done this abominable deed; a tall man whose pomaded hair brushed against the valance as he stood over the bed. Do you not use such a pomade, Monsieur Rocquet?"

"You are accusing me, monsieur, of having murdered my good step-father? I shall not be angry—I shall merely ask you *when* I could have committed this crime?"

"*When, M*onsieur Rocquet? At the only period when you were not under surveillance of your own arranging. *Before* eight o'clock—which is why I asked the Prefect to check, not on *your* movements before eight o'clock, but on those of your step-father. You met him here by appointment, probably using another name to sign your note, killed him, drew the shutters—after you had attended to the gold and jewels—placed the hour-glass before the hole in the shutter, and lit the lamp. You knew—for you had surely tested the hour-glass—that in exactly two hours the light would show through the hole in the shutter—and you would be safely watching it, in the company of a reliable witness. Your alibi, monsieur, is based upon the supposed fact that Monsieur de St. Dizier died *after* eight o'clock. That false supposition is based upon the fact that Monsieur de St. Dizier lighted his lamp at eight o'clock. But once we have shown—as I have just shown—that the lamp could have been lighted two hours earlier, your alibi, monsieur, is not worth a fig!"

"But the Jewel of Lothaire?" demanded G——.

"The assassin," said Dupin contemptuously, while the trembling young man stared at him with a truly *murderous* hatred, "had little time to spare. Off to establish an alibi with the *agent* and, more especially, with an affectionate young woman, he dared not take with him any compromising object."

"In which case," said Monsieur Rocquet defiantly, "you cannot prove that I took anything. You may search me if you please!"

"Now where, if I were you, Monsieur Rocquet," continued Dupin, "would I hide your step-father's treasure?—one priceless Jewel, and a fortune in gold and lesser jewels. The larger quantity I should place in the drawer of a table, removing the table on the following morning when all were busy with the men from the morgue, and removing from that table what I had placed in its drawer.

"Still, someone might just hap-

pen upon the contents of a drawer, so that I should have to take more care with the hiding-place of the Jewel of Lothaire, trinsically of small value, but historically priceless and of illimitable value as a means of blackmailing the highest in the land. Now where would I, in your place, Monsieur Rocquet, put *that?*"

"Yes, Dupin, where for heaven's sake!" cried G——.

"Why, here," said Dupin, unscrewing the tubular oil-container from the lamp. "Yes, here it is! The Jewel of Lothaire. The rest of the plunder was in the drawer of the table that Madame Laffont informed us was moved out when the men with trestles came in."

"You have no proof that I murdered my step-father!" Rocquet shouted desperately.

"You have one chance," said Dupin, "but I shall be astonished if you will be able to avail yourself of it. Prove to us that you have an alibi for yesterday, *up to eight o'clock,* and you will never have to take that walk in the dawn with Monsieur de Paris. Ah, you are silent at last!

"Well, then, let me relieve myself of an aphorism—of little concern to you now, I fear, Monsieur Rocquet, but still of general usefulness. It is this: a man who places *all* reliance on an alibi which fails him is left with nothing—simply nothing—on which to fall back!"

INDEX TO VOLUME FIFTY-SIX—JULY-DECEMBER 1970

(Continued from page 161)

Coming soon . . .

NEW short stories and novelets by

STANLEY ELLIN	MICHAEL GILBERT
GEORGES SIMENON	HUGH PENTECOST
JOHN D. MacDONALD	NICOLAS FREELING
PHYLLIS BENTLEY	LAWRENCE TREAT
URSULA CURTISS	GERALD KERSH
MICHAEL INNES	CLAYTON RAWSON
JOHN CREASEY	ANTHONY GILBERT
H. R. F. KEATING	NEDRA TYRE
PATRICIA McGERR	BERKELY MATHER
AVRAM DAVIDSON	EDWARD D. HOCH
ROBERT L. FISH	J. J. MARRIC
JULIAN SYMONS	LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

This month let's reverse our usual practice. Instead of ending with those choice items to which I would draw your attention, let me begin with them. Let me do this even before I settle down to sum up for the year. And two current books very much deserve your notice.

The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes, edited by Hugh Greene (Pantheon, $6.95), offers thirteen exploits from the case-books of sleuths who flourished in British magazines during the greatest days of the great Sherlock, 1891 to 1914.

With the possible exception of Austin Freeman's Dr. Thorndyke, nobody here can so much as challenge the sage of Baker Street. Still, if prejudice may be expressed, I myself am drawn less by character than by ingenious plots with ingenious clues on display. These qualities we are given in plenty. Perhaps the best tales of this baker's dozen are two by Baroness Orczy: "The Mysterious Death on the Underground Railway," featuring the old man in the corner, and "The Woman in the Big Hat," featuring Lady Molly of Scotland Yard.

Emmuska, Baroness Orczy, a Hungarian noblewoman by birth, was taken to England at the age of eight. Best known as the author of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, she also wrote first-class short detective stories. I met her once at the Detection Club: a small, vivacious old lady with white hair and flashing dark eyes. Though she had lived in her adopted country since 1873, she still spoke English with a slight foreign accent.

To name her first, let me repeat, may be the prejudice of one who sets ingenious fair play above all. But her sleuths walk in fine company here. John Thorndyke unmasks the misdirection of "The Moabite Cypher." Among others we have Arthur Morrison's Martin Hewitt; we have blind Max Carrados; we have Carnacki the ghost-finder, whose adventures in the occult or the pseudo-occult still constitute a criminous feast. And this book is hereby offered as proof.

In Whit Masterson's *The Death of Me Yet* (Dodd, Mead, $4.50) you will find mystery-adventure-espionage of immense sweep and power. At first glance you may wonder how any of these elements could touch the life of Paul Towers, prosperous, happily married, ordinary-seeming

young owner-publisher of a weekly newspaper in southern California, or why there should be several determined attempts on his life.

Neither the emotional pattern nor the background pattern has been quite what it seemed. When the eventual grisly pattern does take shape, forcing Paul towards death in his horned and devilish double life, the reader is not so much carried away as swept away with a roar. Tension mounts through excitement after excitement to a well-plotted surprise finale that should blow your ears off. Of its kind, be assured, *The Death of Me Yet* is as strong as anything we have seen so far.

With that satisfactory reflection I can glance back over 1970. Anyone indulgent enough to follow this column will have observed that there has been much less griping than usual. Perhaps your correspondent was in a better temper; certainly there has been much less to gripe about. Every month produced at least one new title which could be recommended without reserve.

Since I mentioned espionage a moment ago, note that we have had a vintage year for cloak and dagger. High praise to *The Smile on the Face of the Tiger*, by Douglas Hurd and Andrew Osmond; *The Innocent Bystanders*, by James Munro; *The Amazing Mrs. Pollifax*, by Dorothy Gilman, the last-named being that *rara avis* of sensationalism, a spy story by a woman. To these add *Assignment—White Rajah* and *Assignment—Star Stealers*, paperback but new, in Edward S. Aarons's series about C.I.A. Agent Sam Durell, as well as the Chinese caper of *The Dragon's Eye*, by Scott C. S. Stone.

In the realm of mystery-adventure with fair play, you were assured of satisfaction with Oliver Bleeck's *The Brass Go-Between;* John Farris's *The Captors;* Alistair MacLean's *Puppet on a Chain;* Richard Meade's *The Lost Fraulein;* Victor Canning's *Queen's Pawn;* Kin Platt's *The Pushbutton Butterfly;* J. J. Marric's *Gideon's River;* Stanley Ellin's *The Bind;* Lou Cameron's *The Amphorae Pirates;* and, no less effective for being farcical, Donald E. Westlake's *Somebody Owes Me Money.*

Classic detection? A great deal of it, from old hands and newcomers alike. Try *Murder To Go*, by Emma Lathen; *The Last Woman in His Life*, by Ellery Queen; *Many Deadly Returns*, by Patricia Moyes; *Death at the Chase*, by Michael Innes; *The Stately Home Murder*, by Catherine Aird; *Enquiry*, by Dick Francis; *The Best Man To Die*, by Ruth Rendell; *Finish Me Off*, by Hillary Waugh; *In the Death of a Man*, by Lesley Egan; *The Women of Peasenhall*, by R. J. White; *Deadly Pattern*, by Douglas Clark; *Wobble to Death*, by Peter Lovesey; *Archer At Large*, the three-volume omnibus by Ross Macdonald; *Death on the Nile*, a hardcover reprint by Agatha Christie. To this category

belong the stories in *The Allingham Case-Book*, by Margery Allingham, as well as the best tales in *Merchants of Menace*, twenty-fourth anthology from the Mystery Writers of America, edited by Hillary Waugh.

Paperback reprints of various sorts have gladdened this old heart more than once. Judiciously chosen items included one account of a real-life murder society, Arthur H. Lewis's *Lament for the Molly Maguires*, one account of real-life espionage agents in *The Spies*, edited by Robert G. Deisdorfer, a good modern detective novel, Harry Kemelman's *Sunday the Rabbi Stayed Home*, in addition to two detective classics from the nineteen twenties, A. A. Milne's *The Red House Mystery* and Philip MacDonald's *The Rasp*, together with a notable collection of spy stories from about the same period, *Ashenden*, by W. Somerset Maugham.

Long live the paperback, and more power to its editors! In addition to gladdening my heart as a reader, they have also saved my face as a critic.

As regards reconstruction of real-life cases, imaginative probing into some mystery long past, there has been nothing new except *Mischief in the Mountains*, subtitled by its editors 'Strange Tales of Vermont and Vermonters.' Though this work received due praise, it lacked something as a rogues' calendar. In '69 we had both a history of the Pinkertons and a biography of Houdini. Possibly things even better are reserved for '71. Shall we learn the truth about the Bravo poisoning, or whose hand slew the Bordens at high noon that August day?

Stop; this won't do. Having boasted of little griping through the year, I must not end it with a gripe. Besides, such notions can backfire. When the late Ed Radin published his vindication of the more famous Borden sister, a group of us met for lunch as the Friends of Lizzie Borden. And not a man among us could have said whether we were celebrating Lizzie's innocence or congratulating her for having gotten away with murder.

Never mind. Serenely I await the new year.

When Edward Tromanhauser submitted "The Perfect Crime" he was 38 years old, and in a letter that followed he stated he was "serving a one-to-ten-year sentence in the Indiana State Prison." Before incarceration he worked in the engineering department of a large radio-manufacturing corporation in Chicago. Mr. Tromanhauser had been in electronics for approximately ten years.

His freelance writing had begun about the same time he entered the electronic field. He sold articles first to trade papers, then branched out to more general periodicals, and finally started to sell fiction to men's magazines.

And that isn't all in Mr. Tromanhauser's remarkable record. He is co-author with H. Jack Griswold of a novel titled AN EYE FOR AN EYE, *published last June by Holt, Rinehart & Winston, and at the time of this writing his second novel is in the hands of his agent.*

Stone walls do not a prison make . . .

THE PERFECT CRIME

by EDWARD TROMANHAUSER

ERNESTO SANCHEZ HAD HAD it. After almost ten years in this country he was still only a janitor at the Partridge Elementary School and he hated it.

"You know, I was an important man once," he told his old friend Rudolfo Garcia, who was also a janitor, but in a bank. The two men lived in the same roominghouse.

"Certainly, Ernesto," Garcia replied. "But the old days are gone forever. For both of us."

"I don't know," said Sanchez, rubbing a pudgy hand over his huge belly. "Fidel cannot last much longer."

"You said that last year, Ernesto, and the year before that. We shall be Cuban refugees until the end."

"From a Chief of Police to a janitor is a great fall," said Sanchez.

"I have had a great fall also, but at least we are alive," reasoned Garcia. "If ever we go back to Cuba—" He made a slashing motion as he drew a bony hand across his throat.

"If only we had some capital," said Sanchez, ignoring the gesture. "You know it takes money to make money. Once you have a great deal of it you can always keep increasing your wealth."

"Yes, Ernesto, but we have no capital and no chance of getting any. You don't expect the United States to give us the capital as a gift, do you?"

Sanchez looked down at his small companion and s m i l e d. "Why not, Rudolfo?" he said, his eyes sparkling. "Why not?"

Garcia shrugged. "I don't know what you mean. I hope you've forgotten about that crazy idea you once had."

Sanchez stopped smiling. His mouth took on a petulant expression. "Robbing the bank?" he said. "It is not such a crazy idea. You are the janitor and you have a key to the front door. You must clean up the bank in the morning b e f o r e the other employees arrive. Correct?"

Garcia wrung his hands nervously. "Yes, so?"

"So you let me in with you and as the other bank employees come to work we seize them one by one and tie them up. The bank opens at ten o'clock, correct?"

Garcia nodded.

"So the time lock trips at nine and the manager arrives just before the time lock trips. He will open the vault for us on schedule and we will then be rich men."

"You were a p o l i c e m a n, Ernesto, and you should therefore know that we would not get far before we were caught."

"You think so?" Sanchez was smiling again. "My friend, I have been busy using my head as well as my back. I have it all planned. I have even saved enough money for the plane tickets."

"Plane tickets?" said Garcia nervously.

"Certainly. You are correct about our being caught *if* we stayed in this country. But I have friends in Bolivia, good friends. I have been corresponding with them, you see. Once we get to Bolivia with—how much money do you think is in the vault?"

"Oh, I don't know," s a i d Rudolfo. "At least a hundred thousand dollars."

"Ah, *bueno,*" m u r m u r e d Sanchez. "As I was saying, for us to arrive in Bolivia with one hundred thousand A m e r i c a n dollars is to insure ourselves a hearty welcome from my friends, who are, by the way, not without influence in the government. They

will take us to the back country for six months and then we emerge with newly acquired identity papers. We can live like kings down there with that kind of money, Rudolfo."

Neither of them spoke for a few moments, then Garcia said, "If we ever get there."

"I will purchase the two plane tickets before the robbery," said Sanchez, continuing to ignore Garcia's gloomy remarks. "You still have your Cuban passport?"

"Yes."

"So do I," said Sanchez. "And we will get tourist visas for Bolivia. Nothing could be simpler."

Garcia shook his head. "I don't like it," he said.

"What can go wrong?" asked Sanchez. "We tie them up and leave the bank by, say, nine thirty. I have checked. There is a weekly flight for La Paz at ten o'clock every Friday morning. It is a twenty-minute drive to the airport. We will have time. We will be in the air before anyone even knows the bank has been robbed. So what can go wrong?"

"Nothing, I guess," Garcia muttered. "But I do not like it."

Sanchez bristled. "Listen, stupid, you can remain a janitor all your life if you want, but not me. If you don't want half the money, just let me hit you on the head and take the key. I will do the whole thing by myself and won't have to split the money with you or anyone. Well, what do you say?"

"No, I don't want to get hit on the head, Ernesto, and I would truly like to go to Bolivia with you and live like a king. It is just that I am afraid."

"There is nothing to be afraid of," snorted Sanchez. "My plan is perfect. Are you with me or not?"

Garcia nodded his head slowly and with obvious reluctance.

"Bueno," shouted Sanchez, slapping Garcia on the back. "I will get our plane tickets for two weeks from this Friday. The only thing you have to do is have your bags packed and remember to go down to the Bolivian consulate for your tourist visa. We shall be rich men together, Rudolfo."

Garcia bobbed his head. "You have a gun?" he asked.

"Certainly," said Sanchez as he wiped the perspiration from his face with a large handkerchief. "Please put your mind at rest, my friend. I have thought of everything."

It was raining that Friday morning when Ernesto Sanchez and Rudolfo Garcia arrived at the bank. Garcia glanced nervously up and down the street. "Is it wise to leave the car in front of the bank?" he asked.

"No one will bother it," said Sanchez. "What are you worried about, a parking ticket?"

Garcia smiled weakly.

"Hurry up and open the door," commanded Sanchez as he turned up the collar of his jacket. "It is raining out here, you know."

Garcia fumbled with the ring of keys that he drew from his pocket, found the right one, and inserted it in the lock.

"Come, come," Sanchez urged his friend.

The door swung open and the two men hurried inside. Garcia locked the door behind them and they proceeded to the back of the bank, out of sight of passers-by.

"How many employees have keys?" asked Sanchez.

"Just myself, the chief cashier, and the manager," said Garcia. "When the others arrive, they tap on the glass and I let them in."

"Good," said Sanchez. "Where should I stand?"

"Right where you are," said Garcia. "It is raining and most of them will have rubbers or umbrellas or raincoats. There is a closet just behind you where they hang their clothing."

"*Bueno,* just let them in as usual and let them walk back here," said Sanchez. He glanced around. "Did you bring the pieces of rope?"

Garcia pointed. "Over there on the floor. Fifty feet altogether."

"That should be enough. How many employees are there?"

