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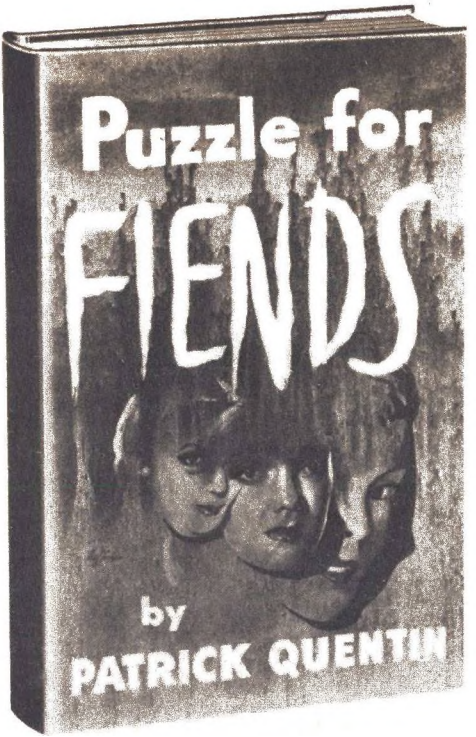

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WHEN HE AWOKE, his mother and his beautiful wife were comforting him, promising to stand by him even if he *was* a murderer. Somehow, somewhere, he couldn't rid himself of the feeling that this was not his home, not his mother, not his wife—and not his murder.

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AN INNER SANCTUM MYSTERY

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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There is something here for every taste in crime, fiction or fact. The perfect bedside collection or vacation companion, it includes the work of the following authors: Robert Arthur, Anthony Boucher, Richard Burke, George Harmon Coxe, Ken Crossen, August Derleth, William Gresham, Brett Halliday, Howard Haycraft, Dorothy B. Hughes, Baynard Kendrick, Helen McCloy, Q. Patrick, Ellery Queen, Edward D. Radin, Craig Rice, Kurt Steel, Phoebe Atwood Taylor, Lawrence Treat and Percival Wilde.

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DUELL, SLOAN AND PEARCE

SECOND-PRIZE WINNER : HELEN McCLOY

One book consistently made every list of The Ten Best Detective Novels of 1945: that was Helen McCloy's THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY. *Helen McCloy is on the march: it won't be long before she sits very close to the head of the table, an acknowledged leader in the most highly competitive trade ever devised by the human brain. As a step forward Miss McCloy wrote her first detective short story, submitted it to EQMM's first contest, and won a second prize — which leaves Miss McCloy only one more world to conquer in "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" . . .*

Miss McCloy's story is far off the beaten track, in time, place, and dramtis personæ. The action of the story takes place nearly a hundred years ago — more precisely, in the early 1860s — and in the fabulous city of old Pekin; the detective is Colonel Alexei Andreitch Liakoff of Oussurian Cossacks, Russian military attaché and descendant of Genghis Khan; the other characters — well, meet them for yourself, especially Olga Kyrilovna.

The title of the story is important — you will realize why after you have finished reading this tale of a different world. "Chinoiserie" means an imitation of the Chinese style in art, manners, or decoration; also, an act of mimicry or malice. It is interesting to note in passing that "chinoiseries de bureau" is French for our own bureaucratic phrase "red tape." It is interesting to note also the genesis of Miss McCloy's Chinese background: it grew as a composite picture drawn from many sources — the author's friendship with people who lived in China before the turn of the century and research in Chinese history and art of various periods before the rise of the Chinese Republic. For example: the incident of Heng's letting his jacket fall was told to Miss McCloy by the wife of a general in the U. S. Army.

Miss McCloy was inspired to write the story when she first heard a description of life in Pekin long ago. It seemed to her that the locking of the city gates every sunset, keeping residents either in or out of the citadel for the entire night, would lend itself to detective-story plot. The character of Alexei was born when Miss McCloy learned that a certain Russian chargé used to ride pickaback on a Cossack of the Escort to save his boots from mud and sewage during the rainy season; apparently the sewage in the streets of old Pekin was so bad that mules and even men were known to have been drowned in it. At the time of the story the whole colony of white people in Pekin numbered only one hundred men and fifteen women.

"Chinoiserie" reveals in every phrase the thoroughness of Miss McCloy's research. There is a richness and authenticity of detail, in background, characters, and atmosphere, that enchanted and enthralled your Editor; and Miss McCloy's projection-in-words of the fourth-dimensional subtleties and overtones of Chinese art is a quality not to be found in any detective story ever written. As an example of this richness, here is the full text of a paragraph in the story which in the final version was cut from twelve sentences to three, because the story was running too long:

"Who could offer him anything he does not already possess?" intoned the young Chinese. "His revered father amassed one hundred thousand myriad snow-white taels of silver from unofficial sources during his benevolent reign as Governor of Kwantung. The Palace of Whirring Phoenixes is filled with precious things. Bronze tripods of the Han dynasty. Gongs of pure jade like blocks of green ice. A faery forest of red coral trees. Fans painted with verses by the Emperor Yung Lo. Sceptres of gold and ivory. Soup bowls of amethyst. Snuff-boxes of topaz and carnelian. Images of Buddha and his Lohans carved in crystal and malachite. Even the wash-bowls and spitting basins are curiously wrought of fine jade and pure gold, for this prince loves everything that is rare and strange." An Oriental catalogue, perhaps, but in words of rich beauty. . . .

Further comments, comparing "Chinoiserie" with the so-called detective formula, after you have read one of the most distinguished short stories written since the detective story came of age.

CHINOISERIE

by HELEN McCLOY

THIS IS the story of Olga Kyrilovna and how she disappeared in the heart of old Pekin.

Not Peiping, with its American drugstore on Hatamen Street. Pekin, capital of the Manchu Empire. Didn't you know that I used to be language clerk at the legation there? Long ago. Long before the Boxer Uprising. Oh, yes, I was young. So young I was in love with Olga Kyrilovna . . . Will you pour the brandy for me? My hand's grown shaky the last few years . . .

When the nine great gates of the Tartar City swung to at sunset, we were locked for the night inside a walled, mediæval citadel, reached by camel over the Gobi or by boat up the Pei-ho, defended by bow and arrow and a painted representation of cannon. An Arabian Nights' city where

the nine gate towers on the forty-foot walls were just ninety-nine feet high so they would not impede the flight of air spirits. Where palace eunuchs kept harems of their own to "save face." Where musicians were blinded because the use of the eye destroys the subtlety of the ear. Where physicians prescribed powdered jade and tigers' claws for anæmia brought on by malnutrition. Where mining operations were dangerous because they opened the veins of the Earth Dragon. Where felons were slowly sliced to death and beggars were found frozen to death in the streets every morning in the winter.

It was into this world of fantasy and fear that Olga Kyrilovna vanished as completely as if she had dissolved into one of the air spirits or ridden away on one of the invisible dragons that our Chinese servants saw in the atmosphere all around us.

It happened the night of a New Year's Eve ball at the Japanese Legation.

When I reached the Russian Legation for dinner, a Cossack of the Escort took me into a room that was once a Tartar General's audience hall. Two dozen candle flames hardly pierced the bleak dusk. The fire in the brick stove barely dulled the cutting edge of a North China winter. I chafed my hands, thinking myself alone. Someone stirred and sighed in the shadows. It was she.

Olga Kyrilovna . . . How can I make you see her as I saw her that evening? She was pale in her white dress against walls of tarnished gilt and rusted vermilion. Two smooth, shining wings of light brown hair. An oval face, pure in line, delicate in color. And, of course, unspoiled by modern cosmetics. Her eyes were blue. Dreaming eyes. She seemed to live and move in a waking dream, remote from the enforced intimacies of our narrow society. More than one man had tried vainly to wake her from that dream. The piquancy of her situation provoked men like Lucien de L'Orges, the French *chargé*.

She was just seventeen, fresh from the convent of Smolny. Volgorughi had been Russian minister in China for many years. After his last trip to Petersburg, he had brought Olga back to Pekin as his bride, and . . .Well, he was three times her age.

That evening she spoke first. "*Monsieur* Charley . . ."

Even at official meetings the American minister called me "Charley." Most Europeans assumed it was my last name.

"I am glad you are here," she went on in French, our only common language. "I was beginning to feel lonely. And afraid."

"Afraid?" I repeated stupidly. "Of what?"

A door opened. Candle flames shied and the startled shadows leaped up the walls. Volgorughi spoke from the doorway, coolly. "Olga, we are having sherry in the study . . . Oh!" His voice warmed. "*Monsieur* Charley, I didn't see you. Good evening."

I followed Olga's filmy skirts into the study, conscious of Volgorughi's sharp glance as he stood aside to let me pass. He always seemed rather formidable. In spite of his grizzled hair, he had the leanness of a young man and the carriage of a soldier. But he had the weary eyes of an old man. And the dry, shrivelled hands, always cold to the touch, even in summer. A young man's imagination shrank from any mental image of those hands caressing Olga . . .

In the smaller room it was warmer and brighter. Glasses of sherry and vodka had been pushed aside to make space on the table for a painting on silk. Brown, frail, desiccated as a dead leaf, the silk looked hundreds of years old. Yet the ponies painted on its fragile surface in faded pigments were the same lively Mongol ponies we still used for race meetings outside the city walls.

"The Chinese have no understanding of art," drawled Lucien de l'Orges. "Chinese porcelain is beginning to enjoy a certain vogue in Europe, but Chinese painters are impossible. In landscape they show objects on a flat surface, without perspective, as if the artist were looking down on the earth from a balloon. In portraits they draw the human face without shadows or thickness, as untutored children do. The Chinese artist hasn't enough skill to imitate nature accurately."

Lucien was baiting Volgorughi. "Pekin temper" was as much a feature of our lives as "Pekin throat." We got on each other's nerves like a storm-stayed house party. An unbalanced party where men outnumbered women six to one.

Volgorughi kept his temper. "The Chinese artist doesn't care to 'imitate' nature. He prefers to suggest or symbolize what he sees."

"But Chinese art is heathen!" This was Sybil Carstairs, wife of the English Inspector-General of Maritime Customs. "How can heathen art equal art inspired by Christian morals?"

Her husband's objection was more practical. "You're wastin' money, Volgorughi. Two hundred Shanghai *taels* for a daub that will never fetch sixpence in any European market!"

Incredible? No. This was before Hirth and Fenollosa made Chinese painting fashionable in the West. Years later I saw a fragment from Volgorughi's collection sold in the famous *Salle Six* of the *Hôtel Drouot*. While the *commissaire-priseur* was bawling: *On demande quatre cent mille francs* . . . I was seeing Olga again, pale in a white dress against a wall of gilt and vermilion in the light of shivering candle flames . . .

Volgorughi turned to her just then. "Olga, my dear, you haven't any sherry." He smiled as he held out a glass. The brown wine turned to gold in the candlelight as she lifted it to her lips with an almost childish obedience.

I had not noticed little Kiada, the Japanese minister, bending over the painting. Now he turned sleepy, slant-eyes on Volgorughi and spoke blandly. "This is the work of Han Kan, greatest of horse painters. It must be the

finest painting of the T'ang dynasty now in existence."

"You think so, Count?" Volgorughi was amused. He seemed to be yielding to an irresistible temptation as he went on. "What would you say if I told you I knew of a T'ang painting infinitely finer — a landscape scroll by Wang Wei himself?"

Kiada's eyes lost their sleepy look. He had all his nation's respect for Chinese art, tinctured with jealousy of the older culture. "One hears rumors now and then that these fabulous masterpieces still exist, hidden away in the treasure chests of great Chinese families. But I have never seen an original Wang Wei."

"Who, or what, is Wang Wei?" Sybil sounded petulant.

Kiada lifted his glass of sherry to the light. "Madame, Wang Wei could place scenery extending to ten thousand *li* upon the small surface of a fan. He could paint cats that would keep any house free from mice. When his hour came to Pass Above, he did not die. He merely stepped through a painted doorway in one of his own landscapes and was never seen again. All these things indicate that his brush was guided by a god."

Volgorughi leaned across the table, looking at Kiada. "What would you say if I told you that I had just added a Wang Wei to my collection?"

Kiada showed even, white teeth. "Nothing but respect for your excellency's judgment could prevent my insisting that it was a copy by some lesser artist of the Yuän dynasty — possibly Chao Mēng Fu. An original Wang Wei could not be bought for money."

"Indeed?" Volgorughi unlocked a cabinet with a key he carried on his watch chain. He took something out and tossed it on the table like a man throwing down a challenge. It was a cylinder in an embroidered satin cover. Kiada peeled the cover and we saw a scroll on a roller of old milk-jade.

It was a broad ribbon of silk, once white, now ripened with great age to a mellow brown. A foot wide, sixteen feet long, painted lengthwise to show the course of a river. As it unrolled a stream of pure lapis, jade and turquoise hues flowed before my enchanted eyes, almost like a moving picture. Born in a bubbling spring, fed by waterfalls, the river wound its way among groves of tender, green bamboo, parks with dappled deer peeping through slender pine trees, cottages with curly roofs nestling among round hills, verdant meadows, fantastic cliffs, strange wind-distorted trees, rushes, wild geese, and at last, a foam-flecked sea.