"Seven."

"It is enough."

Garcia looked at his watch. He licked his dry lips.

"What time do they start arriving?" said Sanchez.

"Any minute now," said Garcia.

They almost missed the flight because of the rain and heavy traffic. It was two minutes to ten when Sanchez whipped the car into the airport parking lot and screeched to a stop near the main rotunda. The two men dashed quickly across the parking lot, each carrying two suitcases. As they burst through the tinted glass doors of the building they heard their names being called on the PA system.

"Will Mr. Ernesto Sanchez and Mr. Rudolfo Garcia please go to Ramp C at once. Your flight is ready to depart."

"Hurry," shouted Sanchez as he waddled down the concourse.

"I'm coming, I'm coming," mumbled Garcia as he struggled with his two heavy bags.

They were momentarily held up by the baggage check and again by customs where they displayed their passports; then the men charged up the embarkation ramp and into the plane. The door closed with a bang and a stewardess led them to their seats. They dropped wearily into the seats and said nothing for several minutes. The big jet began taxiing on the

runway and soon they were airborne.

"Ah," said Sanchez finally, "I can breathe again."

"Yes," agreed Garcia. "We made it, didn't we?"

"Just as I told you we would," said Sanchez. "I planned it all very carefully. We are, as the Americans say, 'home free.' "

As the tension drained from them Sanchez and Garcia grew sleepy. They began to doze. An hour later the two of them were awakened by the pilot's voice on the aircraft's PA system.

"Your attention please, ladies and gentlemen. We won't be going to La Paz today, I'm afraid. There is a gentleman behind me with a gun who insists that we make a detour to Havana."

a *NEW* Dover *NOVELET* by

JOYCE PORTER

In the February 1969 issue of EQMM we gave you the first shorter-than-a-novel story about Detective Chief Inspector Wilfred Dover and his long-suffering assistant, Sergeant MacGregor. Now we bring you the second Dover novelet, and like the first one it's great fun.

Dover, the sedentary Scotland Yard man (yes, Scotland Yard, although Dover is hardly the accepted or desirable image of that illustrious institution), has been called irascible, abusive, boorish, rude and crude—in fact, his book publisher openly refers to him as "abominable." Well, perhaps—only perhaps, mind you—Dover is mellowing. At most, you understand, only a trifle. He's almost as disagreeable, insulting, and unglamorous as he was; but we hasten to reassure you that he still snarls, shouts, grumbles, growls, scowls, snaps, and roars. But no matter how much you may dislike him, you'll have to admit he gets the job done—in this new case of a baffling murder, after his own fashion, as usual, but with credit to his noble profession . . .

DOVER TANGLES WITH HIGH FINANCE

by JOYCE PORTER

THE DIRECTORS OF SEWELL & Vallotton Company, Limited, together with the upper echelons of management, enjoyed a rare privilege in their London offices. They had their own private entrance hall and over the years a great deal of care and company money had been lavished on it. Delicate works of art and exquisite antiques were dotted about the vast expanse of the hall with a tastefulness which was always being photographed by the glossier

monthly magazines. Whatever economies might be made elsewhere, nobody begrudged the extravagant luxuries here, and even the doormen had their uniforms made in Savile Row.

Not that the doorman on duty at the moment was looking particularly happy as he lurked behind an expensive sculpture by Henry Moore and waited for the next batch of policemen to arrive.

He brooded resentfully about the lot he already had upstairs, trampling round in their great boots and upsetting everything. He realized, of course, that when one of your directors gets himself murdered in his own boardroom there's bound to be a bit of a disturbance; but, the doorman reminded himself, there's moderation in all things. He'd been watching directors come and go for the last 25 years and he was blowed if he could see that one more or less made that much difference.

He looked at his watch. Half-past eleven! Blimey, how much longer were they going to be? You could walk it from Scotland Yard in ten minutes! He'd been hanging about here for nearly an hour already and had missed his coffee break in the bargain.

A big black car drew up in the private driveway. The doorman smoothed down his jacket and peered through the holes which Mr. Moore might have placed there for just such a purpose. Two of the occupants of the car appeared to be trying to extricate a third from the confines of the rear seat. The doorman sniffed contemptuously. Yes, well, if it hadn't been for the murder, that fat one coming out of the car like a tight cork out of a bottle wouldn't have got his foot over the threshold! What a lout! A filthy bowler hat and a disgusting old overcoat—*not* the sartorial standards you expected in the Sewell & Vallotton directors' private entrance hall!

The fat man was now laboring up the short flight of marble steps with a younger, thinner fellow chasing athletically after him. The doorman stood his ground. He'd long ago given up falling over himself to welcome anybody, never mind a couple of peasants like these.

The plate-glass doors, untouched by human hand, swung noiselessly open and the two new arrivals moved forward to receive a blast of warm scented air on the top of their heads. Another step and—

"'Strewth!" exploded Detective Chief Inspector Wilfred Dover.

There was a fastidious shiver from the glass in the chandelier but the attention of "Fattie of the Yard" was riveted on the floor. Eyes popping, he watched in astonishment as his boots sank up to the ankles in the thick pile

of the carpet. For one who had spent his life wallowing in lower middle-class squalor it was an intriguing, if unnerving, experience.

The younger, thinner man—Detective Sergeant MacGregor—went a bright pink as he always did when his superior made an exhibition of himself in public. The sergeant was just as impressed with the opulence of his surroundings as Dover was, but he would have died rather than show it.

The doorman adjusted his sneer and came forward, casually skirting the five-foot-high T'ang vase and arriving just in time to stop the fat man getting his paws on a charming little Fabergé clock which was standing defenseless on one of Sheraton's finer tables.

"H'are you the—er—gentlemen from Scotland Yard?"

Poor Sergeant MacGregor was cut to the quick by the doorman's hesitation, but if you wanted to insult Dover you had to use a sledge-hammer. In any case Dover was far too busy gawping enviously round to pay much attention to the doorman. This lot must have cost somebody a pretty penny or he was a Dutchman! What about that picture? Looked as though it had been done by a two-year-old kid with its feet but they wouldn't have stuck it in a posh frame like that if it weren't valuable. And that dirty great mirror over there? Dover swung round suddenly on the doorman.

"Here — you got all this junk properly insured?"

That took the wind right out of the doorman's sails and without another word he led the two detectives over to the directors' own personal elevator, ushered them in, showed MacGregor which button to press, and thankfully watched them slowly disappear from sight.

The directors' own personal elevator was worth a king's ransom on its own account. The wrought-iron gates were Fifteenth Century Florentine work and the two carved clusters of fruit on the side walls had been confidently attributed to Grinling Gibbons; but it was the icon on the rear wall that caught Dover's eye. Not that Dover was exactly a connoisseur of early Novgorod religious painting but he found the gold and jewels with which this particular example was covered well-nigh irresistible.

"Do you reckon those rubies are real?" he demanded as the elevator wended its way gently upward.

"Oh, I should think so, sir," said MacGregor, noting with relief that the icon seemed to be securely bolted to the wall. "They wouldn't have any imitation stuff here."

Dover's hand was already moving toward his trouser pocket. "I'll bet you could prize 'em out

easy as pie with a penknife," he observed as though challenging his sergeant to say that you couldn't.

But MacGregor was quick to scotch any bright ideas in that direction. "I don't advise you to try, sir. Sewell and Vallotton's collection of antiques is very well-known and you can be quite sure they've taken all the necessary precautions against theft. I imagine this place is absolutely crawling with burglar alarms. Closed circuit television cameras, too, I shouldn't wonder."

"Oh." Dover continued to stare wistfully at the rubies while MacGregor hoped fervently that Sewell & Vallotton had indeed got everything portable well nailed down. "I didn't know they were second-hand furniture dealers."

"Sir?"

"This dump. I thought it was some sort of an office building we were coming to."

"It is, sir. It's the head office of Sewell and Vallotton. You know"—MacGregor, who was more than a bit of a snob, looked down his nose—"they make soap."

"Soap?"

"Well, detergents now, I suppose, but they started off making soap. They're one of the biggest firms in that line in the country. Blanchette, Squishy-Washy, Alabas, Sparkle-Spume, Blua—they market all that and a dozen others besides."

"Well, what's all this stuff then?" Dover jerked an inquiring thumb at the icon.

MacGregor shrugged. "It's just their gimmick, sir. Some firms sponsor golf matches or horse shows; Sewell and Vallotton buy and display works of art. They make a specialty of saving national treasures from going abroad. It brings them millions of pounds' worth of free publicity and I suppose the antiques themselves are a pretty gilt-edged investment."

"Seems a funny way of going on," sniffed Dover.

"Sewell and Vallotton can more than afford to indulge their whimsies, sir."

Eventually the elevator reached the top floor, and Dover and MacGregor emerged to find themselves in what was known as the Directors' Suite. Here, too, money had been splashed around with a most liberal hand, as witness the fine Aubusson tapestry which covered the whole of the facing wall.

As MacGregor was closing the elevator gates they heard the creaking of regulation boots and a second later a young chubby-faced policeman came tiptoeing toward them, his cap tucked underneath his arm.

"Chief Inspector Dover, sir?" he inquired in a respectful whisper.

"Who are you?"

"Police Constable Saunderson, sir. C Division. Me and my mate answered the original 999 call and we've sort of been holding the fort ever since." In his innocence P.C. Saunderson considered himself entitled to administer a mild rebuke. "We thought you was never coming, sir."

Dover's face went black but MacGregor stepped in with a ready lie. "We were held up by the traffic," he explained quickly. "Now, what's going on here?"

"Well, nothing really at the moment, Sarge," replied P.C. Saunderson who was proving to be a rather complacent sort of lad. "I think you might say that me and my mate have got the situation well under control." He started to get his notebook out of his tunic pocket. "You've missed all the excitement —sec?—what with you being held up by the traffic and everything. Now"—he flicked the pages of his notebook over—"me and Stokes—he's my mate—we got the 999 call relayed to us at ten seventeen precisely.

"A sudden death in suspicious circumstances was the message and we arrived downstairs at ten twenty-one. A nippy bit of driving that but, of course, the streets are pretty quiet round here in the middle of the morning. Or, at least, that's been my experience. Right—well, by ten twenty-three approximately we was up here and I conducted a preliminary examination of the deceased. Strictly between you and me, old Stokes is a bit of a dead loss when it comes to First Aid.

"Now, at ten twenty-five I turned to Stokes and said,"—P.C. Saunderson solemnly consulted his notebook—" 'I reckon this is a blooming murder, Jack, or' "—he turned over a page—" 'or maybe he croaked hisself.' "

"For God's sake," snarled Dover, his feet giving him hell as usual, "do we have to stand here all day listening to this twaddle?"

P.C. Saunderson, whose romantic ideas about Scotland Yard's glamorous murder squad were about to take quite a beating, was disconcerted by the violence of the interruption. "Did you want to see the body, sir?" he stammered.

"Not likely!" came Dover's indignant retort. "If I'd wanted to spend my life looking at corpses I'd have joined a blooming mortuary, wouldn't I, blockhead? Isn't there somewhere we can go and sit down?"

"Oh, yes, sir! As a matter of fact I've already requisitioned the secretary's office for your use."

"And where's the secretary?" demanded MacGregor sharply, because somebody had to keep a check on these things.

"Having hysterics in the ladies'

cloaks. I shouldn't wonder," chuckled P.C. Saunderson as he led the way down a corridor devoted exclusively to masters of the Seventeenth Century Dutch school. "Funny how it takes some people, isn't it?"

"Good God, man!" shouted MacGregor. "You don't mean to say you've let her out of your—"

"Now, now, Sarge," said P.C. Saunderson soothingly, "give us credit for a bit of the old common or garden. She's in the clear. Never went in the boardroom after the bottle of sherry was opened. Everybody agrees about that. And she didn't have any contact with the suspects after the old fellow snuffed it either, so she can't be an accomplice. Ah"—he opened a door—"here we are! Think you can pig it in here?"

The secretary's room was startlingly elegant but the furnishings were merely expensive and not priceless. Dover didn't care. He homed to a comfortable-looking chair behind the desk and flopped into it with a sigh of relief. MacGregor propped himself up against a filing cabinet and got his own notebook out. P.C. Saunderson decided not to push his luck and remained standing by the door.

"Sherry?" prompted Dover, ever hopeful.

The constable twinkled roguishly at him. "The murder weapon, sir."

"The murder weapon? Do you mean the victim was hit over the head with a bottle?"

"Oh, no, sir." It was P.C. Saunderson's turn to register surprise. "He was poisoned. Didn't they tell you?"

"Nobody ever tells me anything," grumbled Dover, with considerable justification. "And that goes for you too, laddie, so you can wipe that stupid grin off your face! I don't know what you young coppers are coming to, straight I don't! Why, when I was your age I'd have had the bloomin' case solved by now."

"Give us another half hour, sir, and I'll have it all tied up for you," responded P.C. Saunderson eagerly and watched with some trepidation as Dover's usually pasty face turned dark crimson.

The trouble with Chief Inspector Wilfred Dover was that he had a rather dog-in-the-manger attitude to work. He didn't want to do it himself, but he got exceedingly nasty if anybody else tried, too obviously, to relieve him of the burden. MacGregor, who had more experience than anybody else in the delicate art of handling the old fool, stepped in once more to smooth things over.

"Just give us the facts, Constable," he said, "and leave the detective work to us."

And, sulkily hoping that everybody realized how hurt his

feelings were, P.C. Saunderson did just that.

The crime had occurred just as the monthly board meeting of the Sewell & Vallotton directors was about to start. Only five directors had been present and they had eventually d i v i d e d themselves up neatly into one victim and four suspects.

"And the name of the dead man?" asked MacGregor.

"Sir Holman Hobart." P.C. Saunderson dutifully waited while MacGregor wrote it down. "He was Chairman of the Board. Chap in his early sixties, I should think."

MacGregor nodded and the story continued.

The five directors had all arrived for their meeting at about ten o'clock. According to Mrs. Doris Vick, the secretary who had welcomed them and taken their hats and coats, they had behaved quite normally and gone straight into the boardroom. When everybody had arrived she had closed the door and left them to their weighty deliberations.

MacGregor looked up. "That's a bit odd, isn't it? Doesn't the secretary usually sit with the board and take down the minutes or something?"

"I believe that is the accepted procedure, Sarge, but from what I've been able to ascertain that lot in there"—P.C. Saunderson inclined his head toward the beautifully inlaid double doors in the wall directly opposite the secretary's desk—"are a bit of a law unto themselves." The constable lowered his voice. "Seems they prefer to have all their argybargies in private and *then* call Mrs. Vick in and dictate an expurgated version of what happened. She says they're real gentlemen and they don't like cussing and swearing in front of a lady."

"What the hell," demanded Dover, temporarily abandoning his search for some decent writing paper that wasn't defaced by Sewell & Vallotton's engraved letterhead, "are you whispering for?"

"Well," said P.C. Saunderson defensively, "we don't want them to hear us talking about them, do we, sir?"

"No skin off my nose," grunted Dover and opened a n o t h e r drawer.

MacGregor, however, was blessed with a more inquiring mind. He pointed his pencil at the double doors. "That's the boardroom, is it?"

"Right, Sarge."

"And the dead body?"

"Oh, that's in there too, Sarge." P.C. Saunderson drew himself up proudly. "The doc wanted to take it away with him but I said no, not until you'd had a chance to look at it."

"The police surgeon's been and gone?" asked MacGregor, shooting an anxious glance at Dover.

"Said he couldn't hang about any longer, Sarge. Still, I made him give me his preliminary report. He can't tell us anything more until he's done the post-mortem."

"But I don't get this," persisted MacGregor. "You mean that all the surviving members of the board are sitting in there with the corpse?"

"It's nicely covered up with a sheet, Sarge, and they insisted. Of course, I've got my mate, Stokes, in there too, keeping an eye on them. I told you they was a queer lot, didn't I? Not one of 'em has so much as set foot outside that room since the old boy dropped down dead."

MacGregor took a deep breath to steady himself. "Yes, well, let's get back to that, shall we? You can explain these peculiar goings on when we come to them. Now, we'd got as far as the five of them having their board meeting."

But P.C. Saunderson was a stickler for accuracy. The board meeting, he ponderously pointed out, had not actually started. There was, it seems, a rather charming tradition at Sewell & Vallotton according to which the directors, before settling down to their meeting, refreshed themselves with a glass or two of choice sherry. Poured, added the constable looking meaningly at MacGregor, from an unopened bottle.

Dover, who had been quietly resting his eyes, opened them and smacked his lips.

"You're sure of that?" asked MacGregor.