Kiada's face was a study. He whispered brokenly. "I can hear the wind sing in the rushes. I can hear the wail of the wild geese. Of Wang Wei truly is it written — his pictures were unspoken poems."

"And the color!" cried Volgorughi, ecstasy in his eyes.

Lucien's sly voice murmured in my ear. "A younger man, married to Olga Kyrilovna, would have no time for painting, Chinese or otherwise."

Volgorughi had Kiada by the arm. "This is no copy by Chao Mēng Fu! Look at that inscription on the margin. Can you read it?"

Kiada glanced — then stared. There was more than suspicion in the look he turned on Volgorughi. There was fear. "I must beg your excellency to excuse me. I do not read Chinese."

We were interrupted by a commotion in the compound. A gaunt Cossack, in fullskirted coat and sheepskin cap, was coming through the gate carrying astride his shoulders a young man, elegantly slim, in an officer's uniform. The Cossack knelt on the ground. The rider slipped lightly from his unconventional mount. He sauntered past the window and a moment later he was entering the study with a nonchalance just this side of insolence. To my amazement I saw that he carried a whip which he handed with his gloves to the Chinese boy who opened the door.

"Princess, your servant. Excellency, my apologies. I believe I'm late."

Volgorughi returned the greeting with the condescension of a Western Russian for an Eastern Russian — a former officer of *Chevaliers Gardes* for an obscure Colonel of Oussurian Cossacks. Sometimes I wondered why such a bold adventurer as Alexei Andreitch Liakoff had been appointed Russian military *attaché* in Pekin. He was born in Tobolsk, where there is Tartar blood. His oblique eyes, high cheek bones and sallow, hairless skin lent color to his impudent claim of descent from Genghis Khan.

"Are Russian officers in the habit of using their men as saddle horses?" I muttered to Carstairs.

Alexei's quick ear caught the words. "It may become a habit with me." He seemed to relish my discomfiture. "I don't like Mongol ponies. A Cossack is just as sure-footed. And much more docile."

Olga Kyrilovna roused herself to play hostess. "Sherry, Colonel Liakoff? Or vodka?"

"Vodka, if her excellency pleases." Alexei's voice softened as he spoke to Olga. His eyes dwelt on her face gravely as he took the glass from her hand.

The ghost of mockery touched Volgorughi's lips. He despised vodka as a peasant's drink.

Alexei approached the table to set down his empty glass. For the first time, his glance fell on the painting by Wang Wei. His glass crashed on the marble floor.

"You read Chinese, don't you?" Volgorughi spoke austerely. "Perhaps you can translate this inscription?"

Alexei put both hands wide apart on the table and leaned on them studying the ideographs. "*Wang Wei.* And a date. The same as our 740 A.D."

"And the rest?" insisted Volgorughi.

Alexei looked at him. "Your excellency really wishes me to read this? Aloud?"

"By all means."

Alexei went on. "*At an odd moment in summer I came across this painting of a river course by Wang Wei. Under its*

influence I sketched a spray of peach blossom on the margin as an expression of my sympathy for the artist and his profound and mysterious work. The Words of the Emperor. Written in the Lai Ching summerhouse, 1746."

Kiada had been frightened when he looked at that inscription. Alexei was angry. Why I did not know.

Carstairs broke the silence. "I don't see anything 'mysterious' about a picture of a river!"

"Everything about this picture is . . . mysterious." Kiada glanced at Volgorughi. "May one inquire how your excellency obtained this incomparable masterpiece?"

"From a pedlar in the Chinese City." Volgorughi's tone forebade further questions. Just then his Number One Boy announced dinner.

There was the usual confusion when we started for the ball at the Japanese Legation. Mongol ponies had to be blindfolded before they would let men in European dress mount and even then they were skittish. For this reason it was the custom for men to walk and for women to drive in hooded, Pekin carts. But Sybil Carstairs always defied this convention, exclaiming: "Why should I be bumped black and blue in a springless cart just because I am a woman?" She and her husband were setting out on foot when Olga's little cart clattered into the compound driven by a Chinese groom. Kiada had gone on ahead to welcome his early guests. Volgorughi lifted Olga into the cart. She was quite helpless in a Siberian cloak of blue fox paws and clumsy Mongol socks of white felt over her dancing slippers. Her head drooped against Volgorughi's shoulder drowsily as he put her down in the cart. He drew the fur cloak around her in a little gesture that seemed tenderly possessive. She lifted languid eyes.

"Isn't Lady Carstairs driving with me?"

"My dear, you know she never drives in a Pekin cart. You are not afraid?" Volgorughi smiled. "You will be quite safe, Olga Kyrilovna. I promise you that."

Her answering smile wavered. Then the hood hid her face from view as the cart rattled through the gateway.

Volgorughi and Lucien walked close behind Olga's cart. Alexei and I followed more slowly. Our Chinese lantern boys ran ahead of us in the darkness to light our way like the linkmen of mediæval London. Street lamps in Pekin were lighted only once a month — when the General of the Nine Gates made his rounds of inspection.

The lantern light danced down a long, empty lane winding between high, blank walls. A stinging Siberian wind threw splinters of sleet in my face. We hadn't the macadamized roads of the Treaty Ports. The frozen mud was hard and slippery as glass. I tried to keep to a ridge that ran down the middle of the road. My foot slipped and I stumbled down the slope into a foul gutter of sewage frozen solid. The lanterns turned a corner. I was alone with the black night and the icy wind.

I groped my way along the gutter, one hand against the wall. No stars, no moon, no lighted windows, no other pedestrians. My boot met something soft that yielded and squirmed. My voice croaked a question in mandarin: "Is this the way to the Japanese Legation?" The answer came in sing-song Cantonese. I understood only one word: "Alms . . ."

Like Heaven itself I saw a distant flicker of light coming nearer. Like saints standing in the glow of their own halos I recognized Alexei and our lantern boys. "What happened?" Alexei's voice was taut. "I came back as soon as I missed you."

"Nothing. I fell. I was just asking this —"

Words died on my lips. Lantern light revealed the blunted lion-face, the eyeless sockets, the obscene, white stumps for hands — "mere corruption, swaddled man-wise." A leper. And I had been about to touch him.

Alexei's gaze followed mine to the beggar, hunched against the wall. "She is one of the worst I've ever seen."

"She?"

"I think it's a woman. Or, shall I say, it was a woman?" Alexei laughed harshly. "Shall we go on?"

We rounded the next corner before I recovered my voice. "These beggars aren't all as wretched as they seem, are they?"

"What put that idea into your head, Charley?"

"Something that happened last summer. We were in a market lane of the Chinese City — Sybil Carstairs and Olga Kyrilovna, Lucien and I. A beggar, squatting in the gutter, stared at us as if he had never seen Western men before. He looked like any other beggar — filthy, naked to the waist, with tattered, blue cotton trousers below. But his hands were toying with a little image carved in turquoise matrix. It looked old and valuable."

"He may have stolen it."

"It wasn't as simple as that," I retorted. "A man in silk rode up on a mule leading a white pony with a silver embroidered saddle. He called the beggar 'elder brother' and invited him to mount the pony. Then the two rode off together."

Alexei's black eyes glittered like jet beads in the lantern light. "Was the beggar the older of the two?"

"No. That's the queer part. The beggar was young. The man who called him 'elder brother' was old and dignified . . . Some beggars at home have savings accounts. I suppose the same sort of thing could happen here."

Again Alexei laughed harshly. "Hold on to that idea, Charley, if it makes you feel more comfortable."

We came to a gate where lanterns clustered like a cloud of fireflies. A piano tinkled. In the compound, lantern boys were gathering outside the windows of a ballroom, tittering as they watched barbarian demons "jump" to Western music.

Characteristically, the Japanese Legation was the only European house in Pekin. Candle flames and crystal prisms. Wall mirrors and a polished

parquet floor. The waltz from *Traviata.* The glitter of diamonds and gold braid. Punch *à la Romaine.*

"Where is Princess Volgorughi?" I asked Sybil Carstairs.

"Didn't she come with you and Colonel Liakoff?"

"No. Her cart followed you. We came afterward."

"Perhaps she's in the supper room." Sybil whirled off with little Kiada.

Volgorughi was standing in the doorway of the supper room with Lucien and Carstairs. "She'll be here in a moment," Carstairs was saying.

Alexei spoke over my shoulder. "Charley and I have just arrived. We did not pass her excellency's cart on the way."

"Perhaps she turned back," said Lucien.

"In that case she would have passed us," returned Alexei. "Who was with her?"

Volgorughi's voice came out in a hoarse whisper. "Her groom and lantern boy. Both Chinese. But Kiada and the Carstairs' were just ahead of her; *Monsieur* de L'Orges and I, just behind her."

"Not all the way," amended Lucien. "We took a wrong turning and got separated from each other in the dark. That was when we lost sight of her."

"My fault." Volgorughi's mouth twisted bitterly. "I was leading the way. And it was I who told her she would be . . . safe."

Again we breasted the wind to follow lanterns skimming before us like will o' the wisps. Vainly we strained our eyes through glancing lights and broken shadows. We met no one. We saw nothing. Not even a footprint or wheel rut on that frozen ground. Once something moaned in the void beyond the lights. It was only the leper.

At the gate of the Russian Legation, the Cossack guard sprang to attention. Volgorughi rapped out a few words in Russian. I knew enough to understand the man's reply. "The *baryna* has not returned, excellency. There has been no sign of her or her cart."

Volgorughi was shouting. Voices, footfalls, lights filled the compound. Alexei struck his forehead with his clenched hand. "Fool that I am! The leper!"

He walked so fast I could hardly keep up with him. The lantern boys were running. A Cossack came striding after us. Alexei halted at the top of the ridge. The leper had not moved. He spoke sharply in mandarin. "Have you seen a cart?" No answer. "When she asked me for alms, she spoke Cantonese," I told him. He repeated his question in Cantonese. Both Volgorughi and Alexei spoke the southern dialects. All the rest of us were content to stammer mandarin.

Still no answer. The Cossack stepped down into the gutter. His great boot prodded the shapeless thing that lay there. It toppled sidewise.

Alexei moved down the slope. "Lights!" The lanterns shuddered and came nearer. The handle of a knife protruded from the leper's left breast.

Alexei forced himself to drop on

one knee beside that obscene corpse. He studied it intently, without touching it.

"Murdered . . . There are many knives like that in the Chinese City. Anyone might have used it — Chinese or European." He rose, brushing his knee with his gloved hand.

"Why?" I ventured.

"She couldn't see." His voice was judicious. "She must have heard . . . something."

"But what?"

Alexei's Asiatic face was inscrutable in the light from the paper lanterns.

Police? Extra-territorial law courts? That was Treaty Port stuff. Like pidgin English. We had only a few legation guards. No gunboats. No telegraph. No railway. The flying machine was a crank's daydream. Even cranks hadn't dreamed of a wireless telegraphy . . . Dawn came. We were still searching. Olga Kyrilovna, her cart and pony, her groom and lantern boy, had all vanished without trace as if they had never existed.

As character witnesses, the Chinese were baffling. "The Princess' groom was a Manchu of good character," Volgorughi's Number One Boy told us. "But her lantern boy was a Cantonese with a great crime on his conscience. He caused his mother's death when he was born which the Ancients always considered Unfilial."

At noon some of us met in the smoking room of the Pekin Club. "It's curious there's been no demand for ransom," I said.

"Bandits? Within the city walls?" Carstairs was skeptical. "Russia has never hesitated to use *agents provocateurs*. They say she's going to build a railway across Siberia. I don't believe it's practical. But you never can tell what those mad Russians will do. She'll need Manchuria. And she'll need a pretext for taking it. Why not the abduction of the Russian minister's wife?"

Kiada shook his head. "Princess Volgorughi will not be found until The River is restored to its companion pictures, The Lake, The Sea, and The Cloud."

"What do you mean?"

Kiada answered me patiently as an adult explaining the obvious to a backward child. "It is known that Wang Wei painted this series of pictures entitled Four Forms of Water. Volgorughi has only one of them — The River. The separation of one painting from others in a series divinely inspired is displeasing to the artist."

"But Wang Wei has been dead over a thousand years!"

"It is always dangerous to displease those who have Passed Above. An artist as steeped in ancient mysteries as the pious Wang Wei has power over men long after he has become a Guest On High. Wang Wei will shape the course of our lives into any pattern he pleases in order to bring those four paintings together again. I knew this last night when I first saw The River and — I was afraid."

"I wonder how Volgorughi did get that painting?" mused Carstairs. "I

hope he didn't forget the little formality of payment."

"He's not a thief!" I protested.

"No. But he's a collector. All collectors are mad. Especially Russian collectors. It's like gambling or opium."

Lucien smiled unpleasantly. "Art! Ghosts! Politics! Why go so far afield? Olga Kyrilovna was a young bride. And Volgorughi is . . . old. Such marriages are arranged by families, we all know. Women, as Balzac said, are the dupes of the social system. When they consent to marriage, they have not enough experience to know what they are consenting to. Olga Kyrilovna found herself in a trap. She has escaped, as young wives have escaped from time immemorial, by taking a lover. Now they've run off together. *Sabine a tout donné, sa beauté de colombe, et son amour . . .*"

"*Monsieur* de l'Orges."

We all started. Alexei was standing in the doorway. His eyes commanded the room. "What you say is impossible. Do I make myself clear?"

"Of course, Alexei. I — I was only joking." Lucien sounded piteous.

But Alexei had no pity. "A difference of taste in jokes has broken many friendships. . . . Charley, will you come back to the Russian Legation with me?"

The Tartar General's audience hall had never seemed more shabby. Volgorughi sat staring at the garish wall of red and gilt. He was wearing an overcoat, carrying hat and gloves.

"News, excellency?" queried Alexei.

Volgorughi shook his head without looking up. "I've been to the *Tsungli Yamên*." He spoke like a somnambulist. "The usual thing. Green tea. Melon seeds. A cold stone pavilion. Mandarins who giggle behind satin sleeves. I asked for an audience with the Emperor himself. It was offered — on the usual terms. I had to refuse — as usual. By the time a gunboat gets to the mouth of the Pei-ho, they may agree to open another seaport to Russian trade by way of reparation, but . . . I shall never see Olga Kyrilova again. Sometimes I think our governments keep us here in the hope that something will happen to give them a pretext for sending troops into China . . ."

We all felt that. The *Tsungli Yamên* or Foreign Office calmly assumed that our legations were vassal missions to their Emperor like those from Thibet. The Emperor would not receive us unless we acknowledged his sovereignty by kowtowing, the forehead to strike the floor audibly nine times. Even if we had wished to go through this interesting performance for the sake of peace and trade, our governments would not let us compromise their sovereignty. But they kept us there, where we had no official standing, where our very existence was doubted. "It may be there are as many countries in the West as England, France, Germany and Russia," one mandarin had informed me. "But the others you mention — Austria, Sweden, Spain and America — they are all lies invented to intimidate the Chinese."

Alexei was not a man to give up

easily. "Excellency, I shall find her."

Volgorughi lifted his head. "How?"

Alexei shouted. The study door opened. An old man in workman's dress came in with a young Chinese. I knew the old man as Antoine Billot, one of the Swiss clockmakers who were the only Western tradesmen allowed in Pekin.

"Charley," said Alexei. "Tell Antoine about the fingering piece you saw in the hands of a beggar last summer."

"It was turquoise matrix, carved to represent two nude figures embracing. The vein of brown in the stone colored their heads and spotted the back of the smaller figure."

"I have seen such a fingering piece," said Antoine. "In the Palace of Whirring Phoenixes. It is in that portion of the Chinese City known as the Graveyard of the Wu Family, in the Lane of Azure Thunder."

"It is the Beileh Tsai Heng who lives there," put in Antoine's Chinese apprentice. "Often have we repaired his French clocks. Very fine clocks of Limoges enamel sent to the Emperor Kang Hsi by Louis XIV. The Beileh's grandmother was the Discerning Concubine of the Emperor Tao Kwang."

"An old man?" asked Alexei.

"The Beileh has not yet attained the years of serenity. Though the name Heng means 'Steadfast' he is impetuous as a startled dragon. He memorialized the late Emperor for permission to live in a secluded portion of the Chinese City so that he could devote his leisure to ingenious arts and pleasures."

I looked at Alexei. "You think the beggar who stared at us was a servant of this prince?"

"No. Your beggar was the prince himself. 'Elder Brother' is the correct form for addressing a Manchu prince of the third generation."

"It is the latest fad among our young princes of Pekin," explained the apprentice, "to haunt the highways and taverns dressed as beggars, sharing the sad life of the people for a few hours. They vie with each other to see which can look the most dirty and disreputable. But each one has some little habit of luxury that he cannot give up, even for the sake of disguise. A favorite ring, a precious fan, an antique fingering piece. That is how you can tell them from the real beggars."

Alexei turned to me. "When a taste for the exquisite becomes so refined that it recoils upon itself and turns into its opposite — a taste for the ugly — we call that decadence. Prince Heng is decadent . . . bored, curious, irresponsible, ever in search of a new sensation." Alexei turned back to the apprentice. "Could the Beileh be tempted with money?"

"Who could offer him anything he does not already possess?" intoned the young Chinese. "His revered father amassed one hundred thousand myriad snow-white *taels* of silver from unofficial sources during his benevolent reign as Governor of Kwantung. In the Palace of Whirring Phoenixes even the wash bowls and spitting basins are curiously wrought of fine

jade and pure gold, for this prince loves everything that is rare and strange."

Alexei hesitated before his next question. "Does the Beileh possess any valuable paintings?"

"His paintings are few but priceless. Four landscape scrolls from the divine brush of the illustrious Wang Wei."

Volgorughi started to his feet. "What's this?"

"You may go, Antoine." Alexei waited until the door had closed. "Isn't it obvious, sir? Your Wang Wei scroll was stolen."

Volgorughi sank back in his chair. "But . . . I bought it. From a pedlar in the Chinese City. I didn't ask his name."

"How could a nameless pedlar acquire such a painting from such a prince honestly?" argued Alexei. "Your pedlar was a thief or a receiver. Such paintings have religious as well as artistic value to the Chinese. They are heirlooms, never sold even by private families who need the money. Last night the moment I saw the marginal note written by the Emperor Ch'ien Lung I knew the picture must have been stolen from the Imperial Collection. I was disturbed because I knew that meant trouble for us if it were known you had the painting. That's why I didn't want to read the inscription aloud. It's easy to see what happened. The thief was captured and tortured until he told Heng you had the painting. Heng saw Olgo Kyrilovna with Charley and Lucien in the Chinese City last summer. He must have heard then that she was your wife. When he found you had the painting, he ordered her abduction. Now he is holding her as hostage for the return of the painting. All this cannot be coincidence."

Volgorughi buried his face in his hands. "What can we do?"

"With your permission, excellency, I shall go into the Chinese City tonight and return the painting to Heng. I shall bring back Olga Kyrilovna . . . if she is still alive."

Volgorughi rose, shoulders bent, chin sunk on his chest. "I shall go with you, Alexei Andreitch."

"Your excellency forgets that special circumstances make it possible for me to go into the Chinese City after dark when no other European can do so with safety. Alone I have some chance of success. With you to protect, it would be impossible."

"You will need a Cossack Escort."

"That would strip the legation of guards. And it would antagonize Heng. Olga Kyrilovna might be harmed before I could reach her. I prefer to go alone."

Volgorughi sighed. "Report to me as soon as you get back . . . You are waiting for something?"

"The painting, excellency."

Volgorughi walked with a shuffling step into the study. He came back with the scroll in its case. "Take it. I never want to see it again."

At the door I looked back. Volgorughi was slumped in his seat, a figure of utter loneliness and despair.

Alexei glanced at me as we crossed

the compound. "Something is puzzling you, Charley. What is it?"

"If this Beileh Heng is holding Olga Kyrilovna as a hostage for the painting, he wants you to know that he has abducted her. He has nothing to conceal. Then why was the leper murdered? If not to conceal something?"

Alexei led the way into a room of his own furnished with military severity. "I'm glad Volgorughi didn't think of that question, Charley. It has been troubling me too."

"And the answer?"

"Perhaps I shall find it in the Palace of Whirring Phoenixes. Perhaps it will lead me back to one of the men who dined with us yesterday evening. Except for the Carstairs', we were all separated from each other at one time or another in those dark streets — even you and I . . ."

Alexei was opening a cedar chest. He took out a magnificent robe of wadded satin in prismatic blues and greens. When he had slipped it on he turned to face me. The Tartar cast of his oblique eyes and sallow skin was more pronounced than I had ever realized. Had I passed him wearing this costume in the Chinese City I should have taken him for a Manchu or a Mongol.

He smiled. "Now will you believe I have the blood of Temudjin Genghis Khan in my veins?"

"You've done this before!"

His smile grew sardonic. "Do you understand why I am the only European who can go into the Chinese City after dark?"

My response was utterly illogical. "Alexei, take me with you tonight!"

He studied my face. "You were fond of Olga Kyrilovna, weren't you?"

"Is there no way?" I begged.

"Only one way. And it's not safe. You could wear the overalls of a workman and carry the tools of a clockmaker. And stay close to me, ostensibly your Chinese employer."

"If Antoine Billot will lend me his clothes and tools . . ."

"That can be arranged." Alexei was fitting a jewelled nail shield over his little finger.

"Well? Is there any other objection?"

"Only this." He looked up at me intently. His pale face and black eyes were striking against the kingfisher blues and greens of his satin robe. "We are going to find something ugly at the core of this business, Charley. You are younger than I and . . . will you forgive me if I say you are rather innocent? Your idea of life in Pekin is a series of dances and dinners, race meetings outside the walls in spring, charades at the English Legation in winter, snipe shooting at Hai Tien in the fall. Your government doesn't maintain an Intelligence Service here. So you can have no idea of the struggle that goes on under the surface of this pleasant social life. Imperialist ambitions and intrigues, the alliance between politics and trade, even the opium trade — what do you know of all that? Sometimes I think you don't even know much about the amusements men like Lucien find in the

Chinese City . . . Life is only pleasant on the surface, Charley. And now we're going below the surface. Respectability is as artificial as the clothes we wear. What it hides is as ugly as our naked bodies and animal functions. Whatever happens tonight, I want you to remember this: under every suit of clothes, broadcloth or rags, there is the same sort of animal."

"What are you hinting at?"

"There are various possibilities. You said Heng stared at your party as if he had never seen Western men before. Are you sure he wasn't staring at Olga Kyrilovna as if he had never seen a Western woman before?"

"But our women are physically repulsive to Chinese!"

"In most cases. But the Chinese are not animated types. They are individuals, as we are. Taste is subjective and arbitrary. Individual taste can be eccentric. Isn't it possible that there are among them, as among us, men who have romantic fancies for the exotic? Or sensual fancies for the experimental? I cannot get those words of Antoine's apprentice out of my mind: *this prince loves everything that is rare and strange . . .*"

A red sun was dipping behind the Western Hills when we passed out a southern gate of the Tartar City. In a moment all nine gates would swing shut and we would be locked out of our legations until tomorrow's dawn. It was not a pleasant feeling. I had seen the head of a consul rot on a pike in the sun. That was what happened to barbarian demons who went where they were not wanted outside the Treaty Ports.

The Chinese City was a wilderness of twisting lanes, shops, taverns, theatres, tea-houses, opium dens, and brothels. Long ago conquering Manchu Tartars had driven conquered Chinese outside the walls of Pekin proper, or the Tartar City, to this sprawling suburb where the conquered catered to the corruption of the conqueror. The Chinese City came to life at nightfall when the Tartar City slept behind its walls. Here and there yellow light shone through blue dusk from a broken gateway. Now and then we caught the chink of porcelain cups or the whine of a *yuehkin* guitar.

Alexei seemed to know every turn of the way. At last I saw why he was Russian military *attaché* at Pekin. Who else would learn so much about China and its people as this bold adventurer who could pass for a Manchu in Chinese robes? When we were snipe-shooting together, he seemed to know the Pei-chih-li plain as if he carried a military map of the district in his head. Years afterward, when the Tsar's men took Port Arthur, everyone learned about Russian Intelligence in China. I learned that evening. And I found myself looking at Alexei in his Chinese dress as if he had suddenly become a stranger. What did I know of this man whom I had met so casually at legation parties? Was he ruthless enough to stab a beggar already dying of leprosy? Had he had any reason for doing so?

We turned into a narrower lane — a mere crack between high walls. Alexei whispered: "The Lane of Azure Thunder."

A green-tiled roof above the dun-colored wall proclaimed the dwelling of a prince. Alexei paused before a gate, painted vermilion. He spoke Cantonese to the gate-keeper. I understood only two words — "Wang Wei." There were some moments of waiting. Then the gate creaked open and we were ushered through that drab wall into a wonderland of fantastic parks and lacquered pavilions blooming with all the colors of Sung porcelain.

I was unprepared for the splendor of the audience hall. The old palaces we rented for legations were melancholy places, decaying and abandoned by their owners. But here rose, green and gold rioted against a background of dull ebony panels, tortured by a cunning chisel into grotesquely writhing shapes. There were hangings of salmon satin embroidered with threads of gold and pale green, images of birds and flowers carved in jade and coral and malachite. The slender rafters were painted a poisonously bright jade-green and on them tiny lotus buds were carved and gilded. There was a rich rustle of satin and the Beileh Heng walked slowly into the room.

Could this stately figure be the same rude fellow I had last seen squatting in the gutter, half naked in the rags of a beggar? He moved with the deliberate grace of the grave religious dancers in the Confucian temples. His robe was lustrous purple — the "myrtle-red" prescribed for princes of the third generation by the Board of Rites. It swung below the paler mandarin jacket in sculptured folds, stiff with a sable lining revealed by two slits at either side. Watered in the satin were the Eight Famous Horses of the Emperor Mu Wang galloping over the Waves of Eternity. His cuffs were curved like horse-shoes in honor of the cavalry that set the Manchu Tartars on the throne. Had that cavalry ridden west instead of south, Alexei himself might have owed allegiance to this prince. Though one was Chinese and one Russian, both were Tartar.