"Quite sure, Sarge. I got it from that commissionaire chap downstairs. It's his job to supply two bottles of sherry for each board meeting. Anything the directors don't consume is his perks. He bought the bottles on his way to work this morning from an off-license in Pewter Street and he'll take his oath that they hadn't been tampered with when he left 'em on the table in the board-room. Anyhow, we don't need to worry too much about what happened to the sherry at this stage. If the poison had been put in the bottle, the whole lot of 'em would have died, wouldn't they?"

MacGregor chewed the end of his pencil and admitted somewhat helplessly that this would appear to be so.

P.C. Saunderson looked pleased; then, sucking in his second wind, he continued inexorably. One of the directors, the Marquis of Arnfield, had opened the sherry and poured it out, but the tray of glasses had been handed round by another director, the Honorable Gisbert Fittsarthur. Presumably either nobleman could have surreptitiously slipped in the fatal dose, but it was a little difficult to see how they could have

insured that Sir Holman took the right glass. As Chairman he had been served first out of courtesy and had had the choice of five more or less identical goblets.

"You can hold a tray so that a man will probably take a particular glass," MacGregor pointed out doubtfully. "Still, it's pretty risky. What happened next?"

Nothing, really. The directors had stood around, sipping their drinks and chatting. After about ten minutes Sir Holman had called them to order and suggested that they might as well make a start. Everybody was just beginning to sit down when Sir Holman, standing at the head of the table, had gasped, clutched his throat, choked, retched, doubled up in obvious agony, and dropped down dead.

"And the funny thing is, Sarge," P.C. Saunderson went on with a wondering shake of the head, "that none of 'em seems to have doubted for a minute that he'd been poisoned. And not accidental, neither. They spotted straight off that they'd all be under suspicion, so they called the secretary on the intercom and told her to get the police. After that they just sat tight, watching each other. Until me and Stokes arrived nobody was allowed to enter or leave the boardroom. What do you think of that, eh?"

MacGregor shrugged.

"If you ask me, Sarge, it's a conspiracy."

"Well, nobody is asking you, laddie, so shut up!" Dover, having delivered himself of this pleasantry, crooked a finger at his sergeant. MacGregor hurried over to the desk. "Sling him out!" Dover ordered.

"Sir?"

"You heard me! Cocky young smart aleck—get rid of him!"

P.C. Saunderson might have his faults but being stone-deaf wasn't one of them. "I haven't quite finished my report yet, sir," he said and went so far as to produce a friendly man-to-man smile.

Dover's habitual scowl deepened. "You were finished ten minutes ago, laddie," he growled ominously. "Take my word for it."

MacGregor moved in smartly before the situation could degenerate any further. He caught the constable by the arm and began to lead him over to the door. "Well, come on!" he urged impatiently. "What else is there? And for God's sake keep it short!"

"It's just that me and Stokes searched all the suspects, Sarge."

"And?"

"I thought that whoever brought the poison into the room must have carried it in something—see?—and they might still have the container on their person."

MacGregor gave the arm he was grasping a warning shake. "Did you find anything?"

"Well, not exactly. I haven't had time, have I? But I confiscated everything they had in their pockets. I've got all the stuff locked up in that filing cabinet and I'd just finished making a list when you arrived." P.C. Saunderson risked a sideways glance in the direction of the desk. "I hope I did the right thing."

MacGregor opened the door with one hand and held out the other. "Give me the key. Now"—he dropped his voice and spoke more kindly—"take my advice and stay out of sight for a bit. No, better still, see if you can't rustle up some coffee for him, and a few biscuits. He's generally a bit more amenable when he's been fed."

With the door open and escape in sight, P.C. Saunderson threw the discipline of years to the winds. "What's his favorite food, Sarge?" he demanded in an aggrieved whisper. "Babies?"

Dover watched in gloomy silence as MacGregor unlocked the filing cabinet and brought out five small cardboard boxes, all neatly labeled with names. It was only when the boxes had been deposited on the desk in front of him and he caught sight of the contents that he sat up and began to take notice.

"Blimey!" he squealed. "Get an eyeful of all that!"

"Oh, sir, I don't think—"

MacGregor was too late. Chief Inspector Dover had already got at the loot and was dribbling gold watches, silver cigar cutters, platinum ballpoint pens, and plump soft leather wallets through the stickiest fingers in the Metropolitan Police. MacGregor scrabbled desperately, trying to return each avidly snatched-up goodie to its own box.

"Who are they, for God's sake?" gasped Dover, flicking away unsuccessfully at a diamond-studded lighter before abandoning it for another in opalescent strawberry enamel. "Bleeding millionaires?"

MacGregor caught the diamond-studded lighter just before it hit the desk. "As near as makes no difference, I believe, sir. Now, which box did this come from? Oh, sir, please, we shall get them all muddled up and—"

"It's downright unfair!" whined Dover, grabbing for an alligator-skin wallet, "Nobody ought to be this rich! 'Strewth, look at this!" He opened the wallet to reveal a thick wad of five-pound notes. "I'll bet he doesn't even know how much he's bleeding well got!"

"He may not, sir," said MacGregor, literally pulling the wallet out of Dover's stubby fingers, "but P.C. Saunderson certainly does. He's made a complete inventory of everything."

"He would!" Dover looked around for a consolation prize.

A heavy gold cigarette case caught his eye and by the time MacGregor had returned the wallet to its box Dover was already lighting a fat white cigarette with the enameled lighter.

"Oh, *sir!*" said MacGregor.

Dover ignored the reproach and went through the routine of hacking, coughing, and spluttering which, more often than not, accompanied his first puff.

"Don't you think we'd better start questioning the people concerned, sir? They must be getting very impatient at having to wait so long."

Dover mopped his eyes and regarded his purloined cigarette with disgust. "Talk about sweaty socks!" he observed disparagingly. "What did you say? Oh, I suppose we might as well. Wheel the first one in."

In some bewilderment MacGregor examined the names, titles, and decorations which P.C. Saunderson had painstakingly written on the little boxes. How was one with only a scanty acquaintance of the beau monde to sort out the precedence in this bunch? Of course Sir Holman Hobart Bt., K.C.V.O., C.B., D.S.O., M.C. (the deceased) could be ignored; but that still left the Marquis of Arnfield, M.V.O., M.B.E., T.D.; Dr. Benjamin Zlatt, O.B.B., Q.C., M.Sc., LL.D., F.R.I.C.; Vice-Admiral T. R. Jonkett-Brown, C. B. E., D.S.O., D.S.C., R.N. (ret); and the Honorable Gisbert Fittsarthur, B.A., F.R.G.S.

"Alphabetical order!" grunted Dover, cutting the Gordian knot.

As a matter of fact, almost any sequence would have served as there was a remarkable similarity in the appearance of the surviving Sewell & Vallotton directors. Dover, indeed, never really did get round to telling t'other from which. It was almost as if all four of them had been cast from the same mold and only as an afterthought had a few superficial details been added to distinguish one from the other. Each was vaguely middle-aged, aggressively well-nourished, beautifully groomed and suited by a tailor who knew, where necessary, how to conceal an incipient paunch.

The Marquis of Arnfield, as befitted a peer of the realm, played it very aloof and distant. He waited with only the merest hint of impatience as MacGregor placed a chair for him in front of the desk.

Dover was busy examining a packet of picture postcards which he had found tucked away in Admiral Jonkett-Brown's possessions, but the Marquis appeared not to notice the snickers and grins which ensued. He had condescended to make a statement

to the police but that was going to be the limit of his social contact with them.

"I think I should say right at the beginning," drawled the Marquis, gazing at a delightful little Gainsborough which hung on the wall over Dover's right shoulder, "that I did not murder Sir Holman Hobart."

"Disgusting!" chuckled Dover under his breath. "They bloomin' well want running in for having muck like—oh, crikey!" And then, just to show that his mind really was on his work, he swung round suddenly on the Marquis. "You seem damned sure it's murder."

"Accident would appear to be extremely unlikely and Sir Holman was the last man in the world to commit suicide, especially in public."

"Might have been a heart attack or something," said Dover, wondering why he hadn't thought of that lovely labor-saving idea before.

The Marquis continued to feast his eyes on the Gainsborough. Most people, finding themselves face to face with Dover, would have done the same. "Your police doctor didn't think so."

Dover sighed and shuffled through his picture postcards. "Who are you putting your money on?"

The Marquis didn't bother pretending not to understand. "I'm afraid I haven't the faintest idea. They say poison is a woman's weapon, don't they? Perhaps you ought to arrest our faithful Mrs. Vick."

"The secretary? But I thought she—"

The Marquis deigned to look straight at Dover. "I was being facetious," he murmured. "But, since we are on the subject of poisoning, perhaps I ought to mention that Dr. Zlatt is a qualified chemist."

"Is he now?" said Dover, pushing the picture postcards to one side.

"And a very distinguished one. Sewell and Vallotton often employ him as a consultant and so do several other firms. He must have unrestricted access to a number of industrial research laboratories."

"Fancy." Dover looked up hopefully. "You didn't happen to see him slipping anything in Sir What's-his-name's drink?"

The Marquis squinted down his nose. "Of course not."

Dover sighed again and dragged some sheets of typing paper over in front of him. "You'd better tell us what happened in there, I suppose," he grumbled and began hunting through the boxes in front of him. Eventually he selected an old-fashioned fountain pen belonging to the Honorable Gisbert Fittsarthur and unscrewed the top. "You're the one who

poured the sherry, aren't you?"

"Yes. I always do. I filled the five glasses on the tray, took my own, then old Gissie Fittsarthur handed the others round. He loves appearing generous when somebody else is footing the bill."

There was a strong rumor circulating round Scotland Yard that Chief Inspector Wilfred Dover couldn't even write his own name. Judging from the way he was futilely scratching with the borrowed fountain pen, the rumor was probably true. MacGregor watched him jabbing the nib irritably into the paper and decided that he had better carry on with the questioning until Dover had less important problems on his mind.

"Did you speak to Sir Holman, sir, after you poured out the sherry and before he died?"

The Marquis acknowledged MacGregor's presence by a languid quarter turn of his head. "Naturally. I went over to have a word with him as soon as I'd finished pouring the sherry. I suppose we stood chatting over by the window for several minutes."

By the judicious use of his teeth Dover managed to restore the fourteen-carat gold nib to something approaching its original condition. MacGregor hurried on with his next question.

"What happened after that, sir?"

The Marquis withdrew a fine linen handkerchief from his cuff and waved it negligently across his nose. The scent of lavender filled the air. "After that? Well, Sir Holman was called away by Dr. Zlatt. Zlatt had a great sheaf of papers in his hand and the pair of them stood looking at them. I joined Gissie Fittsarthur and the Admiral by the sherry table. Gissie was knocking back as much free drink as he could get his hands on, of course. Then Sir Holman started walking to the head of the table to call the meeting to order and Admiral Jonkett-Brown muttered something about wanting a quick word with him. He caught him about halfway up the table and they had a brief chat. After that Sir Holman suggested that we should all take our seats."

Dover chucked the fountain pen back in its box and scowled disagreeably at the Marquis of Arnfield. "So the whole bang shoot of you talked to Sir What's-his-name while he was guzzling his sherry?"

An expression of acute distaste passed over the Marquis' countenance. "Not exactly. Gissie Fittsarthur didn't speak to him, as far as I can remember."

Dover grunted and returned to an examination of the little boxes.

The Marquis wafted his handkerchief over his face again. "Is that all?" he asked MacGregor faintly.

"Well, just another question or two, if you don't mind, sir." MacGregor cringed visibly as Dover emerged triumphant with a carved ivory toothpick. "When Sir Holman left you to go and talk to Dr. Zlatt, can you remember how much sherry he still had left in his glass."

"Yes."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

The Marquis closed his eyes in a slow blink of martyrdom. "I said, yes, I do remember how much sherry he still had in his glass. He had it all left."

"All, sir?"

The Marquis directed a bleak stare at MacGregor. "Are you having difficulty in hearing me, my good man?"

MacGregor blushed. "No, sir."

"I am glad to hear it. I rather pride myself on the clarity of my enunciation. Now, as I was saying, when Sir Holman left me to talk to Zlatt he hadn't touched his sherry. There was nothing unusual about this. Sir Holman was a whiskey man and didn't care much for sherry. However, it is the tradition at Sewell and Vallotton to serve sherry before each board meeting, so there was nothing Sir Holman could do about it. He just used to carry his glass around until he was ready to open the meeting. Then he went to the head of the table, tossed the whole glassful down at one go, and called us to order. Like," added the Marquis with a very aristocratic sneer, "someone drinking cough mixture."

"That's very interesting, sir," said MacGregor and shot a glance at Dover to see if this vital piece of information had penetrated the solid ivory. Was there a momentary hesitation in the delicate exploration, with the borrowed toothpick, of the Chief Inspector's left ear? It was difficult to tell. MacGregor turned back to the Marquis. "I suppose everybody in the boardroom knew that Sir Holman usually drank his sherry like that?"

"Of course." The Marquis flourished his handkerchief with studied grace. "It was no secret. He did it for years."

MacGregor tried to hide his excitement. "No doubt that's why he never noticed the poison."

"No doubt. Is there anything else?"

"Er—just one more point, sir." MacGregor turned back a page or two in his notebook. "Ah, yes. Could you tell me what you and Sir Holman were talking about, sir?"

The Marquis looked annoyed. "I fail to see what damned business it is of yours," he snapped, "but, if you must know, we were discussing my re-election to the board. I am due to retire in a couple of months under our rules and I wanted to be quite sure that our chairman knew that

I was intending to stand again."

"There was no quarrel or disagreement, sir?"

"None. Sir Holman assured me of his full support." The Marquis stood up and glared icily at Dover who was now engaged in trying to get the top off the Marquis' own pocket flask. "No doubt you will be returning my personal possessions in due course. I would prefer to have them in an undamaged condition, if that is possible."

The Honorable Gisbert Fitts-arthur was a watery-eyed, shriveled old chap who was clearly keen to get on pally terms with two real-life detectives.

"Always been a great one for mystery stories," he confided as he hitched his chair nearer to the desk. "Started as a nipper with those Sherlock Holmes ones and never looked back since, hm? Borrow 'em from the library, don't you know. Can't afford to buy books with surtax the rate it is. So—you've me to thank that there was no tampering with the evidence in there, hm? Knew there was something pretty fishy about the way old Holman keeled over. Fit as a fiddle, he was. 'Don't touch anything!' I told 'em. 'And nobody's to leave the room, either!' I knew exactly what to do, hm?"

Dover scowled resentfully and pulled the Honorable Gisbert's box in front of him. The old-fashioned fountain pen, a rather shabby wallet, four pieces of string, three bus tickets, a large sheet of hastily folded blotting paper—the Honorable Gisbert's personal possessions were not up to the high standards Dover had come to expect. He opened up the sheet of blotting paper and glowered at its virgin whiteness.

The Honorable Gisbert grinned sheepishly. "Always stock up on a bit of stationery, hm? Well, Sewell and Vallotton won't miss it, will they?"

Dover pushed the box away and got down to business. "You were the one who handed the sherry round?"

"Ah! Yes, well, I can explain that. Innocent as a newborn babe, hm? Sherry glasses all laid out on a heavy silver tray. Lord Arnfield pours the sherry out. I pick up the tray. Both hands, see? Takes both my hands to lift the damned thing. Couldn't possibly have held it in one hand while I popped the poison in. Besides, how did I know which glass poor Holman was going to take?"

"You served him first," Dover pointed out through an enormous yawn.

"Who told you that? Oh, Arnfield, of course! Well, if it's a suspect you're after, have a good look at our noble Marquis, hm? *Cui bono*, that's what I always say."

MacGregor knew it was no use waiting for Dover to respond to a Latin phrase, however well-known. "Are you suggesting that the Marquis of Arnfield benefits from Sir Holman's death?" he asked.

The Honorable Gisbert bared his yellow teeth in what could have been a smile. "Five thousand a year. What I'd call a substantial motive, hm?"

"He stands to inherit that, sir?"

"No, not inherit! Keep. That's what he gets for serving on the board, don't you know. Arnfield's term of office coming to an end. No re-election for him without poor Holman's backing. Ergo, five thousand a year gone up the spout and Arnfield's got some very expensive hobbies to keep up."

"And Sir Holman was not going to support him, sir?"

The Honorable Gisbert winked, tapped the side of his nose, and leered knowingly. "Little bird!" he sniggered. "Little bird, hm? Holman wanted the seat for his nephew. Everybody knows that."

"You accusing this Marquis of Who's-your-father of murder?" demanded Dover who could occasionally get to the point with amazing speed.

The Honorable Gisbert squirmed uncomfortably. "Hey, steady on!" he whinnied. "Arnfield and I belong to the same club. Not that I'll be able to keep my dues up much longer with the way—"

"Well, who do you fancy then?" demanded Dover.