Heng's boots of purple satin looked Russian. So did his round cap faced with a band of sable. His skin was a dull ivory, not as yellow as the southern Chinese. His cheeks were lean; his glance, searching and hungry. He looked like a pure-bred descendant of the "wolf-eyed, lantern-jawed Manchus" of the Chinese chronicles. A conqueror who would take whatever he wanted, but who had learned from the conquered Chinese to want only the precious and fanciful.

Something else caught my eye. There was no mistake. This was the beggar. For, pale against his purple robe, gleamed the fingering piece of turquoise matrix which his thin, neurotic fingers caressed incessantly.

No ceremonial tea was served. We were being received as enemies during a truce. But Alexei bowed profoundly and spoke with all the roundabout ex-

travagance of mandarin politeness.

"An obscure design of destiny has brought the property of your highness, a venerable landscape scroll painted by the devout Wang Wei, into the custody of the Russian minister. Though I appear Chinese in this garb, know that I am Russian and my minister has sent me in all haste and humility to restore this inestimable masterpiece to its rightful owner."

Heng's eyes were fixed on a point above our heads for, Chinese or barbarian, we were inferiors, unworthy of his gaze. His lips scarcely moved. "When you have produced the scroll, I shall know whether you speak truth or falsehood."

"All your highness' words are unspotted pearls of perpetual wisdom." Alexei stripped the embroidered case from the jade roller. Like a living thing the painted silk slipped out of his grasp and unwound itself at the Beileh's feet.

Once again a faery stream of lapis, jade and turquoise hues unrolled before my enchanted eyes. Kiada was right. I could hear the wind sing in the rushes and the wail of the wild geese, faint and far, a vibration trembling on the outer edge of the physical threshold for sound.

The hand that held the fingering piece was suddenly still. Only the Beileh's eyeballs moved, following the course of Wang Wei's river from its bubbling spring to its foam-flecked sea. Under his cultivated stolidity, I saw fear and, more strangely, sorrow.

At last he spoke. "This painting I inherited from my august ancestor the ever-glorious Emperor Ch'ien Lung who left his words and seal upon the margin. How has it come into your possession?"

Alexei bowed again. "I shall be grateful for an opportunity to answer that question if your highness will first condescend to explain to my mean intelligence how the scroll came to leave the Palace of Whirring Phoenixes?"

"Outside Barbarian, you are treading on a tiger's tail when you speak with such insolence to an Imperial Clansman. I try to make allowances for you because you come of an inferior race, the Hairy Ones, without manners or music, unversed in the Six Fine Arts and the Five Classics. Know then that it is not your place to ask questions or mine to answer them. You may follow me, at a distance of nine paces, for I have something to show you."

He looked neither to right nor left as he walked soberly through the audience hall, his hands tucked inside his sleeves. At the door he lifted one hand to loosen the clasp of his mandarin jacket, and it slid from his shoulders. Before it had time to touch the ground, an officer of the Coral Button sprang out of the shadows to catch it reverently. The Beileh did not appear conscious of this officer's presence. Yet he had let the jacket fall without an instant's hesitation. He knew that wherever he went at any time there would always be someone ready to catch anything he let fall

before it was soiled or damaged.

We followed him into a garden, black and white in the moonlight. We passed a pool spanned by a crescent bridge. Its arc of stone matched the arc of its reflection in the ice-coated water, completing a circle that was half reality, half illusion. We came to another pavilion, its roof curling up at each corner, light filtering through its doorway. Again we heard the shrill plaint of a guitar. We rounded a devil-screen of gold lacquer and the thin sound ended on a high, feline note.

I blinked against a blaze of lights. Like a flight of parti-colored butterflies, a crowd of girls fluttered away from us, tottering on tiny, mutilated feet. One who sat apart from the rest, rose with dignity. A Manchu princess, as I saw by her unbound feet and undaunted eyes. Her hair was piled high in the lacquered coils of the Black Cloud Coiffure. She wore hairpins, earrings, bracelets and tall heels of acid-green jade. Her gown of sea-green silk was sewn with silver thread worked in the Pekin stitch to represent the Silver Crested Love Birds of Conjugal Peace. But when she turned her face, I saw the sour lines and sagging pouches of middle age.

Princess Heng's gaze slid over us with subtle contempt and came to rest upon the Beileh with irony. "My pleasure in receiving you is boundless and would find suitable expression in appropriate compliments were the occasion more auspicious. As it is, I pray you will forgive me if I do not linger in the fragrant groves of polite dalliance, but merely inquire why your highness has seen fit to introduce two male strangers, one a barbarian, into the sanctity of the Inner Chamber?"

Heng answered impassively. "Even the Holy Duke of Yen neglected the forms of courtesy when he was pursued by a tiger."

A glint of malice sparkled in the eyes of the Beileh's Principal Old Woman. "Your highness finds his present situation equivalent to being pursued by a tiger? To my inadequate understanding that appears the natural consequence of departing from established custom by attempting to introduce a barbarian woman into the Inner Chamber."

Heng sighed. "If the presence of these far-travelled strangers distresses you and my Small Old Women you have permission to retire."

Princess Heng's jade bangles clashed with the chilly ring of ice in a glass as she moved towards the door. The Small Old Women, all girls in their teens, shimmered and rustled after the Manchu princess who despised them both as concubines and as Chinese.

Heng led us through another door. "Olga!"

The passion in Alexei's voice was a shock to me. In my presence he had always addressed her as "excellency" or "princess" . . . She might have been asleep as she lay there on her blue fox cloak, her eyes closed, her pale face at peace, her slight hands relaxed in the folds of her white tulle skirt. But the touch of her hands was ice and faintly from her parted lips

came the sweet, sickish odor of opium.

Alexei turned on Heng. "If you had not stolen her, she would not have died!"

"Stolen?" It was the first word that had pierced Heng's reserve. "Imperial Clansmen do not steal women. I saw this far-travelled woman in a market lane of the Chinese City last summer. I coveted her. But I did not steal her. I offered money for her, decently and honorably, in accord with precepts of morality laid down by the Ancients. Money was refused. Months passed. I could not forget the woman with faded eyes. I offered one of my most precious possessions. It was accepted. The painting was her price. But the other did not keep his side of the bargain. For she was dead when I lifted her out of her cart."

The lights were spinning before my eyes. "Alexei, what is this? Volgorughi would not . . ."

Alexei's look stopped me.

"You . . ." Words tumbled from my lips. "There was a lover. And you were he. And Volgorughi found out. And he watched you together and bided his time, nursing his hatred and planning his revenge like a work of art. And finally he punished you both cruelly by selling her to Heng. Volgorughi knew that Olga would drive alone last night. Volgorughi had lived so long in the East that he had absorbed the Eastern idea of women as well as the Eastern taste in painting. The opium must have been in the sherry he gave her. She was already drowsy when he lifted her into the cart. No doubt he had planned to give her only a soporific dose that would facilitate her abduction. But at the last moment he commuted her sentence to death and let her have the full, lethal dose. He gave her goodbye tenderly because he knew he would never see her again. He promised her she would be safe because death is, in one sense, safety — the negation of pain, fear and struggle . . .

"There was no pedlar who sold him the painting. That was his only lie. He didn't prevent your coming here tonight because he wanted you to know. That was your punishment. And he saw that you could make no use of your knowledge now. Who will believe that Olga Kyrilovna, dead of a Chinese poison in the Chinese City, was killed by her own husband? Some Chinese will be suspected —Heng himself, or his jealous wife, or the men who carry out his orders. No European would take Heng's story seriously unless it were supported by at least one disinterested witness. That was why the leper had to die last night, while Volgorughi was separated from Lucien through a wrong turning that was Volgorughi's fault. The leper must have overheard some word of warning or instruction from Volgorughi to Olga's lantern boy that revealed the whole secret. That word was spoken in Cantonese. Olga's lantern boy was Cantonese. Volgorughi spoke that dialect. The leper knew no other tongue. And Lucien, the only person who walked with Volgorughi, was as ignorant of Cantonese as all the rest of

us, save you."

Heng spoke sadly in his own tongue. "The treachery of the Russian minister in sending this woman to me dead deserves vengeance. But one thing induces me to spare him. He did not act by his own volition. He was a blind tool in the skillful hand of the merciless Wang Wei. Through this woman's death The River has been restored to its companion pictures, The Lake, The Sea, and The Cloud. And I, who separated the pictures so impiously, have had my own share of suffering as a punishment . . ."

. . . Yes, I'll have another brandy. One more glass. Olga? She was buried in the little Russian Orthodox cemetery at Pekin. Volgorughi was recalled. The breath of scandal clung to his name the rest of his life. The Boxer Uprising finally gave the West its pretext for sending troops into China. That purple satin Epicurean, the Beileh Heng, was forced to clean sewers by German troops during the occupation and committed suicide from mortification. The gay young bloods of Pekin, who had amused themselves by playing beggar, found themselves beggars in earnest when the looting was over. Railways brought Western business men to Pekin and before long it was as modern as Chicago.

Alexei? He became attentive to the wife of the new French minister, a woman with dyed hair who kept a Pekinese sleeve dog in her bedroom. I discovered the distraction that can be found in study of the early Chinese poets. When I left the service, I lost track of Alexei. During the Russian revolution, I often wondered if he were still living. Did he join the Reds, as some Cossack officers did? Or was he one of the Whites who settled in Harbin or Port Arthur? He would have been a very old man then, but I think he could have managed. He spoke so many Chinese dialects . . .

The scroll? Any good reference book will tell you that there are no Wang Wei scrolls in existence today, though there are some admirable copies. One, by Chao Mēng Fu, in the British Museum, shows the course of a river. Scholars have described this copy in almost the same words I have used tonight to describe the original. But they are not the same. I went to see the copy. I was disappointed. I could no longer hear the song of the wind in the rushes or the wail of the wild geese. Was the change in the painting? Or in me?

EDITOR'S NOTE

Did "Chinoiserie" strike you as a formula detective story? Hardly! Yet Miss McCloy insists that it contains all the basic ingredients of a typical detective story: two murders, indications of the murderer's motive, opportunity and method given early in the story, a "red herring" in the form of a plausible but erroneous theory of the crime evolved by the investigator in the middle of the tale, and a surprise ending (at least, it was a surprise to your

Editor who missed the subtle clue of the title itself). In addition, the story offers four obvious suspects, each with opportunity and a potential motive — Volgorughi, Kiada, Lucien, and Heng; and two less obvious suspects — Alexei, the detective, and Charley, the narrator.

What, then, makes "Chinoiserie" seem so utterly different from the formula detective story? Miss McCloy suggests this reason: the scene of the story automatically eliminates all modern police methods — fingerprints, chemical analysis, dragnets, and teletype alarms. The basic structure of the detective story — murder, suspicion, investigation, and dénouement — still forms the framework of "Chinoiserie" and remains "exquisitely true to type" without the scaffolding of modern police procedure to support it. According to Miss McCloy, the intricacies and gingerbread of police mechanics have become clumsy and cumbersome in the last few years; many writers are beginning to jettison the "chinoiseries de bureau" (red tape) of official investigation in favor of telling their stories from the point of view of a suspect who doesn't know what the police are doing, or why.

In "Chinoiserie" Miss McCloy achieved the same objective by the ingenious idea of putting the story in a place and period where there were no police. Thus, in the hands of a daring and imaginative craftsman, formula can be broken without sacrificing even a particle of technique, and a "different" story can be produced that is still in the strictest tradition of the pure detective tale.

Here, as promised, is the third in the new series of Professor Poggioli stories — another provocative and unusual detective story by the old master himself. Again Poggioli is confronted with a strange and baffling situation, including a strange and baffling little man named Mr. Hartley, and a strange and baffling pair of murder-clues. Why did Mr. Hartley date his wife's murder in this peculiar way? — two days after the second Monday in July. And what was the meaning of the queerest clue ever found on the scene of a crime? — a spit ball. Surely a unique clue in the annals of both fictional and factual murder!

Piqued? Then suppose we add one more strange and baffling item of information. In a letter to your Editor, Mr. Stribling wrote: "The plot of 'The Mystery of the Paper Wad' is one that I have had in my head for at least fifteen years." Fifteen years of germination — and then it clicked! How many other writers would have played mental hide-and-seek for so long merely to develop an idea for a single detective short story?

THE MYSTERY OF THE PAPER WAD

by T. S. STRIBLING

PROFESSOR HENRY POGGIOLI put his man off, not exactly lightly but at least casually and uninterestedly. He said, "You may tell the police from me, Mr. Hartley, not only that you didn't kill your wife but that you are temperamentally incapable of murdering anybody."

A very odd expression came over the face of the little man.

"I couldn't kill anybody . . . even if I wanted to?"

The criminologist smiled at the illusion held by every man that with him all things, both crimes and virtues, are possible.

"Naturally your hand, Mr. Hartley, could lift a gun or wield a knife, but the catch is, 'if you wanted to.' You wouldn't want to."

Mr. Hartley's triangular face took on a queer look, as if some poignant irony had arisen in his mind. He even gave a click of a laugh. "Imagine that. . . . I hadn't thought of that."

"No, men never realize their own emotional or mental limitations. If they did the world would lack the numberless failures that go to form the foundation of any final success."

It irked me personally that Poggioli had allowed himself to be sidetracked into such dull philosophizing. I wanted to get at the bottom of Mr. Hartley's facial expression. It was very extraordinary for a man to appear shocked and even dismayed when told that he was incapable of committing murder. I cleared my throat to reintroduce the subject when Poggioli

gave me a glance to keep silent and continued easily as if talking of the weather,

"Now, Mr. Hartley, on what date was your wife murdered?"

Our client pondered a moment, "It was . . . let me see . . . two days after the second Monday in July."

The psychologist's eyes rested on a little calendar over the desk in my study.

"Mr. Hartley, may I ask what happened to you on the second Monday in July?"

This too annoyed me. Poggioli was off on another sidetrack. The suspected man seemed disconcerted.

"Why, nothing that I seem to remember. What makes you ask?"

"You dated your wife's murder two days after the second Monday in July."

"Oh, that. . . ." Mr. Hartley took his sharp chin in his thin fingers and pondered with evident sincerity. The result appeared to be some vague mental disturbance. Finally he gave up whatever he was after for he said, "I suppose it's because it was the first day after the weekend races."

"Do you attend the weekend races?"

He gave another little click of a laugh. "No, I should say not."

"Then why do you date . . ."

Here he fished up another reason, quite as sincere as his first.

"Well, it must be because my cousin, Anson Kinkaid, sent me money to pay my alimony on that day. He always brought it on Monday, when he brought it at all, and that let me out of jail."

"What does your cousin have to do with the races?"

"He owns some horses, and he bets."

I broke in here. The idea of a man's jail term depending on a horse race struck me as funny. I said, "I see. When your cousin's entries won you got out of prison but when they lost you stayed in?"

I'm afraid, in Professor Poggioli's presence, I am not impressive. Our little visitor simply looked at me and made no reply.

Poggioli said, "And did your cousin bring the money and liberate you on this second Monday in July?"

The little man became perturbed again. He pondered as if trying to pin some elusive memory among his thoughts. "Well . . . yes . . . yes, he brought it. . . . I know he brought it. . . ." He broke off thinking intently, as if his memory ended on this unfinished sequence.

Poggioli sat reflecting on his client's uncertainties. I had no idea what he made of it. Nothing, I suppose, for he shifted to a new field of inquiry.

"Now, Mr. Hartley, do you know why you are accused of murdering your wife?"

The little man winced. "No, no, I'm not accused of . . . of that. No, the police asked me a question I couldn't answer and it worried me. I'd heard of you; read stories about you which that gentleman wrote up, I suppose," he pointed at me. "I said to

the police, 'I'm going to ask Professor Poggioli that question, if you don't mind.' One of them laughed and said 'You'd better not ask that psychologist who wrote the note unless you are positive you didn't write it yourself.' I said to him, 'Why of course I didn't write it. Why should I have written it? Doesn't make sense.' So I came over to get you to clear my name of suspicion."

"Now, what was this thing that was written?" asked Poggioli gently. "You see, you didn't quite begin at the beginning."

"Oh, that. A spit ball."

"A *what?*" I ejaculated.

The man did not answer me but continued looking at Poggioli who pondered a moment and then said, "This spit ball was found in your wife's apartment after her murder?"

"Yes, it was," said Hartley.

"Poggioli," I interrupted, "how in the world did you know. . . ."

He brushed me off with a touch of impatience. "How could it have entered the evidence of a murder mystery if it hadn't been found near the body?" I saw his reasoning then and would have known it myself if I had given it a thought. Poggioli went on, "There must have been something written on the spit ball. The police think you know something about it?"

The little man made a fluttery gesture. "They claim I wrote it. But why should *I* have written it? What sense would there be for me to write. . . ." He was apparently arguing with himself, in mixed terror and mystification.

"Just a moment. What was written on it?"

A little shiver went over our client. "My . . . my wife's address . . . that's all, just her address, no name, nothing but the address."

"And exactly what do you want me to do, Mr. Hartley, in your behalf?"

"I want you to prove to the police that I know nothing whatever about the note. I don't want to be under the slightest suspicion, especially at just this time in my life." Here he drew out and glanced at his watch, as if he had focused this sensitive period of his span down to minutes and seconds.

Poggioli almost smiled. Such stories of him have floated abroad that persons come in and expect absolute miracles of him. Now he said, "Well, Mr. Hartley, the rather narrow field of my information . . . mm . . . you see, all I know is a note, an address, was found in the apartment of your dead wife."

"Uh, Professor Poggioli, just another word . . . uh . . . I hate to mention this . . . Amabell is dead now, and she never knew I knew it, but I could have figured it out, if I'd been smart, just from the way she kept me in jail for not paying her alimony. Why should she have kept me in jail for not paying her alimony? Could I make any money in jail? Did she have any better chance of getting something when I was in jail? No, she didn't, at least not from me, but

. . . she would have from others, wouldn't she? You see what I mean? I say I could have figured it out for myself if I had been bright, only I didn't. A neighbor had to write me and tip me off. Then you can imagine how I felt . . . or maybe you can't, unless you've been married and your wife kept you in jail to allow herself a free hand in her own carryings on."

The little man said this with such a mixture of injury, helplessness and resentment that my sympathy went out to him. And at the same moment a kind of illumination came into my mind. I suddenly understood the address written on the note. I said to Poggioli, "I've got it!"

Poggioli either didn't hear me or he paid no attention. I went on, however, because in my own mind the whole matter was solved. I said, "The ex-Mrs. Hartley's character explains everything. She began flirting with some man in a crowd, probably on a street car, or bus. He signaled to know where he could meet her. She had a newspaper in her hand. She scribbled her address on the margin, tore it off, made it into a ball, and tossed it to him. Later he visited her apartment . . . and murdered her."

The little man sat staring at me with open mouth. "It *was* written on the edge of a newspaper," he said.

Well, that corroborated and proved my deduction and I have never received such a lift in all my life. I could then understand why Poggioli spent his life unraveling crimes. My friend, who was now listening to me, said, "Well let's run over to headquarters and take a look at the note."

I said, "What's the use of running over to headquarters? We know the facts: the woman wadded up the note, chewed it, threw it to a . . ."

"Women don't throw notes," interrupted Poggioli, "because they can't throw with any certainty and they can't catch. When a woman gives a man a note, she holds on to it until she has poked the slip of paper into the middle of the man's palm. If a woman wrote the note it wouldn't be wadded or chewed, it would be folded, very tightly. So a man wrote the note. That's why I suggest we'd better run over to police headquarters and look at the evidence."

Naturally that didn't fit very well with me. However I got up and went along with them. Out in the street the three of us caught a bus over to the Municipal Building. Poggioli and I found a rear seat while little Mr. Hartley got stuck in the jam near the door.

I was a little amused at the summary manner in which Poggioli had disposed of my theory. What if women didn't throw notes as a general rule? Couldn't *one* of them have thrown one? Besides that, the ex-Mrs. Hartley was apparently not an ordinary woman; her variance from the ordinary woman might induce a variance in the matter of throwing notes also. I developed this point with Poggioli, not arguing, but putting my side before him in the interest of truth.

He waggled the whole thing down

with his finger. "The note isn't the important point in this case," he said. "It's ancillary and will drop into its niche when we clear up the real mystery."

I looked at him. I said, "What is the real mystery?"

"Why, the way he dated the murder of his wife! Did you ever meet a more baffling riddle?"

I tried to recall the detail but it slipped me completely. "How did he date the murder of his wife?" I asked at last.

"He said it was two days after the second Monday in July."

"Mm — mm . . ." I tried to think more deeply about it, but finally I had to ask, "How does that make a riddle?"

Poggioli made a hopeless gesture. "Don't you see what that means? Something happened on the second Monday in July — something so important that it takes precedence in Hartley's mind over the murder of his wife!"

"I don't see why you think such a thing," I said.

"Because he dates her death by it. Dates fix themselves in our minds according to their emotional content. Ordinarily a man would date all other events from his wife's death. Hartley dates his wife's death from . . ."

"I see. I see what you mean," I said with a rising wonderment of my own. "What do you suppose could have happened on the second . . ."

"I don't know. That's what we are investigating, but it wouldn't surprise me to find a connection, subconscious possibly, between the second Monday . . ." Here Poggioli's explanation to me trailed off into silent analysis.

It was dusk, and lights were on in the city, as little Mr. Hartley led us into the municipal detective bureau to clear himself of all connection with the note found in the apartment of his murdered wife. As we went in he looked again at his watch as if he had only a limited time to spend on his exoneration and then he must be at something else. The regular day force were out of the office and only one officer, a Lieutenant, was on duty for the night. Little Mr. Hartley went up to him and said he had brought Professor Poggioli to see the note. The officer said it was in the homicide files and arose with the faintly bored, yet somewhat antagonistic air of men who habitually work with criminal matters. He went into another room and returned with a paper container. He opened it, showed some filled-out forms, two empty .38 pistol shells, a small bolus of chewing gum, and a bit of chewed paper torn from a newspaper margin. This last had been straightened out loosely and bore the address in pencil, 72 Henry Street.

The little fellow indicated these odd bits of evidence. "There's the note, Professor Poggioli," he said in the tone of a patient expecting instant relief from his physician. "I wish you would prove to this officer that I had nothing to do with it. I want to get away from here."

Poggioli hesitated over the folder. As for myself I really wanted our client freed. So, although Poggioli had just discountenanced my own theory, I hoped the lieutenant at the desk would not be so analytical. So I told it once more. I suggested that Amabell Hartley had written the note herself, tossed it to some man who later visited her apartment and murdered her.

"That was Captain Cypert's idea, too," nodded the Lieutenant.

I knew Captain Theodore Cypert of the Tiamara police force and I admit I felt rather set up that I had hit on the very theory advanced by the Captain. I said, "If the department thinks that, why do they continue to hold Mr. Hartley?"

"They don't think it," said the Lieutenant, "they thought it; the Captain's theory was disproved almost at once." Rather curiously I asked how. The Lieutenant pointed out the wad of gum in the container along with the wad of paper. "You see they were *both* chewed. The gum comes from her apartment, too; one of many pieces stuck around on the under sides of the furniture. The person who chewed the gum used bottled mineral water such as we found in Mrs. Hartley's apartment. The person who chewed the note used city water with chlorine in it, and their two sets of mouth germs also were different. That's our bacteriologist's report. The woman didn't chew or write the note."

The brevity with which my idea had been disproved daunted little Mr. Hartley. He glanced at his watch, then at the psychologist. "Can't you get me out, Professor Poggioli?"

At the little man's plea, Poggioli marshalled his arguments. "As I understand it, you don't suspect Mr. Hartley of murdering his wife?"

"Oh, no," denied the officer at once, "we know he didn't. We had him here in jail at that time."

"Then you must hold him under suspicion of complicity in her death."

"Yes, that's correct," granted the Lieutenant.

"Will you give me your grounds for that suspicion?"

The man behind the desk cleared his throat, apparently to collect his 'grounds.' "Well, Hartley here would have an interest in her death. He was in jail off and on for nonpayment of alimony and apparently that would continue for the rest of his life . . . or her life. . . ."

"Many men are in prison for nonpayment of alimony, Lieutenant. It is not usual to hold them responsible for disasters that befall their wives."

"No-o, certainly not . . . but this note . . ."

"All right, now let's take up the note. Mr. Hartley disclaims any knowledge of it."

"Yes, but Professor," said the officer, "anybody can disclaim anything."

"In words, certainly, but not with a synthesis of words, acts and thoughts. What I mean is this: if Hartley knew he had written the note, he would never have come to me, a psychologist,

to prove that he did *not* write it. He would have hired a lawyer to defend him. Mr. Hartley knows very well that I am not expert in twisting evidence to make it appear to prove what is false. All I can do is to establish facts. He wants me to establish his innocence of any knowledge of the note. The fact that he employed me for that purpose goes a long way to prove his innocence."

The man at the homicide desk sat for several moments thinking this over with a queer quizzical look. Finally he said to Poggioli, "He may have hired you, a psychologist, to give himself the appearance of innocence which you have just explained."

Poggioli puckered his brow in appraisal of the officer; finally he said, "Lieutenant, you know perfectly well that my client could never have thought of such a thing."

"Couldn't some one have . . . er . . . suggested it to him?"

"I?" snapped the psychologist.

"Anybody," defended the officer.

"What other man would have thought of that except me?" demanded Poggioli. "Would you?"

"Oh, no, I wouldn't, until you mentioned it. Listen, I can't let Hartley remain at large indefinitely. I'm going to turn him loose on an appearance bond. Hartley, if you can make an appearance bond, you can go."

Our little client was delighted. "Thank you, thank you, Lieutenant, I'll telephone my cousin Anson Kinkaid to come over and sign my bond."

The little man shot away to find a telephone — as delighted as if an appearance bond and complete freedom were one and the same thing.

Poggioli watched him go thoughtfully, then he turned to the officer. "Lieutenant, just what is it you know about that note which I don't know?"

The man at the desk was astonished. "Why do you think I . . ."

"Because you smiled a moment ago when I said Hartley knew nothing about the note. Then you rationalized when you gave me your reason for suspecting Hartley. You knew perfectly well that he didn't hire a psychologist to give himself the appearance of innocence. You are holding him for some completely different reason. Now what is it you know about the note that I don't?"