"I'd give you six to four on Zlatt," responded the Honorable Gisbert maliciously. "Well, you can't call poisoning an Englishman's crime, can you?"

Dover had found himself an ebony comb in a chased silver case. "That all you've got to go on? That Zlatt's not an Englishman?"

"No. He's got a motive, too."

"So has this Marquis fellow."

"Zlatt's is bigger," said the Honorable Gisbert. "*Cui bono*—told you that before." He paused in wonder as Dover slowly drew the comb through his meager tufts of hair. "I say, that's a bit unhygienic, isn't it?"

"Why?" asked Dover, continuing his combing unperturbed. "Zlatt's not got dandruff, has he?"

"That's Zlatt's comb?"

"In his box," said Dover, idly running his thumbnail along the teeth.

The Honorable Gisbert whickered like a senile horse. "Bald as a coot!" he tittered. "What's he want a comb for?"

"Maybe it's a reminder of happier days," chuckled Dover and warmed to the Honorable Gisbert as this shaft of wit was greeted by flattering guffaws.

MacGregor, who had lost his sense of humor the day after he was appointed Dover's assistant, cleared his throat. "You were

telling us about Dr. Zlatt's motive, sir."

"Ah!" The Honorable Gisbert pulled himself together. "Next chairman of Sewell and Vollatton. No doubt about it. Ten thousand a year plus perks." The yellow teeth were revealed once more. "Might be tempted to commit murder myself for that, hm? And he had the opportunity. While he was showing poor Holman those papers. Quickness of the hand, hm? Juggling about like that he could easily have dropped something in Holman's glass of sherry."

Police Constable Saunderson brought in the coffee.

Dover welcomed the refreshments with his usual charm and grace. "Coffee? 'Strewth, it's a square meal I want, laddie!" He grabbed the stickiest-looking cake. "This muck wouldn't keep a fly going."

"Maybe I can get you some sandwiches, sir," said P.C. Saunderson as another cake plunged down the Chief Inspector's gullet.

"Sandwiches? With my stomach, laddie?" Dover shook his head and his face assumed a suitably solemn expression. I've got to be careful, I have. Doctor's orders. I've got a very delicate stomach, you see, and—"

But MacGregor had no intention of letting Dover get started on the subject of his stomach. "I do think, sir, that we ought to finish off these interviews before lunch. We've kept these people waiting long enough already and they are pretty important men, you know. We don't want them to be making complaints."

"Let 'em try!" blustered Dover with the bravado of one who'd had more complaints made against him than most of us have had hot dinners. "We're dealing with murder, not some bloomin' parking violation."

"That's what makes speed in the initial stages so important, isn't it, sir?"

Dover, after a pause for thought, decided that MacGregor hadn't the guts to try being cheeky. He helped himself to another cake.

"Er—have you got any theories yet, sir?"

Dover wiped a blob of cream off his lapel and slowly licked his finger. "Didn't care much for the look of that Marquis fellow," he admitted grudgingly. "Or the other one, come to that."

"The Honorable Gisbert, sir? No, he wasn't very impressive, was he? This Dr. Zlatt looks as though he might be a good possibility."

Dover nodded, his mouth full again.

"Actually, sir,"—MacGregor broached the subject with considerable care because Dover had

a habit of reacting unfavorably to other people's ideas—"I was wondering about the Marquis of Arnfield myself. It's this business of Sir Holman not liking sherry, you see. Now, presented with a tray of glasses, wouldn't he be likely to take the one that was *least* full? The Marquis could have poisoned one glass and then only half filled it—"

"You don't have to spell it out in words of one syllable!" snapped Dover, indicating that he was ready for his second cup of coffee by shoving the saucer noisily across the desk.

"It was just a suggestion, sir."

"And a damned stupid one!" snarled Dover as he stuffed the last cake in his mouth. "Anyhow, I thought of it myself hours ago."

"Yes, sir," sighed MacGregor.

Dover dropped six lumps of sugar in his cup and started stirring it with a silver swizzle stick that he'd come across in the Marquis of Arnfield's box. The gentle exercise appeared to give him pleasure and for some minutes he swizzled away. MacGregor and P.C. Saunderson stood in bemused silence until the Chief Inspector at last raised his head. "Well, what are you waiting for? Bring the next one in!"

Vice-Admiral Jonkett-B r o w n had bright blue mariner's eyes, a red face, and a nasty temper. In spite of this he very nearly became Dover's friend for life when he stormed in declaring that he would make no statement and answer no questions without the professional a d v i c e of his solicitor.

"Very wise!" approved Dover, most of whose attention was currently devoted to t h u m b i n g through a little address book he'd found. "Pity there aren't a few more like you. Get the next one, MacGregor!"

The Admiral was a little taken aback. "It's not that I want to obstruct your inquiries," he explained awkwardly.

"Of course not," agreed Dover, delicately moistening a f i n g e r before he turned over the next page.

"But you must admit we've all been placed in a deuced sticky position."

Dover's face was beginning to ache with the effort of sustaining an encouraging smile. "You can't be too careful," he mumbled.

"Not that I've anything to hide," the Admiral went on. "Damn it, I only exchanged a couple of words with Holman before he went down as though he'd been f e l l e d with a marlinespike." Without thinking he sat down in the chair and the last traces of benevolence faded from Dover's countenance. "So, you see, I couldn't have killed him, even if I'd wanted to. Poor old devil! What a rotten way to go, eh? Still, one of us

four must have done it. There's no getting away from that. Well, luckily I'm not the sort of man who flinches in the face of unpleasant facts. Now, let's have a look at the rest of the field, shall we? What about the Marquis of Arnfield for a start? I daresay you've formed a few opinions of your own about him but I'd just like you to listen to a little theory of mine."

Dover reached for a watch from the Honorable Gisbert's box, wound it up, and placed it ostentatiously on the desk.

The Admiral beamed. "Good! I'm glad to see you're a man after my own heart. Be brief and keep to the point—that's what I used to tell my young officers. I can't tolerate chaps who ramble on and on without ever saying anything. I've been accused of being a trifle too blunt in my time, but nobody's ever called me a shilly-shallier. Thirty years in the Navy's taught me a thing or two—and keeping my eyes open is one of them. And using the old brain. I haven't been wasting my time sitting out there, you know. I've been thinking and in my opinion the Marquis of Arnfield might well be your man. And I can give you a lead as to how he did it, too."

To Dover's patent dismay the Admiral settled back comfortably in his chair and crossed one immaculately trousered leg over the other. "As soon as he'd poured out the sherry, Arnfield dashed across the room and caught poor Holman over by the window. They were talking together for quite a while, discussing Arnfield's chances of being re-elected to the board, I shouldn't wonder. Still, that doesn't matter at the moment. What does matter is that Arnfield is congenitally incapable of speaking to any of us members of the lower orders without waving that damned handkerchief of his about like a distress signal. You must have noticed him. It's a damned dirty habit, if you ask me, and dashed distracting, too. With that flapping about in your face you could have a ton of bricks dropped in your sherry and never even notice."

MacGregor caught Dover's eye and correctly interpreted the finger being drawn grimly across the Chief Inspector's throat as an indication that somebody's patience was becoming exhausted. Vice-Admiral Jonkett-Brown, however, was not a man who let himself be interrupted lightly and MacGregor's half-hearted attempts were sunk without a qualm.

"Mind you, the Marquis of Arnfield isn't the only one you ought to be keeping your eye on. There's our Herr Doktor Zlatt, too. I've always thought he was a deuced sight too clever by half. Ambitious, you know. Sort of blighter who'd stop at nothing.

Well, now"—the Admiral uncrossed his legs and glanced expectantly up at Dover—"there's a couple of pointers for you to follow up."

Dover's eyes had been closed for some time and they didn't open now.

The Admiral, his ears already beginning to steam a little, turned brusquely to MacGregor in search of enlightenment. "The fellow's not gone to sleep, has he?" he demanded.

"Of course not, sir!" MacGregor's attempt to pass off a tricky situation with a gay laugh was not helped by the faint bubbling sound which started to come from Dover's lips. "Er—what about the Honorable Gisbert Fittsarthur, sir?"

"He happens to be a very old friend of mine," said the Admiral coldly, as though that settled the matter.

"But that doesn't mean that he isn't capable of murder, does it, sir?" asked MacGregor.

"It makes it dashed unlikely!"

"He did hand the sherry round, sir."

"True." The Admiral pursed his lips. "But we were all watching him very closely. He dropped the tray last month. He's beginning to show his age, you know. Getting doddery and more than a bit potty, too. He's got this bee in his bonnet about how poor he is. Well,"—the Admiral's red face creased in a frown as he tried to be fair—"I don't suppose he's worth a penny more than half a million these days but that's no excuse for some of the things he does. I mean, we've all got to tighten our belts a bit but there's no need to go writing your letters on the blank pages torn out of library books, is there?"

"I suppose not, sir," said MacGregor.

"And the way he goes on at these board meetings! It's a positive disgrace for a fellow of his breeding. Filling his fountain pen out of the chairman's inkwell, purloining pencils and sheets of paper, downing as much free sherry as he can get his hands on! I've warned him about it. 'Never you mind about finishing up in a pauper's grave,' I told him. 'It's the loony bin you're heading for.' I might as well have saved my breath because he went through the whole rigmarole just the same this morning. Jolly poor show, you know, with people like Zlatt looking on. Gives 'em an entirely false impression of British aristocracy."

By the time Dr. Benjamin Zlatt settled himself with bland composure in the suspects' chair, Dover had had more than enough. His stomach was rumbling like a jumbo jet at takeoff. Dr. Zlatt suddenly found himself at the tail end of Dover's fury.

"I'm thinking of charging you with murder!" snarled the Chief Inspector.

Dr. Zlatt didn't turn a hair. "In that case, my dear sir, I can only advise you to think again."

"You have access to poison!" roared Dover, determined now to make somebody pay for all the trouble he was being put to. "You'll be the next chairman of this bloomin' board and you could have slipped the poison into Sir What's-his-name's sherry when you were showing him those papers."

"Ah!" Dr. Zlatt nodded his head wisely. "Means, motive, and opportunity! Luckily I can demolish your hypothesis without much difficulty."

"Oh, can you? Well, take it from me, mate, if there's any demolishing to be done round here I'll do it!" Dover, suiting his actions to his words, raised his fists and clenched them threateningly. It would have been more impressive if they hadn't looked like a couple of rather dirty, pink, overstuffed cushions.

Dr. Zlatt merely smiled. "May I be permitted to deal with your accusations one at a time? First, the question of the poison. I agree—nobody in that boardroom could have got hold of whatever poison may have been used more easily than I. But, please, give me credit for some intelligence. Should I ever contemplate committing murder, poison is the last means I should choose. It would point the finger of suspicion at me immediately."

"It's the old double bluff," said Dover. "You used poison because you thought I'd think you'd be too clever to use poison."

There were thirty seconds of respectful silence while everybody, including Dover, dissected the cunning logic of this statement.

"And then," Dr. Zlatt continued calmly, "we come to my presumed motive. No doubt the chairmanship of the Sewell and Vallotton board will be offered to me but that doesn't mean that I shall accept it. In fact, I shall not. I am an extremely rich man, my dear sir, and my time is already fully occupied with much work. You will have to take my word for it, but I can assure you that I simply am not interested in becoming Sir Holman's successor."

Dover was now regarding Dr. Zlatt with the utmost loathing. "You'd have to say that!"

"I turned down the chairmanship of another company only last week and the fees were nearly double what I would get here."

Dover turned green with envy and fished out his last ace. "You were the only one with the opportunity to poison the glass of sherry."

Dr. Zlatt trumped the ace. "Now that, my dear sir, is just

not true. All the others were in the near vicinity of Sir Holman and had just as much chance as I did. Even more, I would imagine."

"They weren't waving papers all over the place to distract his attention."

Dr. Zlatt leaned back rather gracefully in his chair. "I'm afraid you have been slightly misinformed. I did talk to Sir Holman for several minutes and I did wave papers about. I was showing him the plans for a new research laboratory which Sewell and Vallotton are thinking of building. However, at that time, Sir Holman's glass of sherry was not in his hand."

Collapse of stout party. "Waddery'mean?" gabbled Dover.

"Before looking at the plans Sir Holman quite naturally put his glass down so that he could have both his hands free. He stepped across to the boardroom table and left his glass by the things in front of his chair. You know about his habit of draining his glass at one gulp just before he opened the meeting?"

"Oh, damn and blast!" said Dover and retired from the interrogation in a sulk.

Dr. Zlatt proved that he could manage quite well without him. "I wonder if you would permit me to offer you a small suggestion, Sergeant?" he said, turning to MacGregor. "It's this problem of motive. Sir Holman wasn't the sort of man who had murderous enemies, certainly not among his fellow directors. On the other hand we are all of us interested in money. Now, as soon as the stock market gets wind of Sir Holman's death, Sewell and Vallotton shares will drop like a plummet of lead. Somebody with prior knowledge could, if you will excuse the expression, make a killing."

MacGregor looked up from his notebook. "You mean by buying up shares in the hope they'll rise later, sir?"

"That's one possibility, but I was thinking of another manipulation. Selling short. A man contracts to sell at some future date shares which he doesn't yet possess. He hopes, of course, to be able to buy the shares meanwhile at a lower price and thus make a profit."

"Ah"—MacGregor had recently bought himself a paperback on the art of investing and reckoned he knew his way around the corridors of high finance —"you mean a bull, sir?"

"Well," said Dr. Zlatt kindly, "it's a bear, actually, but you've got the right idea."

Dover sniggered and got a reproving glance from Dr. Zlatt.

"We'll have to look into this, sir," said MacGregor thoughtfully.

"I should get your Fraud Squad people on to it. They know their

way around the City. You see, if somebody in that boardroom did deliberately kill Sir Holman so that the Sewell and Vallotton shares would drop, he certainly wouldn't have used his own name in his financial dealings. You'll probably need an expert to unravel all the complications."

"And what," asked Dover, removing a fat cigar from Vice-Admiral Jonkett-Brown's pigskin case, "do you think you're doing?"

MacGregor paused in mid-dialing. "I was just getting on to the Yard, sir."

"Wafor?"

"I thought we should follow up Dr. Zlatt's suggestion, sir, and see if anybody has been playing the market with Sewell and Vallotton shares."

"'Strewth!" said Dover, his piggy little eyes gleaming contemptuously through a cloud of richly aromatic smoke. "You don't half like to do things the hard way."

MacGregor dropped the telephone back onto its stand. "Well," he said with as much patience as he could muster, "I really don't see what other line we can pursue at the moment, sir." He glanced in some despair at his notebook. "Our questioning of the four obvious suspects doesn't seem to have got us very far, does it? We can't do much about checking up where the poison came from until we know exactly what it was and it may be hours before the lab comes up with the answer. And as far as I can see from the rather muddled picture we've got of what happened immediately prior to the murder, any one of the four men could have put the poison in Sir Holman's glass of sherry."

MacGregor waited politely while Dover draped himself over the edge of the desk and coughed his heart up. "Actually I was wondering, sir, if perhaps we oughtn't to try staging a reconstruction of the crime. I don't know about you, sir, but I don't feel I've got a very clear idea of what people's movements really were. Of course," added MacGregor rather bitterly, "it would perhaps have helped if we'd examined the boardroom first."

Dover, strangely enough, was no longer coughing. He was laughing. Uproariously, triumphantly, and quite obviously at MacGregor's expense.

MacGregor, his jaw locked, counted up to ten. "Sir?"

"Reconstruction of the crime!" spluttered Dover. "'Strewth, you'll be the death of me yet!"

MacGregor hoped so from the bottom of his heart, but he was inhibited by police discipline from voicing his desire aloud.

"We'll make the arrest after lunch," said Dover, rubbing it in.

"Arrest, sir? But—who are you going to arrest?"

Dover picked up his bowler hat and screwed it on his head. "What's-his-name—that Australian fellow."

Australian fellow? MacGregor almost sagged with relief. The old fool had gone clean off his rocker at last. Or did he mean Austrian? "Dr. Zlatt, sir?"

"No, not Zlatt, you damned fool! He wasn't Australian, was he?" Dover dragged himself to his feet and tapped the ash off his cigar onto the lush carpet. "The one who kept saying 'cooee.' What's his name?" He looked at the labels on the little boxes. "Fittsarthur. The Honorable Gisbert."

"The Honorable Gisbert Fittsarthur, sir?" echoed MacGregor incredulously. "But you can't arrest him!"

"Oh, can't I?" scowled Dover. "You just wait and see, laddie!"