The man behind the desk shook his head. "I'll be hanged! I'd heard that you were clever, but . . . uh . . . the thing I was tickled at a while ago was your saying Hartley didn't know anything about the note, and that his hiring you proved he didn't."

"But he doesn't know anything about the note," repeated the psychologist with authority.

"Doesn't he?" inquired the officer "He ought to, he wrote it."

To say that I was flustered doesn't begin to express my feelings. To have Poggioli proved wrong was like having the floor drop from under my feet. Poggioli himself seemed not in the least put out. He asked the Lieutenant what reasons he had for his statement.

"Jim Moore analyzed the handwrit-

ing," said the deskman who was in high feather at having brought down the great Poggioli in defeat.

The psychologist continued undisturbed. "Your graphologist, Mr. Jim Moore, is he usually correct in his identifications of script?"

"Jim Moore! Why, he has never been proved wrong but once in his life, so far as I know. It was a case in which he judged the handwriting of identical twins; he said the two samples were written by the same man."

Poggioli nodded a thoughtful agreement. "If we may assume that Mr. Moore is correct and Hartley did write the note, then this is a much more interesting case than I thought."

In the midst of my astonishment I was a little amused at the clever way Poggioli was bypassing his own mistake. I knew the Lieutenant saw the same thing, but he was hardly in a position to call Poggioli's hand. So I did it myself.

"Poggioli, doesn't that make one of your deductions incorrect?"

The criminologist looked at me. "Which one?"

"The one the Lieutenant here is laughing at," I said. "You stated a moment ago that Hartley did *not* write the note. Now you are accepting it as a fact that he *did* write it."

My friend seemed surprised at me. "I didn't say that. I said that Hartley knew nothing about the note."

"Why, that's the same thing!" I said. "If he knows nothing about the note, naturally he didn't write it; and if he wrote it, he knows something about it!"

"I can't agree that your couplets mean the same thing," said the psychologist. "In fact, there is a wide difference between them; and also, this is beginning to let in a little light on a very dark corner."

I still thought he was just covering up his error before the officer, but I asked him what dark corner. He replied, "Why Hartley dated his wife's murder two days after the second Monday in July."

That certainly seemed the most complete *non sequitur* I had ever heard. I would have made some further remark but at this moment little Mr. Hartley appeared in the doorway with his cousin, Anson Kinkaid.

The sight of our client completely banished my raillery at Poggioli. Up to this point I had assumed that the little man was as innocent of the murder of his wife as I was. Now this abrupt information that he *had* written the note gave me the queerest and most shocking impression. If he wrote the note he must be a Machiavelli indeed, to seem so simple, frank and unaware of any wrongdoing. It turned our forthright little client into an unbelievable monster. I recalled that little men were really the most dangerous and deadly of all. Was Mr. Hartley in this class? On the other hand, Hartley might have written the address innocently enough and somehow the note had got into his dead wife's apartment. I had heard of tragic coincidences like that hanging

innocent men. That might be Hartley's plight. Whether he was monster or victim, I could not decide.

At the desk the men were briskly and jovially arranging the appearance bond. The turfman, Anson Kinkaid, was no taller than Hartley but he was broad and, I may say, as expansive mentally as he was physically. He wisecracked about always having to get his cousin Geoffrey out of the jug, sometimes by paying his alimony, sometimes by signing his appearance bonds. Suddenly, however, he seemed to notice a discrepancy for he said,

"Look here, Geoff, how is this? Couple of weeks ago I paid your alimony to let you out. Now I'm signing an appearance bond to let you out again. I thought the alimony was good for a month."

The little cousin became uneasy again. "This . . . this isn't about alimony, Anson."

"Not about . . ."

"No . . . it . . . it's about Amabell herself. You haven't heard?"

"Heard what? I've been away. . . ."

"Yes . . . uh . . . something terrible happened . . . she was murdered."

The broad short man stared. "You don't mean it!"

Our client gave the nod of a divorced man who has lost an ex-wife, a peculiarly American nod. All four of us onlookers remained silent, in the uncertain sympathy Americans accord to the bereaved in such problematic moments.

"Then this appearance bond you're making has . . . has to do with Amabell's murder?" asked Mr. Kinkaid.

"Yes," agreed little Mr. Hartley.

As Mr. Kinkaid signed his name to the bond he paused to say,

"Geoff, maybe it wasn't so good that I sent you the money to pay off Amabell and get you out of jail a couple of weeks ago. Maybe you'd been better off to stay in jail?"

"I did stay in jail," said Hartley.

"You didn't pay off and get out?"

"No. I was here in jail when Amabell got killed, wasn't I, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, he was."

Mr. Kinkaid finished his signature. "Well, of all the pieces of luck! It fits in every direction. Amabell didn't get the money. The man who killed Amabell didn't get it. You can't possibly have had anything to do with . . . well, with anything at all . . . My God, what luck that you didn't pay your way out of jail!" Mr. Kinkaid pushed the bond across the desk.

Poggioli interrupted. "Mr. Kinkaid, when did you pay that last installment for Mr. Hartley? Did it happen to be . . . the . . . the second Monday in July?"

"Why, yes, it was," reflected the turfman. "How did you guess that?"

"Oh, you have your races on Saturday and Sunday."

Mr. Kinkaid looked at Poggioli with a touch of admiration.

"That's clever of you to think of that. Yes, the second Monday in July."

Little Mr. Hartley said, "I'm in a

sort of hurry, cousin Anson. If you gentlemen will excuse me, I'll go."

Everybody, including the Lieutenant, nodded and the little man hurried out the door. Kinkaid shrugged. "I don't know what mess he's heading into now, but pretty soon he'll be telephoning me to come get him out." With this he put on his derby and followed his cousin into the night.

The turfman seemed not disturbed over his kinsman, but I was. What shocked me was Poggioli's *guess* "the second Monday in July." The criminologist had explained it very simply as the day following the weekend races, but I knew better. I knew he already had deduced that something had happened on the second Monday in July more shocking to Geoffrey Hartley than the murder of his own wife. Now I knew Poggioli, in some manner or other, linked this horrible thing with the date when Kinkaid paid Hartley's alimony. What connection there could be between the two facts I could not imagine.

Poggioli, however, was not in a fog. He asked the man at the desk if Hartley ever before had received money from Kinkaid without paying his alimony promptly. The officer said he had not.

"Yet this time," probed Poggioli carefully, "he kept the money, remained in jail, and later you found the note he had written in his dead wife's apartment?"

The Lieutenant agreed to this summation and I must say my own fog began to clear away. This brought me still more uneasiness about little Mr. Hartley. My trouble was lack of detachment. I felt a sympathy for the childish little man. Poggioli, of course, was perfect. He had no feeling for anyone; not even a professional sympathy for the man who had employed him. Crime to him was simply an algebraic equation and the criminal nothing more than the "x" to be solved. Now he pondered, glancing at the man at the desk. Presently he asked,

"What method is your department using to shadow Geoffrey Hartley?"

The Lieutenant seemed taken aback. "Just why do you think . . ."

"Because your department can put two and two together as easily as I. Your present evidence almost warrants a conviction but it needs a little tightening; the chewed note, written by Hartley, his imprisonment by his wife, the money he received to pay his alimony but which he did not spend, the immediate death of his wife afterwards. Now his jitters to get away somewhere, no doubt to meet some gangster who murdered his wife and pay the money to him. I know your department sees these things just as clearly as I do. So I know this appearance bond," Poggioli nodded at it, "is really a trap. You are letting him out and following him, to see whom he meets and what he does with his money."

My own heart sank. I thought little Mr. Hartley was practically clear of the murder charge but here it was

almost completely proved against him. The Lieutenant shook his head in a kind of bewildered admiration.

"It is simple, isn't it, when you put it like that. We have a radio car following his taxi."

I breathed out a breath and thought, "Oh Lord," in a kind of prayer for our poor little client. Then I thought of one last hope. "Poggioli," I said, "you told us Hartley knew nothing of the note."

"He doesn't. That's the psychological enigma that holds my interest in the case and suggests that it may take some unusual twist. You see, to put it plainly, Hartley was temperamentally incapable either of murdering his wife or hiring it done, and yet . . . he did it. Now, don't you see how this note he wrote and which he knows nothing about, may be the key that locks these contradictory facts together?"

"I don't hold with the idea that Hartley knows nothing about the note," said the Lieutenant in a tolerant voice. "That's a little too refined."

"You think that Hartley, at this moment, is paying his alimony money to the murderer of his wife?" questioned Poggioli of the Lieutenant.

"Certainly I think it, and so do you; you just said so."

"Oh no, I didn't say so. I was simply telling you your department's reasons for letting Hartley out of jail on a simple appearance bond."

"Well, what *do* you think?" ejaculated the officer, becoming lost in the maze of Poggioli's analysis.

"I don't know what to think until I am able to rationalize that note. Why don't you call up the radio car and see what our little man is doing?"

"If he has met some professional gangster here in the city, you'll agree we are right, that he's paying for his wife's murder."

"Mm . . . mm, ye-e-es . . . yes, I would agree, but the note, mind you, would still remain an irrational element."

The Lieutenant laughed the satisfied laugh of a man who knows he has had the better of an argument. He switched on a loudspeaker by his desk and said into it, "Headquarters calling Bamberg, Car No. 6 . . . Headquarters calling Bamberg. . . ."

A voice answered, "Bamberg, Car No. 6 speaking."

"Anything to report on Hartley?" asked the Lieutenant.

"He's dismissed his taxi at 161 Plumtree Street and entered the building, sir."

"Stand by and keep me informed who else enters the building," directed the Lieutenant.

"Yes, sir," agreed the voice.

This information started another argument. The Lieutenant said that Plumtree Street was the worst slum district in town and that Hartley, a middle-class man, could not possibly have any urgent business there except to pay off a gunman. Poggioli said a gangster wouldn't make an appointment to meet a patron of his murder ring in a tenement district; he would meet him in some night club. In the

midst of this debate Bamberg in the radio car reported, "A woman on the fourth floor is stringing her laundry across the side alley."

"Could that be a signal?" inquired the Lieutenant over the microphone.

"If it is she's been putting out the same signals every night for over three years," said the patrol.

We waited again. Twenty minutes later Bamberg reported that a priest had entered the building. A touch of the *outré* went over me. Almost against my will I said, "Could that be a gunman disguised as a priest?"

The Lieutenant turned to me. "Why do you ask that?"

"He suggests that," explained Poggioli drily, "because he writes fiction."

This amused me in an acidulous way. As a matter of fact I had made Poggioli. He would never have been known outside of his musty classes in criminology at the Ohio State University if I hadn't chosen to write down what he says and does. And this was my thanks for it!

The Lieutenant was not so prejudiced or . . . so jealous. He spoke over the radio, "Bamberg, follow the priest, find out who he is, what he is, and what he is doing in 161."

"Yes, sir," answered the loudspeaker.

I'll admit I felt a little self-conscious now that the Lieutenant was acting on my idea. On second thought I was sure the priest was not a disguised gunman. The idea had just popped out. I was thinking these things when the radio opened up again. "Bamberg reporting on the priest."

"O.K., Bamberg, go ahead," ordered the Lieutenant.

"The priest was called to 161 Plumtree to perform a marriage ceremony, sir, between a Mrs. Grace Binjer and Geoffrey Hartley."

All of us stared at the loudspeaker. Then the Lieutenant dropped his hands and looked at us.

"Imagine it, imagine it, holding back the alimony he should have paid one wife to go marry another!"

"Utterly irresponsible," said Poggioli.

A relief that was heart-deep swept over me. "That relieves him of any implication in his wife's murder, doesn't it, Lieutenant?"

"Mm-mm . . . I suppose it does," agreed the officer slowly.

Poggioli was dubious. "Since he contemplated remarriage, he probably did reserve his four hundred dollars for that purpose. He probably hired nobody to kill his wife, but still there is the note in his own handwriting found in the dead woman's apartment."

"Listen," I said brusquely to Poggioli, "your whole theoretic set-up is now washed up. Let's go home and go to bed."

"Why go home? The woman is still murdered. . . ."

"I know that but our present clue has broken down utterly. Hartley didn't hire a murderer with his money. Let's not start off on a new tack here at midnight. Let's go home and get some sleep." I took the criminologist by the arm and pushed him toward

the door.

Poggioli moved slowly, pondering and not really wanting to go home. Outside on the sidewalk, I looked up and down the street for a taxi, eager to be off. I said aloud to Poggioli, "I wish a cab would come along. . . .

"When it does," planned my companion suddenly, "let's run over to Plumtree Street and call on the newlyweds."

My nervousness turned into downright dismay. "That's what I was afraid of," I cried, "stand there working out more traps for that poor little man when the law itself has declared him innocent!"

"I am not working out traps at all," denied the criminologist, "but I have a question to ask you which you won't be able to answer."

I was quite irritated that Poggioli wouldn't let Hartley alone. "All right, shoot," I said, "what is it?"

"It's this: how did Hartley fall in love with a woman on Plumtree Street?"

"Don't ask me how anybody falls in love . . ."

"All right, I'll change it: *when* did he fall in love with a woman on Plumtree Street. You know that is not his locale, nor of any woman he is likely to admire. Don't you agree he must have met her since he got out of jail?"

"I . . . suppose so . . . but Poggioli, don't give that some complicated twist of yours."