MacGregor wrung his hands and tried an appeal to reason and common sense. "Sir, you can't just charge a man with murder because you don't like the look of him. You have to have *evidence*. You can't run in a man of his standing as though he was just some smelly old tramp. He'll kick up the most frightful shindy, sir, and you'll be—"

"I've got evidence," Dover broke in crossly. "What do you think I am? An idiot?"

It was not a question that MacGregor dared to answer. "You've got evidence that the Honorable Gisbert Fittsarthur murdered Sir Holman, sir?"

"As good as," muttered Dover, showing a belated sense of caution. "All it wants is a bit of checking. Motive and the like."

"A bit of checking? I see, sir. Well, would it be asking too much to inquire of what it consists?"

The ironic tone was not lost on Dover. His face twisted up into a scowl. "Don't you start coming the old sarcastic with me, laddie!" he snarled. "I was solving crimes when you were still in diapers and don't you forget it! Here"—he grabbed the old-fashioned fountain pen out of the Honorable Gisbert's box and chucked it across at MacGregor—"there's your blooming evidence!"

MacGregor turned the fountain pen over doubtfully in his hands and tried to fathom out where it could possibly fit into the murder. Of course, the Chief Inspector was probably as far off the beam as he usually was but you could never be sure. Once in a blue moon the bumbling old idiot did manage to make two and two add up to four and, when he did, MacGregor was never allowed to forget it.

Luckily Dover wasn't prepared to postpone his lunch one second longer than was absolutely

necessary. "That's what he carried the poison in, nitwit!"

Light dawned and MacGregor could have kicked himself. Of course! Oh why, oh why hadn't he spotted it first? It was so childishly obvious when you knew. "The Honorable Gisbert filling his fountain pen from the chairman's inkwell!" he gasped.

Dover gave a withering sniff. "My God, it's taken you long enough to see it! You're that busy scribbling down every blooming word in your little book that you miss what's sticking right up under your nose. When this Gisbert joker went to fill his fountain pen with ink, Sir What's-his-name's glass of sherry was next to the inkwell on the boardroom table, wasn't it?"

MacGregor agreed eagerly that it was. "Dr. Zlatt told us that Sir Holman had put his glass down there—"

"And somebody else mentioned Gisbert filling his fountain pen."

"Vice-Admiral Jonkett-Brown."

"But when I tried to use the pen there was no bloomin' ink in it! I couldn't get the damned thing to write at all."

MacGregor, prompted by the most unworthy of motives, clutched at a final straw. He unscrewed the cap of the fountain pen and tried it. It didn't write. He wiggled the little lever on the side hopefully, but it was no good: the fountain pen was empty.

"Of course, sir," MacGregor said, "this doesn't *prove* that the Honorable Gisbert squirted poison into Sir Holman's glass of sherry while pretending to fill his fountain pen from the inkwell."

"'Strewth!" roared Dover, heading for the door and his lunch. "You want it with jam on, you do. I've told you what happened, laddie. I've done my bit. The rest is up to you."

---

a NEW Dr. Basil Willing story by

HELEN McCLOY

Hail, Hail! Dr. Basil Willing is back—after much too long an absence from the pages of EQMM. The former medical assistant to the District Attorney of New York County, the famous forensic psychiatrist and crime consultant, is given a contemporary problem in communication—a problem within a much larger problem involving one of today's most important challenges to law and order and to the health of our future leaders. In a word, drugs. Or to borrow one of the author's phrases and use it metaphorically—"a costume ball without masks" . . .

THE PLEASANT ASSASSIN

by HELEN McCLOY

THE HIGH PLACE HAD BEEN A grassy knoll a few hundred years ago. It still revealed a view of the countryside beyond the city. Once a watchtower had stood here and beacon fires had been lit when the watchers saw Indians. It was still called Beacon Hill.

From his windows on the twentieth floor Basil Willing looked down on the golden dome of the Bullfinch State House. Beyond, he had a bird's-eye view of huddled roofs and chimneypots. Leafy tree tops traced the paths of old streets winding down to the river. Here and there a church steeple stood, sharp as a needle, against an angry sky.

Black clouds had brought on premature twilight. A hidden sunset touched the lower edge of darkness with flame as if all the fires of hell were banked just beyond human vision.

As indeed they are . . . Basil was remembering the clash between students and police on Boston Common the night before.

He could see the Common now as a mass of tree tops on his left. He could see the river beyond the chimneypots. Little sailboats

were tacking to and fro in a cluster, as busily unimportant as a cloud of hovering gnats.

His doorbell buzzed. Twenty floors below someone must have touched his button by mistake. No one in Boston knew he was at this address except his daughter, and she had left him only moments ago. There had been no question of her coming back this evening.

He pushed the button that opened a two-way speaking tube to the vestibule downstairs. "Yes?"

"Dr. Willing?"

It was a man's voice, distorted by the echo-chamber effect of the tube. "My name's Grogan—Aloysius Grogan, Boston Police Department. Inspector Foyle of New York gave me your address. May I come up?"

"Of course."

Basil pressed the other button that opened the door, but he was still puzzled. Foyle had retired to Florida and only came to New York for occasional visits. When, and why, had Foyle been in contact with the Boston Police?

The doorbell rang. On the threshold stood a tall man with a face so young that just seeing it made Basil feel ten years older.

"Frankly I've come to ask your help," Grogan said. "It's sort of off the record."

"It would have to be," said Basil. "Inspector Foyle is not the only person who has retired lately. I'm no longer a medical assistant to the District Attorney of New York County."

"But you're still called in as a psychiatric consultant."

"Only now and then, but I have no official standing in Boston. I'm here because I was asked to deliver a series of lectures at Harvard. I was glad to accept because it gave me a chance to live near my daughter for a while. She's a student at Wheaton."

"I realize all that, but—" The young man sighed. "When I saw Foyle in New York he seemed to think this was your kind of case. Of course I don't want to impose on you. When a man is old enough to retire he wants people to leave him alone."

Old? "Suppose you tell me about this case."

"Thank you, sir."

Basil's lips were dry. He recalled a remark of his father's: *The worst thing is when they start calling you "sir" . . .*

"You've heard of Professor Jeremiah Pitcairn? Known to students as the Pit Viper?"

"Author of *After the Family: What?*"

"That's our boy. *Brave New World* stuff."

"Stress comes from partial control of environment. Ergo, let's eliminate stress by controlling the environment totally from the moment of birth. Pavlov could never

have got those dogs to salivate every time that bell rang if he'd had only partial control of their environment."

Grogan laughed. "You're not in sympathy with Professor Pitcairn's theories?"

"No, but I really cannot see how they could bring him into conflict with the law."

"I'm with Narcotics."

It took a great deal to startle Basil, but this was a great deal. "A full professor! Pitcairn?"

Grogan sighed. "You see? Nobody's going to believe it. That's his strength. But it's not impossible, you know. Small amounts of mood-changing drugs are accessible to experimental psychologists as to doctors."

"I don't believe it, Pitcairn's much too conservative."

"Is he really? Not if you read between the lines. He wants to change things. He wants escape from conflict. Control the environment of children from birth and they'll escape all conflict with environment. I'd say that's pretty revolutionary."

"It would certainly end progress," said Basil. "For progress depends on some people refusing to accept environment as they find it."

"Who wants progress? Not Pitcairn."

"How do drugs come into it?" asked Basil.

"They can be used experimentally to modify reactions to environment. This enables you to command the reaction you want when you want it, for the length of time you want it, so you can study it at your leisure. But suppose you become so interested in drugs that you decide to try some of them on yourself? Like Baudelaire and Gautier, to say nothing of De Quincey and Coleridge. And—just suppose—you get hooked on an expensive illegal drug. Not just marijuana. Something stronger. What happens then?"

"You'd need money. Lots."

"A hundred dollars a day or more. Just for the drug. You're a full professor, too smart to take to petty crime, like stealing or forgery. So you go into the business of distributing drugs. You become a middleman, recruiting pushers for wholesalers—pushers who are racketeers. That's profitable and you think it will be safe. Who's going to suspect the distinguished author of *After the Family: What?*"

"But you do suspect him. What happened?"

"Stool pigeons. We've had tips—or shall I say, 'information received'? The dope is sea-borne. Pitcairn lives down near Buzzard's Bay and comes up to Boston two or three times a week. He always drops in at one place we're watching—The Den of Iniquity."

Basil couldn't help laughing.

"Surely with that name the place must be innocent!"

"You can't be sure. We've just arrested a pair of burglars who specialized in rifling summer cottages while they were empty in winter. Those boys sold everything they stole openly, at a roadside antique shop, and their sign read: *Thieves Market.*"

"You think The Den of Iniquity is another double bluff?"

"I'm sure of it, but I can't prove it. We had a tip that Pitcairn was going to be there last Wednesday. He'd been away for three weeks. India. It seemed logical he'd have stuff to give pushers when he got back—at least, logical enough to watch him while he was at The Den. I really thought we had him."

"But you didn't?"

"He never showed. I had The Den staked out—went there myself. Then I had a bit of sheer bad luck. There I was, trying not to look like a policeman, and the first guy I saw, after I walked in, was someone I'd been to school with, who went on to MIT on a scholarship when I joined the police department. He called me by name and asked me how I liked being a policeman. I tried to shut him up, but it was too late. Somebody must have heard him and warned Pitcairn not to come."

"Why are you so sure it was this incident that gave you away?"

"Nobody outside Narcotics knew anything about that stakeout at The Den. It must have been that dear old school chum of mine who blew my cover, damn him! Whoever overheard him must have telephoned Pitcairn."

"Where is The Den?"

"Charles Street. It's just one big room. Used to be a shop. There's a shop window still, with a curtain across the glass to hide the inside from passers-by in the street. There's a beer and coffee bar, a little dais for musicians, some tables and chairs and lavatories and one telephone booth. That's all. Just two outside doors—a front door to the street and a side door to an alley. People kept drifting in all evening, but no one left the joint until it closed. I know because I was in a position to watch both doors leading outside. That's why I'm so sure someone telephoned Pitcairn from inside."

"Were you also able to watch the telephone booth too?"

"Oh, yes. I was sitting right beside the booth in case a call came through for me from one of the other men in Narcotics. It didn't. There were no incoming calls at all and only two outgoing calls. A girl the others called Anna Warsaw phoned some boy named Sam at Boston University and they had a long silly conversation. No references to drugs or professors. I could hear

everything because she left the door of the booth open. It was pretty hot that night."

"My daughter knows an Anna Warsaw. At least she's mentioned the name."

"Students around Boston get to know each other. Boston is just a big village. The name Warsaw is pretty uncommon, so it's probably the same girl."

"How do you know she was calling Boston University?"

"She asked for Mugar Memorial Library."

"At that hour?"

"It's open until eleven thirty. And she just asked for Sam—no surname. So he probably works there."

"And the other call?"

"A boy made that one. The others called him Gene."

"Was his conversation silly too?"

"There wasn't any. No one answered his call. He waited about a minute, then slammed the receiver back on its hook and came out of the booth. I heard him say to another boy that parents ought to have more sense than to go gadding about at night when they were too old for it, so I assumed that either he was calling his parents or he wanted people to think so."

"And you believe that one of these two calls warned Pitcairn?"

"What else can I think? Pitcairn never showed up, so someone must have got a message to him. No one there left the room or did anything else that could have conveyed a message outside. So someone must have telephoned, but the only two who actually did telephone didn't seem to be passing on a message about drugs or police. So you see, it's impossible!"

"Unless the girl was talking in code, or the boy let the telephone ring a prearranged number of times as a signal. What do you want me to do?"

"Well . . ." The young face got pinker. "We've just had another tip. Jeremiah Pitcairn is expected in Boston again tonight. If he comes it will be the first time since he returned from India."

"And you think he'll visit The Den of Iniquity?"

"He's a regular—always goes there when he's in town. A lot of professors do. Bridging the generation gap, they call it. I can't go myself because I was recognized last time. All the regulars know I'm a cop now. But you've only just come to Boston. No one would recognize you."

"No one would talk to a man my age in a place like that. You need someone who can pass for under twenty-five."

"Students take their parents to places like The Den. It would seem natural if you were there with your daughter and people might talk to you then."

"I think we should leave my daughter out of this." Basil's voice sounded more abrasive than he had intended.

"But she'd give you a good excuse for being there."

"I don't want her involved. The best I can do is to go there alone and look around. I hardly expect anything will come of it, but I might pick up something. How do I find the place?"

"On the west side of Charles Street, halfway between the Common and Cambridge Street. You can't miss it. There's a big neon sign in red that says: *The Den of Iniquity*. I'll give you a couple of hours, then meet you outside. Look for a blue Pontiac without lights or police markings. My own car."

Grogan rose. "A lot of people say that marijuana is no more harmful than alcohol or tobacco. Do you believe that?"

"It might conceivably be true of the crude marijuana we get in this country," said Basil. "I doubt if it's true of the *ganja* and *charas* used in India. They are to pot what brandy is to beer."

"Didn't the strongest form, hashish, give us our word 'assassin'?"

"The words 'assassin' and 'hashish' both come from Hashishin, the name of Omar Khayyam's schoolmate who founded a secret society devoted to religious assassination, like Thuggee. Marco Polo assumed that the Assassins committed their crimes because they were under the influence of hashish. Actually they were spurred by religious fanaticism, and hashish was their reward. They didn't know Hashishin was feeding them a drug. They thought they were actually visiting Paradise. They thought Hashishin had solved the riddle of the universe and would tell them the secret when they reached the innermost circle of the society. The few who finally made it were bluntly informed: 'The only secret is that there is no secret.' "

"Didn't someone call marijuana 'The Pleasant Assassin'?"

"That was a botanist, Dr. Norman Taylor. *Cannabis sativa* has taken millions of poor Hindus through famines. Dr. Taylor said that to such it is a 'Pleasant Assassin' that kills only fear and grief. Don't ask me if he's right. I just don't know."

"Neither do I. But one thing I do know: as long as marijuana is illegal it brings young people into contact with the criminal world. The men who distribute to young, newly recruited pushers are professional criminals. They sell worse things than marijuana and they stop at nothing. That's what scares me."

The evening was too warm for an overcoat—it was the mild.

moist evening of a New England May.

Basil walked through the archway under the State House, so like the archway under the Institute in Paris. It was like walking through an archway into the past. Gas still burned here in the street lamps. He had left tall buildings and asphalt sidewalks behind him. On Mount Vernon Street there were only low houses, with illumined fanlights above Federal doorways, shining golden through the velvet dusk, and brick pavement that rose in little hillocks over the big roots of the Norwegian maples. As he walked, he crushed maple seeds underfoot.

He passed Louisburg Square, looking like an illustration for a Henry James novel. Wisteria blossoms poured down one housefront, scenting the tepid air with the very smell of spring itself. Cars along the curb, mostly small and foreign, were in jewel colors, polished as lovingly as old silver.

At the foot of the hill he came out on Charles Street opposite the old church that is still called the Meeting House. He could see both sides of the way curving toward Cambridge Street. There was no red neon sign announcing The Den of Iniquity.

Had they moved after Grogan's visit?

He walked on, scanning each housefront. He was halfway to Cambridge Street when he saw, on the other side of Charles, a single low-watt bulb shedding discreet light on a wooden sign. It was decorated with artfully amateurish letters that read: *The Poor Man's Paradise.*

So they hadn't moved. They had merely changed the name, making it less explicit, but still obvious enough to those in the know.

The Sky Flyer, The Giver of Delight, The Soother of Grief, The Heavenly Guide, The Poor Man's Paradise . . . All these graceful phrases were used in India for what the Western mind called by such a short and unattractive word: pot.

There was a curtained shop window, as Grogan had said. Steps led down to a basement door, halfway below street level.

Basil opened the door.

It looked like the usual undergraduate hangout. Coffee and beer were the only drinks in view. Layers of blue and yellow smoke wavered across the room, but they smelled only of tobacco.

The plangent voice of a dulcimer rose and fell, weaving a little silver thread of sound under and over the level mutter of human voices. Some were dancing the still popular monosexual dances in which partners stand a foot or so apart. Most were sitting at tables.

No one looked at Basil. He felt like a ghost until he became

aware of a pair of eyes staring at him from the shadows of an unlighted telephone booth, its door ajar.

To give himself countenance he started toward the bar, then came to an abrupt halt. A sudden draft parted the veils of smoke and he saw a face he knew well. Very well indeed.

Ivory-pale, delicate as a cameo, like her mother's face. Dark eyes, luminous in the shadow of fine densely black hair, also like her mother's. A sweet mouth.

Shock held him motionless.

"Why, father, what are you doing here?"

She was sitting at a table with another girl.

"This is Anna Warsaw. She's in my dormitory."

Basil saw a head in shades of bronze and gold, light brown hair, hazel eyes, suntanned skin with a healthy apricot glow under the tan.