"Call it a 'twist' if you want to, but it is a very obvious twist. How could Hartley save up money in jail to marry a woman whom he didn't even know until his ex-wife's death set him free?" He cleared his throat. "See the riddle, don't you?"

At this point a taxicab swung around the corner and stopped in front of us. As we stepped inside, Poggioli said to the driver, "161 Plumtree."

On our way to the tenement district I became gloomy and despondent again for little Mr. Hartley. I tried to imagine why he had gone to a place like Plumtree Street to get married. Then the woman's name — Binjer — returned to my mind and this bothered me. It seemed I could almost remember the name of Binjer. Finally I mentioned this to Poggioli. This launched him on a long rigmarole in genealogy. He said "Binjer" was a corruption of "Binninger" and belonged to a down-at-the-heels line of that family. "Now that is a possible reason why Hartley married Mrs. Binjer when he met her," he mused thoughtfully.

"What the devil do you mean?" I asked.

"Just this: Mr. Binjer, whoever he is, is undoubtedly low caste. But Mrs. Binjer probably isn't. She has made a *mésalliance*. She is probably of excellent family but, as people say, 'she married her opposite.' That explains how a woman in Plumtree Street could attract Hartley."

"That doesn't seem to be getting us anywhere," I said.

"No, it really doesn't. It explains the wedding after the two met, but it doesn't explain how they met."

My head was going around. Poggioli's reasoning always seems simple and obvious, but it invariably makes me dizzy to follow it. I was very glad when our taxi pulled up at 161 Plumtree Street.

When we got out I noticed the dim shape of a radio police car at some distance down the mean street. That showed me the Lieutenant himself had not been as convinced of little Mr. Hartley's innocence as he had pretended to be.

161 Plumtree Street was a huge, ill-conditioned tenement building. A single faint light in its entrance hung above a bank of broken letter boxes. As we entered I noticed a man standing across the street watching us. It was probably Detective Bamberg of the radio car. Inside, on the panel of boxes, we saw only two names: No. 1. Caretaker; No. 32. Grace Binjer. Poggioli pushed the caretaker's button. Presently up the basement stairway came a woman and a mop. The woman's hair and the mop's head were so nearly in the same state of dishevelment that for a moment they gave me the fantastic impression of twins. The woman asked belligerently what we wanted. Poggioli inquired about the wedding. The caretaker plopped her mop handle on the floor.

"What do you want to know that for? Who are you anyhow — Mrs. Binjer's first husband?"

We said we weren't Mrs. Binjer's first husband.

"Well, you look like him," said the mop bearer, pointing at Poggioli. "Mrs. Binjer described him to me and I seen his pitchers, and you're the spittin' image of him."

Poggioli became attentive. "You never saw Binjer himself?"

"No, I never did."

"Mrs. Binjer showed you his pictures and asked you to stop him if he came in tonight?"

A scornful waggle of the mop, "Naw, she didn't show me no pitchers. She wouldn't have one of his pitchers. I seen 'em in the winders more'n a year ago when he was fightin' all the time."

I suddenly remembered where I had seen the name Binjer: on window cards advertising boxing matches — Battling Binjer. It relieved me. There was nothing criminal about being a pugilist. I told this to Poggioli and it interested him. He asked the mop where this Battling Binjer was now.

"He's been in jail over a year but Mrs. Binjer must figger he's out now because she's got married again."

I didn't quite see the connection between these two statements, but Poggioli, of course, did. He said, "I see. Binjer was also divorced and in jail for unpaid alimony?"

The mop nodded affirmatively and gave us permission to go upstairs.

On the way up I reflected on the queer coincidence that Mrs. Binjer, who had an ex-husband in jail for non-payment of alimony, should marry a man held in prison on the same charge. I pondered and pondered, trying to make something out of this, but beyond the fact that Mrs. Bin-

jer's taste seemed to run in a groove, I could deduce nothing.

By this time we were at the door of No. 32. The doorbell proved out of repair, so Poggioli knocked. For answer came a woman's scream, the wildest and most blood-chilling I had ever heard. I gasped out, "My God, Hartley is murdering his second wife!"

Poggioli continued knocking. "No, she is expecting a very jealous caller, that's the trouble." Then in a louder voice he identified himself: "Hartley, this is Poggioli. We heard you had just got married and dropped in to wish you luck."

Came a moment of complete silence, then whispers, then Hartley's voice bidding us enter. We did so and saw the little man in an ancient Morris chair. In front of him stood his new wife, her left arm toward us, her right apparently protecting her husband. I began stammering an apology for our ill-timed call, but the small man recovered himself at once.

"So glad you came over. Have this chair, one of you. Grace and I will sit on the bed."

We begged them to remain as they were, that we would sit on the bed.

Hartley really was delighted. His spirit soared above his perfectly hopeless surroundings. "I am glad to see you two men. I am entering a new life, a new and happy life, and I wanted somebody of my own sort to come and wish me happiness, this time with fair hopes of its fulfillment. But how did you fellows know I was getting married, and how did you find me?"

Poggioli watched them very carefully as he said, "A police car radioed us where you were and what you were doing, Hartley."

I must admit I expected fear and consternation. Poggioli had convinced me the two were guilty of something. Instead Hartley was simply surprised.

"How did a police car know?"

"One of them followed your taxi, radioed back about the wedding and where it took place. It is still out there in front of this building."

To my amazement the newlyweds looked at each other in the most intense relief. The woman put an arm about Hartley, leaned her head on his shoulder. "Oh, Geoffrey, what a burden off our shoulders!"

"That *is* a break, isn't it," beamed the little man.

Such expressions relieved my suspense. No criminal couple in the world would have welcomed a police car outside their door. This proved their innocence and I was deeply glad of it. We stayed on a few minutes longer, then said goodbye. On the way down I mentioned to Poggioli my pleasure that little Mr. Hartley had cleared himself of any complicity in the murder of the first Mrs. Hartley. Poggioli walked on down, head bent, frowning; then he seemed to recall what I had said for he asked me how I had ever come to think such a thing.

"Why," I said, "Hartley wouldn't have welcomed the police car if he had been guilty of a crime. That shows they're innocent."

"It shows they are deathly afraid

of a visit from Battling Binjer and they think a police car in front of their apartment will protect them. You know," he continued, "there is one point that still puzzles me."

"What is it?" I asked.

"It's their bridal chamber."

"Bridal chamber," I asked. "What's puzzling about their bridal chamber?"

"I'll make it simple," said Poggioli. "Recently Hartley received four hundred dollars from his cousin, Anson Kinkaid, to pay his alimony and get out of jail, but he didn't pay it."

"No, he kept it back for this marriage," I said.

"That's where we were wrong: he didn't," said Poggioli. "Look at him now, spending his bridal night in the most unspeakable quarters and in great fear. Don't you realize if he still had that money he would leave this miserable dump and go to the best hotel in town — where Binjer couldn't possibly get to him. Besides, he would want to make a show before his new wife. No, he hasn't got that money; he's spent it . . . somehow."

I grew uneasy again. I didn't like Poggioli's new tack. He reminded me of a spider spinning new and very delicate gossamers around a fly that was about to get loose.

"Well, what if he did spent it . . . somehow?" I asked, mimicking him.

"I'm curious to know what he did with it. Also, why is Hartley afraid Battling Binjer will visit him tonight?"

"Jealousy, man! Binjer has divorced Grace, but he is still insanely jealous of her."

"But when do you think Binjer was liberated from prison?"

"Why, he was liberated as soon as the Hartleys were married."

"About an hour ago?"

"That's correct."

"Listen, don't you realize that Binjer couldn't get out of jail only an hour ago, or indeed any time tonight. It takes time to go through the formality of a court release. If he gets out by tomorrow he'll do well."

I had no idea in what direction Poggioli was leading but I knew perfectly well it was something adverse to the interests of little Mr. Hartley.

I said sharply, "Hartley is not splitting hairs over just when a man, who intends to murder him, will be let out of jail. I daresay Hartley doesn't know how much time it will take!"

"What do you mean, Hartley doesn't *know* how much time it will take when he himself has been in and out of jail a half dozen . . ." Here Poggioli broke off abruptly. "That's it! That explains everything, even down to the note in the dead woman's apartment!"

"What does?" I cried, in a sudden panic!

"What went with the money!"

The criminologist hurried down the rest of the steps, through the dimly lighted entrance and out into the street. He whistled on two fingers for a taxi. Naturally I was quite excited. "Poggioli, what have you found out?"

"Who murdered Amabell Hartley!"

"Well, who did . . ." My question was cut off by a taxicab swinging around a corner and swerving in to us. I repeated my query and begged him to tell me who it was.

He wagged a finger under the dome light. "Can't go into it now. Got to think it all out carefully, make it simple enough for the Lieutenant to understand!"

This didn't help calm my nerves. Our car dashed forward while Poggioli thought things out. At headquarters I rushed in after Poggioli. When we reached the night desk, Poggioli called out:

"Lieutenant, check and see when Battling Binjer paid his alimony and got out of jail."

Poggioli's manner set the officer into abrupt motion. He relayed the question over the phone and presently said that Binjer had paid his alimony on the second Monday in July.

"That date clinches everything! Send out a call to arrest Binjer for the murder of Amabell Hartley."

The officer began questioning but Poggioli interrupted. "Here's the proof: Hartley's bridal chamber is loathsome. So Hartley hasn't got the four hundred given him by his cousin on the second Monday in July. On that date Hartley did not pay his alimony but Binjer did pay *his*. So Hartley probably furnished Binjer with the money. Two days later Mrs. Amabell Hartley was murdered in her apartment. A chewed note bearing her address was all the evidence found. It was in Hartley's handwriting. *He gave Binjer this note, probably threw it to him from one cell to another, when he gave Binjer the money.* Don't you see? *Binjer promised to murder Mrs. Hartley and relieve Hartley of further imprisonment!*"

Poggioli continued: "*In return Hartley promised to murder Mrs. Binjer and permanently free Binjer.* But when he saw her he fell in love with her and married her instead of murdering her. This marriage, of course, will also free Binjer permanently and Hartley undoubtedly hopes it will satisfy the pugilist, but that's neither here nor there. Arrest Binjer . . ."

I interrupted. "You said Hartley didn't remember writing the note. How is that possible?"

"Simple enough. Writing the death sentence of his wife was so horrible to the negative little man that his brain simply refused to harbor the memory. You see, the whole idea was *Binjer's*. He talked Hartley into it . . ."

Here Poggioli was interrupted by the loudspeaker on the Lieutenant's desk.

"Bamberg calling headquarters. Something wrong at 161 Plumtree. Saw a man enter. Just heard pistol shots. Will investigate. Send help. That is all."

AUTHOR'S NOTE

If the reader will now go back and reread the first seven paragraphs of this story, he will find them entertaining.

The story of two runaway kids who joined a traveling circus to get into a trapeze-act. With some kids it has to be that or nothing — that's how trapeze-artists are born.

The kids became men. They worked together, day after day, week after week, year after year, perfecting the blindfold triple-somersault that ended in an upside-down hand-grip — until they had it cinched. Then they took the net away. The net was just a state of mind anyway.

But Natalie wasn't a state of mind — not to one of the two daring young men on a flying trapeze. No, she was real — to have and to hold — forever — even if it meant killing the other man . . .

One of Cornell Woolrich's finest efforts in atmosphere, emotion, and suspense — and as authentic a study of circus troupers as if Mr. Woolrich had lived under the Big Top all his life. But that's the way Cornell Woolrich writes . . .

IF THE DEAD COULD TALK

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

He was in a dim little room off the arena somewhere. He looked so jaunty, in his tunic picked with spangles. He looked so husky, in the tights that encased his muscular thighs. He looked so devil-may-care and debonair, on the side of his face where there was still pink-tan greasepaint. He looked so dead.

There were a pair of clowns there, near the door, with that sad-eyed expression they always have when you're standing too close to them. There was a Roman charioteer there, in a gleaming cuirass and plumed helmet and kilt. There was a bareback rider in a frothy pink skirt. Just for a minute, taking a last look. Then they all turned and drifted silently outside. There was still a performance going on out there. They had to get back. The others stayed.

There was a girl there, a member of his own troupe, a cape around her tights now, looking down at him. Just looking at him. Just standing looking at him, as though she'd never get through. There was a young fellow next to her, a third member of the same troupe, standing holding one arm around her. The other hung stiffly beside him, ending in a mitten of gauze bandaging, as though he'd hurt his hand at some fairly recent performance. He kept looking at her, only at her, not at the still form she was looking at.

No one said anything. What was

there to say? It could have happened to anyone.

Last of all, there was a detective there, jotting something in a notebook. He was all through now. He'd done all his questioning, all his looking around and investigating and reconstructing. It was no secret affair. Nearly a thousand people had seen it happen. He'd found out all there was to find out. Found out all anyone could tell him. Anyone living.

This is what he jotted.

Name: Crosby, Joseph.
Age: Twenty-five
Profession: Trapeze artist
Cause of death —

I knew I was going to kill him from the night she said, "I'm sorry, Joe, it's him, not you any more." I knew it from then on. I only didn't know when or how. That's how I am. That's what my blood is, what my nature is. I couldn't change that even if I tried.