"Do sit down, Dr. Willing," said Anna. "I suppose you're wondering how Gisela collected me and Tom after she left you."

"Tom?"

There were only the two girls at the table.

"Tom Piper. He's gone to get us coffee," said Gisela. "I ran into Tom and Anna on Beacon Street just after I left you. They were on their way to this new place, The Poor Man's Paradise, so I came along to see what it was like."

Anna was watching Basil's face. "This isn't New York, you know. Boston is just a village really—you're always running into people you know."

"Not just in Boston," said Basil. "When I lived in Italy I was told that 'Rome is just a village.' "

"You don't like this place," said Gisela.

"I've seen worse." Basil managed a smile.

"It's a do-your-own-thing place," she explained. "The management provides beer and coffee and a record player. People bring their own records, or guitars, or recite their own poetry, and some dance."

Basil looked toward the wriggling couples on the other side of the smoke veils. "What are they dancing?"

"Father, dances don't have names any more!"

"No names for the steps?"

"There aren't any steps." Her voice reproached him gently for such an archaic idea. "People just get up and make fools of themselves."

Basil's eyes were growing accustomed to the smoke and the dim light. All the boys and girls were in uniform. The new conformity. Pre-Raphaelite girls with long straight hair to their waists. Victorian boys with bushy hair

and sideburns or mustaches or beards. Boys in peasant smocks or antique military tunics. Girls in miniskirts or granny skirts that swept the floor. A costume ball without masks.

They didn't need masks. At that age their faces were masks, too bland and unformed to reveal either character or experience. The only clue to their thoughts lay in the pictures on the walls. Antiwar posters that owed something to Goya. Nightmarish fantasies that owed more to Hieronymus Bosch. Caricatures that would have amused Daumier. Nothing new under the sun.

At that thought some of the tension went out of Basil. How often he had said to his patients, "You must let your children go now. One of the hardest things a baby has to learn is to reverse the grasping reflex—to let go. It's hard for parents, too, but those who cannot let go are emotional misers, hoarders of love, who lose everything in the end."

Through the smoke haze a figure seemed to float toward them like some underwater thing drifting with the current. Orange hair stood out around its head in a great chrysanthemum. The young Paderewski before his hair went white. A sharp narrow face peered out of ambush like a small bird peering from a large untidy nest. He wore a tunic of gold-printed *sari* cloth in shocking pink and tight green slacks. The feet, like all feet that walk city streets in open sandals, were grimy.

"What took you so long?" asked Gisela.

"I stopped to telephone."

"And I bet you forgot the coffee!"

"Gosh, I did! I'll get it now."

"Oh, never mind. Sit down. Father, this is Tom Piper from Chicago. He's a prodigy. He entered Harvard at fifteen."

"And he's been there ever since," put in Anna. "Not a drop-out. A dropin."

There were Pipers in Chicago who had given a Justice to the Supreme Court. Could this be one of that family?

"Hi!" The young man slid into a seat. Now that he was at the table, Basil could see a large button on his chest with a printed legend: *American Students For Mbongu!* Where was Mbongu?

Basil didn't want to reveal his ignorance by asking.

"You're Dr. Basil Willing, aren't you?" said Tom Piper. "I recognized you while I was in the telephone booth and when you walked in. Your picture's on the jacket of your latest book. Must be interesting, being a forensic psychiatrist—at least, you make it sound interesting."

"You mean you're not sure whether I'm a competent psychiatrist or a persuasive writer?"

"Well, writing counts." The boy

grinned. "Who would ever have heard of Freud if he hadn't been such a persuasive writer?"

"The sex helped," said Anna.

The crowd was thinning. Afterward Basil was never able to explain the impulse that made him count the number of people left in the room. Perhaps it had something to do with the layers of smoke that blurred their faces. Counting was a reaching out for definition.

"A bad omen. There are just thirteen people in this room now."

Gisela's eyes narrowed against the sting of smoke. "I see only twelve."

"Including me?"

"Including you. Anna, how many people do you see in this room?"

Anna glanced about her. "There are two by the bar. With the bartender that makes three. There are two dancing. There are three at a table. Total: eight. And we four make twelve."

"I must have miscounted," said Basil.

But he knew he hadn't and he was puzzled by the sudden disappearance of Number Thirteen. Where Basil sat he could keep an eye on both outside doors and the two lavatory doors. No one had gone through any of those doors after his count. Was there a fifth door that he and Grogan had missed?

His glance came back to his own part of the room. The little puzzle solved itself as a light came on in the telephone booth nearby. Basil had forgotten the booth—had not seen it when it was dark. Someone must have just stepped inside and hesitated before closing the door that automatically switched on the light.

Now the light was bright inside, a hundred-watt bulb at least. Through the glass panel in the door he could see a boy dialing—the only boy in the room with hair cut short enough to show the shape of his head. Basil couldn't see his face, only his back and the dial of the telephone high on the wall.

The boy didn't look up the number or get it from Information. It was a number he obviously knew by heart. His fingers moved slowly and carefully as he dialed. Basil was close enough to catch the digits: 768-5829.

When the boy finished dialing he half turned, as if he were uncomfortable in the narrow booth. Now Basil could see his intent profile as he stood listening to whatever was coming through the receiver. After a few moments the boy replaced the telephone in its cradle without speaking and came out of the booth.

"Gisela! I didn't know you were here."

"Hello, Gene. This is Eugene Derry—my father, Dr. Willing. You know Anna and Tom, don't

you? Do sit down a minute."

"Dr. Basil Willing? I thought I recognized you when I came in."

Basil studied the broad brow, the wide-spaced eyes, the straight nose. Comely, almost Grecian. He wore his hair at almost Byronic length, but he was clean-shaven. His open-necked white shirt suggested Rupert Brooke rather than the Beatles.

He grinned across the table at Tom. "Still working for Mbongu?"

"Damn right," said Tom.

"Where is Mbongu?" ventured Basil.

"Oh, father, Mbongu isn't a place! It's a man—Ariosho Mbongu. He's in jail now, a political prisoner in Mandataland."

"Dare I ask where that is?"

"Before the war it was called East—"

"East Hell," interrupted Eugene. "At least, that's what G.I.'s called it during the war. It was an emerging nation even then. Why can't they emerge and get it over with?"

"You'll have to make allowances for Gene," said Anna to Basil. "His full name is Eugene Debs Derry. When parents give you a name like that you just have to become reactionary."

Eugene smiled at Basil. "Not too reactionary to have enjoyed your books, Dr. Willing. I'm majoring in psychology."

"So am I," said Tom. "One of my professors is Jeremiah Pitcairn."

"The Pit Viper?" Eugene laughed.

"You study under him, too?" asked Basil.

"No, but I've read his books and I've met him. The old fraud!"

"We've all met him," said Anna. "He likes young people."

The innocence of that remark sent a chill down Basil's spine. He turned to Eugene. "Why do you call him a fraud?"

"He's all over you. He tries to make you think he likes you. But it's fake. You can tell after the first five minutes with him."

"Oh, come on!" Tom was impatient. "It's his ideas you don't like. You're living back in the thirties, Gene. The Pit Viper and his kind have gone way beyond you. They're living in the twenty-first century."

"The New Left, I suppose?"

"Hell, no! They're way beyond prescientific ideas like Left and Right. They're in computer country, man."

"Why is he called the Pit Viper?" inquired Basil.

Everybody smiled. It was Anna who answered. "Because he has a temper."

"I hate to break this up, but I really must be going," said Gisela. "Biology at nine A.M.

They all rose.

"I can give you a lift," Anna

said to Gisela. "If I haven't been towed away. I'm parked right around the corner. Sorry I haven't room for you, Dr. Willing. It's a Fiat—only holds two."

"Thank you, but I'm living nearby," answered Basil. "Just a walk up the Hill. Good night, Tom. And Eugene."

"Good night, sir."

They left the two boys standing in the smoke haze. The Fiat was still there. Basil watched it drive off with the flat feeling that always comes to those who are left behind.

Slowly he walked back to Charles Street. Across the way from The Poor Man's Paradise a blue Pontiac, without lights, was parked at the curb. Basil stooped to look at the driver's face, opened the door, and sat down beside Grogan.

"Any luck?" asked Grogan.

"Maybe. But it's just a hunch." Basil was looking at the dial of what seemed to be a telephone wired to the dashboard. "Is that a radio-telephone?"

"Yes. My own, not police. Want to call someone?"

"Not at the moment. Do you know anything about a political prisoner in Mandataland named Mbongu?"

"Another case of international injustice. Mbongu was jailed for demanding the sort of rights people take for granted in most Western countries."

"Does the telephone number 768-5829 mean anything to you? I saw someone dial that number."

"If he dialed the digit one first, it's an Essex number. If he didn't it's a Sussex number, closer to Boston so you don't have to dial one first. 768 is the office code for both Essex and Sussex. Both have the same area code as Boston, 617, so neither is a long distance call from here."

"I don't believe he dialed one first, but I'm not sure."

"Let's see what we can find out." Grogan picked up his radio-telephone and dialed. "Grogan speaking. Check the listing of this number, please, and call me back. 768-5829. Either Essex or Sussex, possibly both . . . Who are we waiting for, Doctor Pitcairn?"

"No, I doubt if he'll come here tonight. My daughter was in there with friends. I was addressed by name several times, just as you were. I would hazard a guess that Pitcairn has been warned. Again. Possibly by the same person who warned him last time, and who will now—I hope—lead us back to Pitcairn, and the evidence you need."

"Who is he? The one who phoned, I mean."

"It may be either of two young men. Tom Piper or Eugene Derry. They both knew who I was. Piper was in the telephone booth when I arrived and could have phoned then. Derry tried to telephone af-

ter I arrived and got no answer."

"He could be the Gene who telephoned last time and got no answer."

"Anna Warsaw was t h e r e again, t o o — t h e one who telephoned last time and did get an answer. She was sitting with my daughter when I walked in. She's driving my daughter back to college now."

"Could she have signaled to Piper when she saw you?"

"She didn't have to. H e recognized me at once."

"I didn't think so many people there would know you by sight."

"Neither did I. but my picture was on the jacket of my most recent book. They all seem to have read it and they all seem to know Pitcairn. Tom Piper likes him. Eugene Derry doesn't."

"And you got some kind of hunch out of all this?"

"Yes—until I started talking to you. Now I'm beginning to wonder if—"

The radio-telephone buzzed.

"Grogan speaking . . . Thank you." He put down the receiver. "In Essex, 768-5829 is a private house, a new listing for somebody named B. G. Standish. In Sussex it's been the office phone number of a learned society for several years, the League of Spiritual Development. I suppose—"

Grogan's voice died as the door of The Poor Man's Paradise opened.

Three figures climbed up the steps to the street. There was a chorus of goodbyes and two figures turned toward the Common. The third crouched low to crawl into a low-slung Porsche at the curb.

"Can you follow him without his suspecting?"

"Probably not. Are you sure he's going to Pitcairn's?"

"Quite sure now."

"I know some short cuts he may not know and I can go faster than he can without being picked up for speeding. There are still some advantages in being a cop. We'll get to Pitcairn's house first and wait for him there."

Before long they were leaving Taunton and passing the sign that reads: *Cape Cod and the Islands.* Soon the ancient scent of the sea was salt in their nostrils, waking racial memories almost as old as life itself. They could not see the surf in the darkness, but they could hear its regular breathing.

A large white house stood alone on a spit of land half surrounded by the water of an inlet.

The only light was at a window on an upper floor.

Grogan parked his car in shadow under trees and switched off his lights.

He had hardly done so when a Porsche came around the corner on two wheels. Gravel spurted as it turned too sharply into the driveway.

The boy got out. He didn't knock or ring. He opened the front door without using a key and walked in as if he owned the place.

A French window to the right of the door lit up casting a patch of light on the grass outside.

Basil and Grogan walked across the turf without making a sound, skirting the patch of light from the French window. There were no curtains. They could look directly into the lighted room.

"Amateurs," whispered Basil. "Or they would have had curtains and drawn them."

The scene on the other side of the pane was as clear and bright and silent as something seen on color television with sound turned off.

It was a study, small, elegant, almost feminine. Paneling painted ice-green, molding picked out in silver, French furniture in natural fruitwood, an Aubusson faded to pastel tones on the parquet floor.

Behind the Louis XV writing table sat a bald man with a fringe of gingery hair and a fox face.

"Pitcairn?" whispered Basil.

"Yes."

He was unlocking a drawer in the table, his head bent over it. The boy stood by a fireplace of blond marble looking down at a cold grate filled with maidenhair fern.

Pitcairn took some cellophane packages out of the drawer and put them on the table.

Grogan caught his b r e a t h. "Decks. Heroin."

"The not-so-pleasant assassin," said Basil.

The window wasn't locked. Grogan pushed it open. It was the sound of its hinges that arrested the movement of Pitcairn's hand. He looked up—and faced ruin.

"Eugene, you fool!"

It was the cold rage of a viper striking.

"But no one followed me!" cried Eugene Derry.

"You gave the show away somehow or they wouldn't be here!"

"I didn't! I didn't, I tell you! Damn it, how could I?"

At Police Headquarters later, Grogan had some questions to ask Basil.

"I caught on to the League for Spiritual Development. Like 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds,' it's slang for LSD. But what put you on to Eugene Derry?"

"The number he dialed, 768-5829. I was hoping I h a d memorized it correctly. I'd seen him dial it only once, and I hadn't had a chance to write it down. It's not easy to m e m o r i z e telephone numbers that run to seven digits without letters, yet Derry had dialed it without first referring to a note or to the phone book. I was wondering how he

had memorized it so easily when my glance fell on the dial of your radio-telephone. Then I knew.

"Letters that spell pronounceable words with some meaning are far easier to remember than a string of meaningless numbers. On the standard dial each number is associated with three letters. I asked myself: did any of the letters associated on the dial with 768-5829 spell out pronounceable words?

"They did. Derry didn't have to memorize a number to dial the League of Spiritual Development. All he had to do was to dial the letters that spell out the words POT-LUCY—words he could not forget if he were panicky or even stoned.

"The telephone company will give you any number you ask for providing it's not already in use, just as the Motor Vehicle people will give you a vanity number for the license plate on your car. Pitcairn was lucky. No one else in Sussex township already had POT-LUCY—that is, 768-5829."

"Wasn't that risky?"

"Not half as risky as letting Derry and other pushers carry around a written note of that telephone number. Who, watching another person dial, pays the slightest attention to the numbers being dialed, let alone the letters associated with them on the dial?

"There's a commercial firm in Boston that has the same notion. When you want to call them, you just dial the letters that spell the firm's name. Pitcairn may have got the idea from them."

"Why the League for Spiritual Development?"

"So no suspicious calls could ever be traced directly to Pitcairn's own number. Derry made an outgoing call that he knew would not be answered. He let the telephone ring an agreed number of times, then hung up. Whoever was on duty at the League of Spiritual Development would then call Pitcairn and relay the danger signal. So much safer than any kind of conversation in code."

"I didn't suspect Anna Warsaw," said Grogan. "Not after you said you had let your own daughter drive off with her. But I did suspect the other boy. The one you said liked Pitcairn."

"How much more likely that Pitcairn's creature would pretend to hate him! And there's another psychological indication: I can't imagine a dope pusher working for a man like Mbongu."

'Q'

a *NEW* Christmas detective story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

'Twas the month before Christmas
And always our plan
Was to find you a mystery
With good will toward man . . .

But it didn't work out quite that way. So instead—

'Twas the month before Christmas
And all through the nights
We looked for a good mystery
That put wrongs to rights . . .

Better . . . But crime at the Detective Bureau's annual Christmas party? Preposterous! Yet . . . as Captain Leopold of Homicide, now head of the newly reorganized Violent Crimes Division, said, "This has been a bad year for cops." So even the preposterous can happen . . .

CHRISTMAS IS FOR COPS

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"GOING TO THE CHRISTMAS party, Captain?" Fletcher asked from the doorway.

Captain Leopold glanced up from his eternally cluttered desk. Fletcher was now a lieutenant in the newly reorganized Violent Crimes Division, and they did not work together as closely as they once had. "I'll be there," Leopold said. "In fact, I've been invited to speak."

This news brought a grin to Fletcher's face. "Nobody speaks at the Christmas party, Captain. They just drink."

"Well, this year you're going to hear a speech, and I'm going to give it."

"Lots of luck."

"Is your wife helping with the decorations again this year?"

"I suppose she'll be around," Fletcher chuckled. "She doesn't trust me at any Christmas party without her."

The annual Detective Bureau party was, by tradition, a stag affair. But in recent years Carol Fletcher and some of the other wives had come down to Eagles Hall in the afternoon to trim the tree and hang the holly. Somehow these members of the unofficial Decorations Committee usually managed to stay on for the evening's festivities.

The party was the following evening, and Captain Leopold was looking forward to it. But he had one unpleasant task to perform first. That afternoon, feeling he could delay it no longer, he summoned Sergeant Tommy Gibson to his office and closed the door.

Gibson was a tough cop of the old school, a bleak and burly man who'd campaigned actively for the lieutenancy which had finally been given to Fletcher. Leopold had never liked Gibson, but until now he'd managed to overlook the petty graft with which Gibson's name was occasionally linked.

"What seems to be the trouble, Captain?" Gibson asked, taking a seat. "You look unhappy."

"I am unhappy, Gibson. Damned unhappy! While you were working the assault and robbery detail I had no direct command over your activities. But now that I'm in charge of a combined Violent Crimes Division, I feel I should take a greater interest in them." He reached across his desk to pick up a folder. "I have a report here from the District Attorney's office. The report mentions you, Gibson, and makes some very grave charges."

"What kind of charges?" the sergeant's tongue forked out to lick his dry lips.

"That you've been accepting regular payments from a man named Freese."

Gibson went pale. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Carl Freese, the man who runs the numbers racket in every factory in this city. You know who he is, and you know what he's done. Men who've opposed him, or tried to report his operations to the police, have been beaten and nearly killed. I have a report here of a foreman at Lecko Industries. When some of his men started losing a whole week's pay in the numbers and other gambling controlled by Freese, he went to his supervisor and reported it. That night on the way home his car was forced off the road and he was badly beaten, so badly that he spent three weeks in the hospital. You should be

familiar with that case, Gibson, because you investigated it just last summer."

"I guess I remember it."

"Remember your report, too? You wrote it off as a routine robbery attempt, despite the fact that no money was taken from the victim. The victim reported it to the District Attorney's office, and they've been investigating the whole matter of gambling in local industrial plants. I have their report here."

"I investigate a lot of cases, Captain. I try to do the best job I can."

"Nuts!" Leopold was on his feet, angry now. There was nothing that angered him more than a crooked cop. "Look, Gibson, the D.A.'s office has all of Freese's records. They show payments of $100 a week to you. What in hell were you doing for $100 a week, unless you were covering up for them when they beat some poor guy senseless?"

"Those records are wrong," Gibson said. "I didn't get any hundred bucks a week."

"Then how much did you get?"

Leopold towered over him in the chair, and Gibson's burly frame seemed to shrivel. "I think I want a lawyer," he mumbled.

"I'm suspending you from the force without pay, effective at once. Thank God you don't have a wife and family to suffer through this."

Tommy Gibson sat silently for a moment, staring at the floor. Then at last he looked up, seeking Leopold's eyes. "Give me a chance, Captain. I wasn't in this alone."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I didn't get the whole hundred myself. I had to split it with one of the other men—and he's the one who introduced me to Freese in the first place."

"There's someone else involved in this? One of the detectives?"

"Yes."

"Give me his name."

"Not yet," Gibson hesitated. "Because you wouldn't believe it. Let me give you evidence."

"What sort of evidence?"

"He and Freese came to me at my apartment and told me the type of protection they needed. That was the night we agreed on the amount of money to be paid each week. I wasn't taking any chances, Captain, so I dug out an old recording machine I'd bought after the war, and rigged up a hidden microphone behind my sofa. I got down every word they said."

"When was this?" Leopold asked.

"More than a year ago, and I've kept the recording of the conversation ever since. What's it worth to me if I bring it in?"

"I'm not in a position to make deals, Gibson."

"Would the D.A. make one?"

"I could talk to him," Leopold replied cautiously. "Let's hear what you've got first."

Gibson nodded. "I'll take the reel off my machine and bring it in to you tomorrow."

"If you're kidding me, Gibson, or stalling—"

"I'm not, Captain! I swear! I just don't want to take the whole rap myself."

"I'll give you twenty-four hours. Then the suspension goes into effect regardless."

"Thank you, Captain."

"Get the hell out of here now."

"Thank you, Captain," he said again. "And Merry Christmas."

On the day of the Christmas party, activities around the Detective Bureau slacked off very little. It was always pretty much business as usual until around four o'clock, when some of the men started drifting out, exchanging friendly seasonal comments. The party would really commence around five, when the men on the day shift arrived at Eagles Hall, and it continued until well past midnight, enabling the evening men to join in after their tours of duty.

Then there would be a buffet supper, and lots of beer, and even some group singing around the big Christmas tree. Without the family attachments of Fletcher and the other men, Leopold tended to look forward to the party. In many years it was the main event of his otherwise lonely holiday season.

By four o'clock he had heard nothing from Sergeant Tommy Gibson. With growing irritation he called Fletcher into his office. "Gibson's under your command now, isn't he, Fletcher?"

"That's right, Captain."

"What's he working on today?"

Fletcher's face flushed unexpectedly. "Well, Captain, it seems—"

"Where is he?"

"Things were a bit slower than usual, so I told him he could go over to Eagles Hall and help put up the tree for the party."

"What!"

Fletcher shifted his feet uneasily. "I know, Captain. But usually I help Carol and the other wives get it up. Now that I'm a lieutenant I didn't feel I could take the time off, so I sent Gibson in my place."

Leopold sighed and stood up. "All right, Fletcher. Let's get over there right away."

"Why? What's up?"

"I'll tell you on the way."

Eagles Hall was a large reasonably modern building that was rented out for wedding receptions and private parties by a local fraternal group. The Detective Bureau, through its Benevolent Association, had held a Christmas

party there for the past five seasons, and its central location had helped make it a popular choice. It was close enough to attract some of the uniformed force as well as the detective squad. All were invited, and most came at some time during the long evening.

Now, before five o'clock, a handful of plainclothesmen from various divisions had already arrived. Leopold waved to Sergeant Riker of the Vice Squad, who was helping Carol Fletcher light her cigarette with a balky lighter. Then he stopped to exchange a few words with Lieutenant Williams, a bony young man who headed up the Narcotics Squad. Williams had made his reputation during a single year on the force, masquerading as a hippie musician to penetrate a group selling drugs to high school students. Leopold liked him, liked his honesty and friendliness.

"I hear you're giving a little speech tonight," Williams said, pouring him a glass of beer.

"Herb Clarke roped me into it," Leopold answered with a chuckle. "I'd better do it early, before you guys get too beered up to listen." He glanced around the big hall, taking in the twenty-foot Christmas tree with its lights and tinsel. Three guy wires held it firmly in place next to an old upright piano. "See Tommy Gibson around?"

Williams stood on tiptoe to see over the heads of some newly arrived uniformed men. "I think he's helping Carol finish up the decorations."

"Thanks." Leopold took his beer and drifted over to the far end of the room. Carol had put down her cigarette long enough to tug at one of the wires holding the tree in place. Leopold helped her tighten it and then stepped back. She was a charming, intelligent woman, and this was not the first time he'd envied Fletcher. As wife and mother she'd given him a fine home life.

"I'm surprised to see you here so early, Captain."

He helped her secure another of the wires and said, "I'm always on time to help charming wives with Christmas trees."

"And thank you for Sergeant Gibson too! He was a great help with the tree."

"I'll bet. Where is he now?"

"He took the hammer and things into the kitchen. I think he's pouring beer now." She produced another cigarette and searched her purse. Finally she asked. "Do you have a light?"

He lit it for her. "You smoke too much."

"Nervous energy. Do you like our tree?"

"Fine. Just like Christmas."

"Do you know, somewhere in Chesterton there's mention of a tree that devours birds nesting in

its branches, and when spring comes the tree grows feathers instead of leaves!"

"You read too much, Carol."

She smiled up at him. "The nights are lonely being a detective's wife." The smile was just a bit forced. She didn't always approve of her husband's work.

He left her by the tree and went in search of Gibson. The burly sergeant was in the kitchen, filling pitchers of beer. He looked up, surprised, as Leopold entered. "Hello, Captain."

"I thought we had an appointment for today."

"I didn't forget. Fletcher wanted me over here."

"Where's the evidence you mentioned?"

"What?"

Leopold was growing impatient. "Come on, damn it!"

Tommy Gibson glanced out at the growing crowd. "I've got it, but I had to hide it. He's here."

"Who? The man who's in this with you?"

"Yes. I'm afraid Freese might have tipped him off about the D.A.'s investigation."

Leopold had never seen this side of Gibson—a lonely, trapped man who was actually afraid. Or else was an awfully good actor. "I've given you your twenty-four hours, Gibson. Either produce this recording you've got or—"

"Captain!" a voice interrupted. "We're ready for your speech."

Leopold turned to see Sergeant Turner of Missing Persons standing in the doorway. "I'll be right there, Jim." Turner seemed to linger just a bit too long before he turned and walked away. Leopold looked back at Gibson. "That him?"

"I can't talk now, Captain."

"Where'd you hide it?"

"Over by the tree. It's safe."

"Stick around till after my talk. Then we'll get to the bottom of this thing."

Leopold left him pouring another pitcher of beer and walked out through the crowd. With the end of the afternoon shifts the place had filled rapidly. There were perhaps sixty members of the force present already, about evenly divided between detectives and uniformed patrolmen. Several shook his hand or patted him on the back as he made his way to the dais next to the tree.

Herb Clarke, president of the Detective Bureau Benevolent Association, was already on the platform, holding up his hands for silence. He shook Leopold's hand and then turned to his audience. "Gather around now, men. The beer'll still be there in five minutes. You all know we're not much for speeches at these Christmas parties, but I thought it might be well this year to hear a few words from a man we all know and admire. Leopold has been in the Detective Bureau for

as long as most of us can remember—" The laughter caused him to add quickly, "Though of course he's still a young man. But this year, in addition to his duties as Captain of Homicide, he's taken on a whole new set of responsibilities. He's now head of the entire Violent Crimes Division of the Bureau, a position that places him in more direct contact with us all. I'm going to ask him to say just a few words, and then we'll have some caroling around the piano."

Leopold stepped over to the microphone, adjusting it upward from the position Herb Clarke had used. Then he looked out at the sea of familiar faces. Carol Fletcher and the other wives hovered in the rear, out of the way, while their husbands and the others crowded around. Fletcher himself stood with Sergeant Riker, an old friend, and Leopold noticed that Lieutenant Williams had moved over near Tommy Gibson. He couldn't see Jim Turner at the moment.

"Men, I'm going to make this worth listening to for all that. You hear a lot at this time of the year about Christmas being the season for kids, but I want to add something to that. Christmas is for kids, sure—but Christmas is for cops, too. Know what I mean by that? I'll tell you. Christmas is perhaps the one time of the year when the cop on the beat, or the detective on assignment, has a chance to undo some of the ill will generated during the other eleven months. This has been a bad year for cops around the country—most years are bad ones, it seems. We take a hell of a lot of abuse, some deserved, but most of it not. And this is the season to maybe right some of those wrongs. Don't be afraid to get out on a corner with the Salvation Army to ring a few bells, or help some lady through a puddle of slush. Most of all, don't be afraid to smile and talk to young people."

He paused and glanced down at Tommy Gibson. "There have always been some bad cops, and I guess there always will be. That just means the rest of us have to work a lot harder. Maybe we can just pretend the whole year is Christmas, and go about righting those wrongs. Anyway, I've talked so long already I've grown a bit thirsty. Let's get back to the beer and the singing, and make it good and loud!"

Leopold jumped off the platform and shook more hands. He'd meant to speak longer, to give them something a bit meatier to chew on, but far at the back of the crowd some of the younger cops were already growing restless. And, after all, they'd come here to enjoy themselves, not to listen to a lecture. He couldn't really blame them.

Herb Clarke was gathering everyone around the piano for songs, but Leopold noticed that Tommy Gibson had suddenly disappeared. The Captain threaded his way through the crowd, searching the familiar faces for the man he wanted. "Great talk, Captain," Fletcher said, coming up by his side.

"Thanks. We have to find Gibson."

"Did he tell you any more?"

"Only that he had to hide the tape near the Christmas tree. He said the other guy was here."

"Who do you make it, Captain?"

Leopold bit his lower lip. "I make it that Tommy Gibson is one smart cookie. I think he's playing for time, maybe waiting for Freese to get him off the hook somehow."

"You don't think there's another crooked cop in the Detective Bureau?"

"I don't know, Fletcher. I guess I don't want to think so."

The door to the Men's Room sprang open with a suddenness that surprised them both. Sergeant Riker, his usually placid face full of alarm, stood motioning to them. Leopold quickly covered the ground to his side. "What is it, Riker?"

"In there! My God, Captain—in there! It's Gibson!"

"What?"

"Tommy Gibson. He's been stabbed. I think he's dead."

Leopold pushed past him, into the tiled Men's Room with its scrubbed look and disinfectant odor. Tommy Gibson was there, all right, crumpled between two of the wash basins, his eyes glazed and open. A long pair of scissors protruded from his chest.

"Lock all the outside doors, Fletcher," Leopold barked. "Don't let anyone leave."

"Is he dead, Captain?"

"As dead as he'll ever be. What a mess!"

"You think one of our men did it?"

"Who else? Call in and report it, and get the squad on duty over here. Everyone else is a suspect." He stood up from examining the body and turned to Riker. "Now tell me everything you know, Sergeant."

Riker was a Vice Squad detective, a middle-aged man with a placid disposition and friendly manner. There were those who said he could even make a streetwalker like him while he was arresting her. Just now he looked sick and pale. "I walked in and there he was, Captain. My God! I couldn't believe my eyes at first. I thought he was faking, playing some sort of a trick."

"Notice anyone leaving before you went in?"

"No, nobody."

"But he's only been dead a

few minutes. That makes you a suspect, Sergeant."

Riker's pale complexion seemed to shade into green at Leopold's words. "You can't think I killed him! He was a friend of mine! Why in hell would I kill Tommy Gibson?"

"We'll see," Leopold said, motioning him out of the Men's Room. The other detectives and officers were clustered around, trying to see. There was a low somber hum of conversation. "All right, everyone!" the Captain ordered. "Keep down at the other end of the room, away from the tree! That's right, move away from it."

"Captain!" It was little Herb Clarke, pushing his way through. "Captain, what's happened?"

"Someone killed Tommy Gibson."

"Tommy!"

"One of us. That's why nobody leaves here."

"You can't be serious, Captain. Murder at the police Christmas party—the newspapers will crucify us."

"Probably." Leopold pushed past him. "Nobody enters the Men's Room," he bellowed. "Fletcher, Williams—come with me." They were the only two lieutenants present, and he had to trust them. Fletcher he'd trust with his life. He only hoped he could rely on Williams too.

"I can't believe it," the bony young Narcotics lieutenant said. "Why would anyone kill Tommy?"

Leopold cleared his throat. "I'll tell you why, though you may not want to believe it. Gibson was implicated in the District Attorney's investigation of Carl Freese's gambling empire. He had a tape recording of a conversation between Freese, himself, and another detective, apparently concerning bribery. The other detective had a dandy motive for killing him."

"Did he say who it was?" Williams asked.

"No. Only that it was someone who got here fairly early today. Who was here before Fletcher and I arrived?"

Williams creased his brow in thought. "Riker was here, and Jim Turner. And a few uniformed men."

"No, just detectives."

"Well, I guess Riker and Turner were the only ones. And Herb Clarke, of course. He was here all day with the ladies, arranging for the food and the beer."

"Those three," Leopold mused. "And you, of course."

Lieutenant Williams grinned. "Yeah, and me."

Leopold turned toward the big Christmas tree. "Gibson told me he hid the tape recording near the tree. Start looking, and don't miss anything. It might even be in the branches."

The investigating officers were arriving now, and Leopold turned his attention to them. There was something decidedly bizarre in the entire situation, a fact which was emphasized as the doctor and morgue attendants and police photographers exchanged muted greetings with the milling party guests. One of the young investigating detectives who'd known Tommy Gibson turned pale at the sight of the body and had to go outside.

When the photographers had finished, one of the morgue men started to lift the body. He paused and called to Leopold. "Captain, here's something. A cigarette lighter on the floor under him."

Leopold bent close to examine it without disturbing possible prints. "Initials. C.F."

Lieutenant Williams had come in behind him, standing at the door of the Men's Room. "Carl Freese?" he suggested.

Leopold used a handkerchief to pick it up carefully by the corners. "Are we supposed to believe that Freese entered this place in the midst of sixty cops and killed Gibson without anybody seeing him?"

"There's a window in the wall over there."

Leopold walked to the frosted-glass pane and examined it. "Locked from the inside. Gibson might have been stabbed from outside, but he couldn't have locked the window and gotten across this room without leaving a trail of blood."

Fletcher had come in while they were talking. "No dice on that, Captain. My wife just identified the scissors as a pair she was using earlier with the decorations. It's an inside job, all right."

Leopold showed him the lighter. "C.F. Could be Carl Freese."

Fletcher frowned and licked his lips. "Yeah." He turned away.

"Find any sign of the tape?"

"Nothing," Williams reported. "I think Gibson was kidding you."

"Nothing *in* the tree? It could be a fairly small reel."

"Nothing."

Leopold sighed and motioned Fletcher and Williams to one side. He didn't want the others to hear. "Look, I think Gibson was probably lying, too. But he's dead, and that very fact indicates he might have been telling the truth. I have to figure all the angles. Now that you two have searched the tree I want you to go into the kitchen, close the door, and search each other. Carefully."

"But—" Williams began, and then fell silent. "All right, Captain."

"Then line everybody up and do a search of them. You know what you're looking for—a reel of recording tape."

"What about the wives, Captain?"

"Get a matron down for them. I'm sorry to have to do it, but if that tape is here we have to find it."

He walked to the center of the hall and stood looking at the tree. Lights and tinsel, holiday wreaths and sprigs of mistletoe. All the trappings. He tried to imagine Tommy Gibson helping to decorate the place, helping with the tree. Where would he have hidden the tape?

Herb Clarke came over, nervous and upset. "They're searching everybody."

"Yes. I'm sorry to spoil the party this way, but I guess it was spoiled for Gibson already."

"Captain, do you have to go on with this? Isn't one dishonest man in the Bureau enough?"

"One is too many, Herb. But the man we're looking for is more than a dishonest cop now. He's a murderer."

Fletcher came over to them. "We've searched all the detectives, Captain. They're clean. We're working on the uniformed men now."

Leopold grunted unhappily. He was sure they'd find nothing. "Suppose," he said slowly. "Suppose Gibson unreeled the tape. Suppose he strung it on the tree like tinsel."

"You see any brown tinsel hanging anywhere, Captain? See any tinsel of any color long enough to be a taped message?"

"No, I don't," Leopold said.

Two of the sergeants, Riker and Turner, came over to join them. "Could he have done it himself?" Turner wanted to know. "The word is you were going to link him with the Freese investigation."

"Stabbing yourself in the chest with a pair of scissors isn't exactly common as a suicide method," Leopold pointed out. "Besides, it would be out of character for a man like Gibson."

One of the investigating officers came over with the lighter. "Only smudges on it, Captain. Nothing we could identify."

"Thanks." Leopold took it, turning it over between his fingers.

C.F.

Carl Freese.

He flicked the lever a couple of times but it didn't light. Finally, on the fourth try, a flame appeared. "All right," he said quietly. Now he knew.

"Captain—" Fletcher began.

"Damn it, Fletcher, it's your wife's lighter and you know it! C.F. Not Carl Freese but Carol Fletcher!"

"Captain, I—" Fletcher stopped.

Leopold felt suddenly very tired. The colored lights of the tree seemed to blur, and he wished he was far away from here, far away in a land where all cops were honest and everyone died of old age.

Sergeant Riker moved in.

"Captain, are you trying to say that Fletcher's *wife* stabbed Tommy Gibson?"

"Of course not, Riker. That would have been quite a trick for her to follow him into the Men's Room unnoticed. Besides, I had to give her a match at one point this evening, because she didn't have this lighter."

"Then who?"

"When I first arrived, you were helping Carol Fletcher with a balky lighter. Yes, you, Riker! You dropped it into your pocket, unthinking, and that's why she didn't have it later. It fell out while you were struggling with Gibson. While you were killing him, Riker."

Riker uttered a single obscenity and his hand went for the service revolver on his belt. Leopold had expected it. He moved in fast and threw two quick punches, one to the stomach and one to the jaw. Riker went down and it was over.

Carol Fletcher heard what had happened and she came over to Leopold. "Thanks for recovering my lighter," she said. "I hope you didn't suspect me."

He shook his head, eyeing Fletcher. "Of course not. But I sure as hell wish your husband had told me it was yours."

"I had to find out what it was doing there," Fletcher mumbled. "God, it's not every day your wife's lighter, that you gave her two Christmases ago, turns up as a clue in a murder."

Leopold handed it back to her. "Maybe this'll teach you to stop smoking."

"You knew it was Riker anyway?"

"I was pretty sure. With sixty men drinking beer all around here, no murderer could take a chance of walking out of that Men's Room unseen. His best bet was to pretend finding the body, which is just what he did. Besides that, of the four detectives on the scene early, Riker's Vice Squad position was the most logical for Freese's bribery."

"Was there a tape recording?" Fletcher asked.

Leopold was staring at the Christmas tree. "I think Gibson was telling the truth on that one. Except that *he* never called it a tape. I did that. I jumped to a conclusion. He simply told me it was an old machine, purchased after the war. In those early days tape recorders weren't the only kind. For a while wire recorders were almost as popular."

"Wire!"

Leopold nodded and started toward the Christmas tree. "We know that Gibson helped you put up the tree, Carol. I'm betting that one of those wires holding it in place is none other than the recorded conversation of Carl Freese, Tommy Gibson, and Sergeant Riker."

INDEX TO VOLUME FIFTY-SIX—JULY-DECEMBER 1970

(Continued on page 99)

CLASSIFIED Market Place

NOTICE: Rates 65¢ per word—payable in advance. Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. Space reservations close 10th of 3rd month preceding COVER date. Send order & remittance to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 229 Park Ave. South, New York, N.Y. 10003.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

LARGE Catalog Free! Mystery-suspense books. Save to 70%. Spencer Books, 3016-D So. Halladay St., Santa Ana, Calif. 92705.

OUT OF PRINT MYSTERIES: Hardcovers only—mostly First Editions. Lists available. Jays, 3095 Savannah Hwy., Charleston, S.C. 29407.

BOUND set of back issues of EQMM available. Vol. 1, No. 1 thru Vol. 10, No. 49 (Dec. 1947). Thereafter unbound thru 1964. Will accept best offer. Contact Publisher, Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10003.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

I MADE $40,000. Year by Mailorder! Helped others make money! Start with $10.00 — Free Proof! Torrey, Box 318-T, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197.

Free Book "999 Successful, Little-Known Businesses" Fascinating! Work home! Plymouth 411-P, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11218.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

COULD YOU BE HAPPIER, RICHER? This book may change your life: "How To Be More Successful . . . Get Your Own Way More, Get Along Better With Others, Become More Productive, Enjoy Life More Fully." $2.00: "How To," Box 14774, Long Beach, Calif. 90814

MAKE Beautiful Scarves, "Tapestries," and novelties with "Rake-Tooth Knitting": A relaxing pastime that gets results. $1.00 brings complete directions. Box 23238, Richfield, Minn. 55423

PRACTICAL tips for home, garden and workshop are in "1001 How-To Ideas." Send $1.00 for your copy, includes postage, to 1001 How-To Ideas, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10003.

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

EXCITING OVERSEAS JOBS. Directory $1.00. Research Associates, Box 942-EC, Belmont, California 94002

MISCELLANEOUS

OVERWEIGHT? Slimming Hypnosis Recording $10.00. Neale Institute, Box 923-M, Edmonton, Canada.

CREDIT CARDS! Receive all kinds, fast, easy. Get new credit without Investigation! Continental, Box 996-S, Hallandale, Fla. 33009

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

MAKE Big Money raising chinchillas, rabbits, guinea pigs for us. Catalog 25¢. Keeney Brothers Farms, Inc., New Freedom, Pa. 17349 or Summerfield, Fla. 32691.

MAKE Your Classified Ad Pay. Get "How To Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth $2.00 toward a classified ad in S & M. Send $1.25 (includes postage) to C. D. Wilson, Science & Mechanics, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, N. Y. 10003.

OF INTEREST TO WOMEN

HOMEWORK: Mailing circulars. Handling fee 50¢. Kronberg's, 1325 So. 27th Street, Omaha, Neb. 68105

RARE & OUT OF PRINT BOOKS

LOCATE any Book. Detective-Mystery specialty. Catalogue $1.00. Aardvarks Book Detectives, Box 15070, Orlando, Florida 32808.

MYSTERY-SUSPENSE used hardbounds. Plus SF, westerns, general fiction. Free lists. Aspen Bookhouse, R.D. 1, Freeville, N.Y. 13068.

SPECIAL SERVICES

ESP Laboratory. This new Research/Service group can help you. For FREE information — write: Al G. Manning, ESP Laboratory, 7559 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90046.

TREASURE FINDERS & PROSPECTING EQUIPMENT

BURIED TREASURE IS EVERYWHERE! New Map Book Shows Over 400 U.S. Locations. Details Free. Moore's Treasure Mart, P.O. Box 436, Harbor City, Calif. 90710

Gardner. A. A. Fair. Christie. Armstrong. Gruber. 11 mysteries, $1.

Including the newest Hercule Poirot and Perry Mason bafflers.

1. The Case of the Fabulous Fake by Erle Stanley Gardner. 36-24-36 is her only I.D. Can Perry find her before she's accused of murder? (Publ. Ed. $4.95)

2. Hallowe'en Party by Agatha Christie. After she boasts of seeing a murder, a child drowns. And a town explodes under Hercule Poirot's probing. (Publ. Ed. $5.95)

3. The Case of the Careless Cupid by Erle Stanley Gardner. A widow is doomed unless Perry finds who really poisoned her husband. (Publ. Ed. $3.95)

4. Endless Night by Agatha Christie. Everyone's after Ellie Roger's millions. Now someone's trying murder. (Publ. Ed. $4.50)

5. The Case of the Queenly Contestant by Erle Stanley Gardner. An aging beauty gets Perry involved with a $2,000,000 estate and murder. (Publ. Ed. $3.95)

6. At Bertram's Hotel by Agatha Christie. Even Jane Marple never expected the vicar to lead a daring train robbery. (Publ. Ed. $4.50)

7. The Case of the Worried Waitress by Erle Stanley Gardner. The only one who can save Perry's pretty client is blind. (Publ. Ed. $3.50)

8. The Clocks by Agatha Christie. The dead man's room now holds 6 clocks instead of 2 and a girl turns up dead nearby. It's time to call Poirot. (Publ. Ed. $4.50)

Plus a Club selection—including the latest by A. A. Fair, Armstrong and Gruber.

9. All Grass Isn't Green by A. A. Fair. This missing persons case leads Donald Lam and Bertha Cool to a love triangle, marijuana and murder. (Publ. Ed. $4.95)

10. The Protégé by Charlotte Armstrong. Old Mrs. Moffat's life is upended by a bearded young redhead, who's not what he seems. (Publ. Ed. $4.95)

11. The Spanish Prisoner by Frank Gruber. The ex-FBI man's search for an old con game or old gold leads him to a Spanish castle and torture-rack murder. (Publ. Ed. $4.95)

The Detective Book Club
Roslyn, New York 11576

Please enroll me as a new member and send me at once the four hard-bound double volumes of full-length Gardner/Christie thrillers, PLUS the regular 3-in-1 Club selection, containing the brand new Donald Lam-Bertha Cool case and 2 other great new mysteries. I enclose no money. Within a week after receiving my books, I will either return them and owe nothing or keep all five volumes, containing eleven first-rate mystery stories, for the special new-member introductory price of only $1.00 (plus a few cents mailing charges).

As a member, I am to receive advance descriptions of all future selections, but am not obligated to buy any. For each future triple volume I keep, I will send you only $3.39 (plus a few cents mailing charges). I may reject any volume before or after I receive it and I may cancel my membership at any time. (Books shipped in U.S.A. only.)

O-LG

Mr. }
Mrs. } _____
Miss }
(please print plainly)

Address _____ 26-337

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

(see other side for further details)

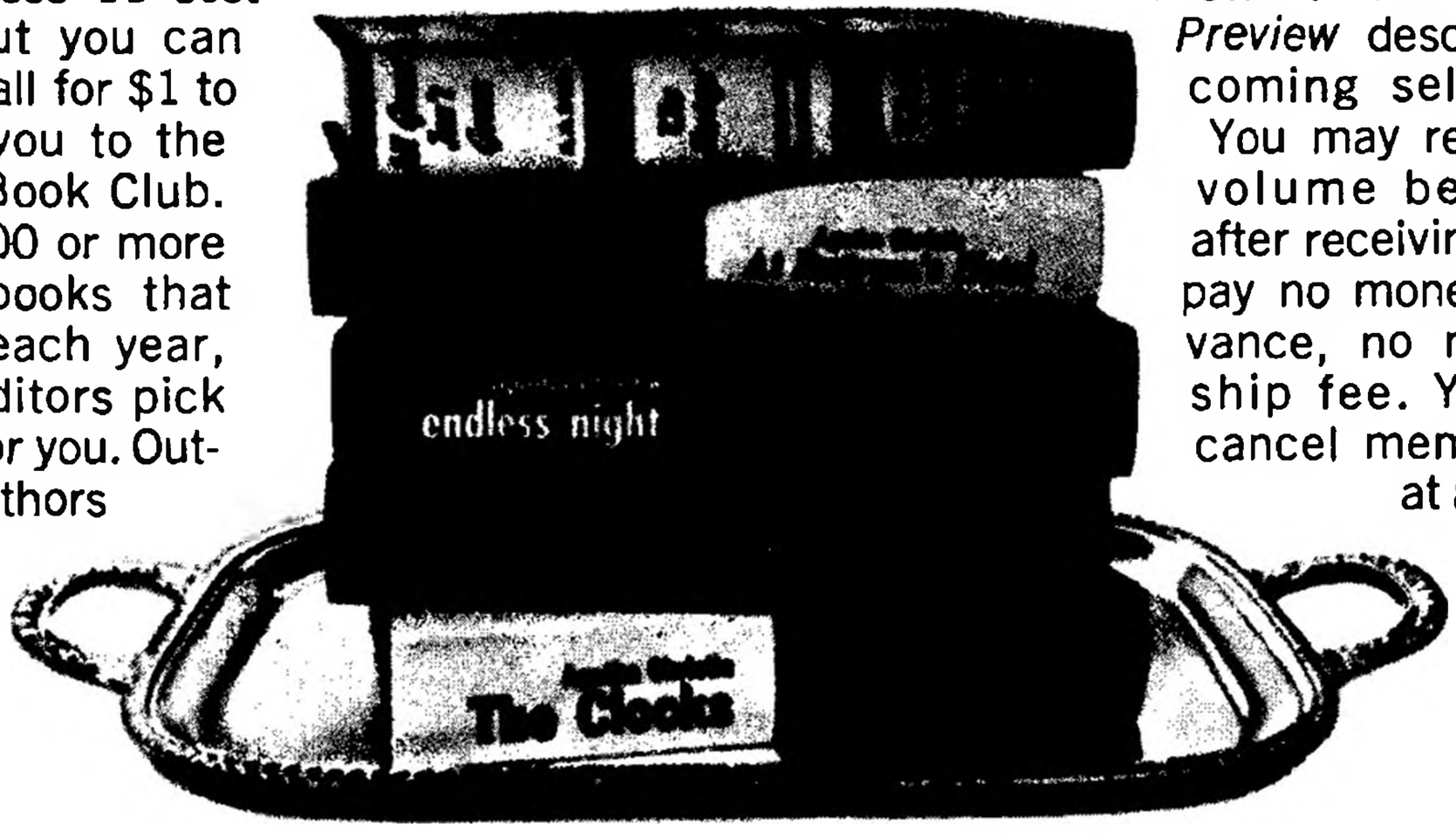
For one small dollar, you can get the brand new Lam-Cool whodunit, which Erle Stanley Gardner wrote under the pen name A. A. Fair—plus 4 of the newest and best Perry Mason mysteries. We'll add 4 spell-binders from Agatha Christie's pen. And top it all off with the newest books by Charlotte Armstrong and Frank Gruber.

11 full-length mysteries, bound into 5 hard-cover books. In the publishers' original editions, these 11 cost $50.65. But you can have them all for $1 to introduce you to the Detective Book Club.

Of the 300 or more detective books that come out each year, the Club editors pick the plums for you. Outstanding authors like Mignon G. Eberhart, John Creasey, Agatha Christie, Van Wyck Mason and many others have had their books selected. Many are Club members themselves.

Club selections are all newly published. You can get three of them each month complete in one handsomely-bound triple volume (a $12.40 to $15.40 value in publishers' editions) for only $3.39.

You don't have to take a volume each month. The Club's *Preview* describes all coming selections. You may reject any volume before or after receiving it. You pay no money in advance, no membership fee. You may cancel membership at any time.



11 mysteries that will make your mouth water. All for $1.

First Class
Permit No. 7
Roslyn, N.Y.

Business Reply Mail
No postage stamp necessary if mailed
in the United States
Postage Will Be Paid By

The Detective Book Club
Roslyn, New York 11576

(see other side for further details)