I tried to stop myself from doing it, in every way I knew how. But it was no good; I knew it was going to happen anyway, I knew it was coming and there was no holding it back. I knew I was going to see him kissing her sometime, or even just looking at her in a certain way that meant she was his and not mine — and that would bring it on whether I wanted to or not.

It's queer how those things are. It's the closer you are to a guy that makes you hate him the worse, when he takes something away from you. And no one was ever as close as him and me. We were brothers in everything but blood.

Here's how it was: we both ran away from our homes the same night. We first met each other on the same night. we both ran away. We were both within a year of one another's age — I was fourteen and a little the older. And we were both on our way to join up with the same traveling circus-outfit that had passed through those parts only a day or so before, pitching in his town first, then crossing the hill and pitching in mine. You can't be any closer than that, for a starter.

I was sneaking down a line of boxcars, stalled in the freight-yards, in the moonlight, keeping an eye open for the watchman and trying to find one of them that was open, when a hand came out to me and a voice whispered: "Try this one in here, where I am." I could tell by the sound it was somebody my own age, so I took his hand through the narrow black opening and floundered in. We closed it up again after us and got acquainted in the dark, like runaway kids do.

"I'm Tommy Sloan," he said. "What's your name?"

"I'm Joe Crosby. Are you on the lam too?"

"I'm heading after that traveling circus, you know the one."

"That's what I'm doing too." It didn't seem strange to us that we should both have the same idea, and meet like that on the same night we'd both carried it out. What would have seemed strange to us was that one of us should some day want to kill the other.

"I heard 'em say their next pitch was going to be over at Gloversville. *This*'ll take us there. I know because I

overheard one of the yardmen telling somebody that. All we gotta do is lie low and keep our eyes open for it when it passes through." He hugged his knees in the gloom and shared his last soda cracker with me. "I wanna get in that trapeze-act they got. The one with the man and the lady, and the little girl that they pass back and forth to each other. Gee, them high bars," he sighed wistfully.

I'd had my eye on that too. It had to be that or nothing, don't ask me why. That's how trapeze-artists come into being, I guess.

"Think they'll take us?" he asked.

"Not right away. You gotta learn how. But maybe they'll let us string along with them and practice up."

We both gave a gusty sigh of mutual yearning in the shadows of the box-car. "I ain't never going to be anything but one of them trapeze-guys," he said in a low, dreamy voice.

"Me neither," I echoed.

A thousand and two kids have said that in their time. We were the two that carried it through.

The line of box-cars jolted, started to crawl slowly forward under us, and the world began.

That's how it was.

When they saw they couldn't shoo us away, and when they found out neither one of us had come from enough of a home to make it worthwhile sending us back to it, they took us with them and trained us. Mom Bissell mothered us. They broke us into the act while we were still pliable and our muscles hadn't stiffened yet. That's the only way you can be broken in; at that age.

We were still in the embryo stage when we lost Mom one night. Not in the ring, in bed, the way she'd always said she never wanted to go. We cried as though she'd been our own mother, him and me both.

Pop took us into full partnership as soon as we went out again after that. He had to, to keep the turn going. We were ready for it by then anyway. It was a proud night for us when we first stood up there on the take-off platforms, tall already but skinny in our new tights, alongside Pop and *her*, and then went sailing out into space on our own, not just filler-ins any more. They say about the stage that once you've been an actor, it gets into your blood so, that you never want to be anything else. Tommy and me, we both found out that night that once you've gone sailing out between the bars, light and fast and sure, you never *can* be anything else.

We were a quartet for awhile. Then Pop went to his rest too. He was getting too stiff and brittle, he had to drop out. He'd taught us all he knew. We used to visit him in the boarding-house where we'd left him, whenever we got back to town. Then after a couple of seasons, there wasn't any reason to go around there any more. That's the way life goes; death beckons someone out of line, but the line keeps closing up.

Two men and a girl now. We didn't look lanky in our tights any more,

we'd grown into them, and we'd come into our prime. We rearranged the turn. We worked on the blindfolded triple-somersault ending in an upside-down hand-grip, that Pop had showed us, until we had it cinched. Then we took the net away. The net was just a state of mind anyway. Nothing was going to happen, once we had it down pat.

They both learned the spinning dive, she and Tommy, just so there'd always be an alternate handy in case any little thing went wrong some night, and we wouldn't have to leave it out of the turn. We couldn't do that, it was our showpiece. But in our line it's always good to figure on any little thing going wrong some night, and having a substitute ready. One of you might eat some last week's fish and get a folding-pain, or have a hand caught in a bus-door.

So they doubled in it between them, Tommy and her. I was always the brake, the anchor. I was a little too heavy to be able to turn fast enough in the air, but the heaviness came in handy for coupling onto and steadying the plunger hurtling down. I was also a good half-head taller than him, and still taller when it came to her, and that meant either of them could take the three complete turns going down in less time than it took me. Have more room left to straighten out for the hand-grip at the end, not have to crowd their somersaults to get them all in.

But Tommy was the one usually did it. She just kept warmed up at it, she was like what they call an understudy in the theater. She looked prettier tying the blindfold around him and getting him poised on the edge of the platform. It looked better like that, than for a girl to be risking her neck while a man stood looking on up there doing nothing. Just showmanship. You have to take those things into consideration.

We got good bookings on the strength of it too. Before we knew it, no more dinky little tent-shows folding up under us in the middle of nowhere. The big time now, our names on three-sheets, winter quarters in Florida, the Garden in New York, and all the rest of the trimmings.

And meanwhile she got lovelier every season. Natalie. The three of us went around together everywhere, always the three of us; her in the middle, with her laughing eyes and dark-gold hair. That was all right while we were still two boys and a girl. But before we noticed it we weren't two boys and a girl any more. We were two men and a woman. Then it wouldn't work any more. She couldn't like the two of us the same, the way she had till now. We wouldn't have wanted her to if she could.

It happened fast when it happened; all at once, like a flash. She came back to the rooming-house and knocked on my door the night she first found out. I think it was in Toledo. He wasn't with her. He must have stayed out to count the stars somewhere.

She said, "I'm sorry, Joe, it's him, not you any more. I found out for

sure tonight. You asked me to tell you, so I am."

I didn't say anything, I just looked at her. "Good night, Joe," she said softly. I closed my door again.

I didn't know right away how bad it was going to be. That was because I'd only seen her by herself as yet, without his being with her. The poison hadn't been added.

We always shared the same room together, wherever we stopped. It was only when he came in by himself, afterward, and I heard the way he was whistling to himself while he undressed in the dark, that I knew how bad it was really going to be. That I knew I was going to kill him, before I'd let him have her.

I could hold it back tonight yet. And tomorrow night. But sometime before long it was going to get away from me; maybe the night-after-tomorrow. I couldn't do anything against it. It had me.

It came on slow but sure. Awfully sure. Every look they gave each other across a midnight lunch-table, every walk they took together, every hidden handclasp down low at their sides that they thought nobody saw, that brought it a little closer.

It was in St. Louis I bought the gun. I knew a guy there in a little pawnshop across the river in East St. Louis, from when we got stranded there with smaller outfits in the past, and he let me have one without asking too many questions.

Then we moved on, and the next pitch we made I finally got him alone one night, just like I wanted to. I'd been watching and waiting for this. She was supposed to meet him at some amusement park on the outskirts of town. She'd had something to attend to right after the performance, and instead of waiting for her, he left a note for her telling her where he'd be when she got back That was my chance. I saw him slip it under the door of her room, and as soon as he'd gone on his way I tore it up, so she wouldn't know where to go looking for him when she returned. Then I gave him about ten or fifteen minutes head start, and followed him out there myself. With the gun.

The place was in a big woodland park just outside of town. The lighted-up part of it, where they had the pavilions and things, just occupied a small fraction of it. The rest was pitch-black, natural woods. It was a good place for it. It was a swell place for it. I couldn't have picked a better one myself.

I found him sitting there waiting for her, drinking root-beer at a concession. I told him she'd asked me to find him and tell him she wasn't coming, she felt tired and thought she'd go to bed instead. Right away he wanted to go back, but I managed to talk that out of him. I got him to come for a stroll with me, and little by little, without his noticing, I led him off away from the lights, deeper and deeper under the trees, until we were far enough in so there were no people anywhere around to see it happen. Or even to hear the shot go off.

I was going to claim it was an accident. It would have been easy enough. We'd been fooling with it, and it had gone off and hit him, while we were looking it over. Or we'd been taking pot-shots at some stray animal we came across, and he stepped out suddenly from behind a tree and got in the line of fire. They could never prove it wasn't that way.

We stopped finally and sprawled out on the ground side by side in a little open grassy patch under the trees. Even now the fool couldn't keep his mouth shut, couldn't keep from talking about her. Telling me all about how wonderful she was — as if I didn't know — and how lucky he was.

"You're not so lucky," I thought to myself, fingering the gun in my pocket.

I left my cigarette in my mouth, and took the gun out and snapped the safety down. Then I reared up on one elbow and pointed it at him, sort of lazy, sort of slow. He'd been looking the other way. He turned his head just then, and when he saw it, instead of getting scared, he asked me in a sort of friendly, drawling way where I got it, and what I was doing carrying it around with me like that.

I just kept it like it was.

Then he laughed and brushed his hand out at it, like at a mosquito, and said, "Don't, Joe. It's liable to go off while you've got it sighted at me like that." And when I still didn't move it, I guess he thought I was trying to play with him. He bunched a fist and pretended to swing it and take a poke at my jaw, but just let it land light.

I couldn't do it, with his face grinning into my own so close. Things kept getting in the way. I saw, instead of his face, the face of a kid of fourteen helping me climb up next to him into a box-car on a siding. I saw the face of my partner, standing next to me on the take-off platform, sharing our first spotlight together, the night Pop first broke us into the act. Saying to me out of the corner of his mouth, with a half-scared but awfully proud look, "Are you nervous, Joe? Boy, my knees are knocking together like triphammers!" I couldn't do it.

The thing tipped over of its own weight. I jarred to my feet all of a sudden and grunted, "I'm getting out of here, I'm going back!" and I started to walk away from there fast.

He stayed where he was a minute, overcome by surprise. Then he jumped up and tried to come after me like a fool. He didn't realize how lucky he'd already been once tonight, what a chance he was still taking now. He hollered after me, "What's the matter, Joe? What's your rush? Wait a minute and I'll come with you."

I turned on him and warned him back in a tight, choked voice. "Keep back! Don't walk next to me, understand? Don't walk next to me *until I get out of here!*"

He dropped behind and just stood there looking after me, scratching his head like he couldn't figure out what got into me. I walked away fast. Boy, how fast I walked away from him! I threw the gun into a little lake I passed along the way out.

She was standing waiting on the rooming-house stairs in her wrapper when I got back. She was standing there waiting halfway down from the floor her room was on, almost as if she'd sensed something was wrong, as if she'd had a feeling something had nearly happened tonight. Women are funny that way. She must have been standing there like that for a half an hour or more when I come in. Her face was kind of white too.

It got even whiter, when she saw that it was me and not him.

"Joe?" She said his name in a whisper. "He always leaves me a note when he goes off anyplace —"

"I was with him just now," I said. "He's all right."

I passed by her and went on the rest of the way up without saying anything more. And she looked at me, I could feel her looking. All the way up she looked at me from where she was. That's how I think she knew. But maybe I'm wrong.

They got married a week later. Maybe that hurried it up. Maybe not. Maybe she didn't really guess anything. I know he didn't. We were playing a split week in one of the big upstate cities. They were both late for the Saturday matinee. I got made up and ready, and there was still no sign of either one of them. Our turn didn't come until later, but we'd never missed a grand opening march yet. I went out by the runway leading into the arena, and took my place in the line-up without them. I kept turning my head and looking for them. I knew by now what the reason was.

At the very last minute, all of a sudden there was a lot of shoving and shifting-aside behind me, and the two of them showed up, working their way through the other performers and all out of breath. The seams of his trunks were all crooked from pulling them on so fast, and he hadn't had time to put any grease on. But he didn't need it. His face was all lit up. I looked down at her hand and I saw the ring on it.

The band blared up and the three of us went on out.

It was coming now sure. The hate choking in my chest and the liquid fire running through my veins told me that I knew this was the last performance I could risk. If I went through any more, it would happen right in the act, and I didn't want that.

I beat it away fast after that show, went off by myself away from the two of them. I went into some eating-place just out of habit, sat staring at a cup of coffee that I didn't touch. Then at my usual time for starting back, I got up and walked outside again, still just out of habit. But when I got out on the street, I turned and walked the other way, away from the big auditorium we were using.

I knew I had to stay out of the night performance. I knew what would happen if I went back for it. I was afraid of being in it with Tommy. I knew my only safety lay in missing it.

It was easy at first, while there was lots of time. I roamed around for awhile. Finally I came to a little park and sat down on a bench. But as the

time for getting back started to tighten up on me, it began to get harder and harder, as though an invisible current had set in, trying to pull me back. I could *feel* it, I tell you, feel the pull of it, like when you're in water and an undertow catches you up.

You see, I'd never missed a show yet. It was my food, my drink, my breath.

I tried to hang onto the park-bench I was on, I actually gripped it with both hands along the edges. I kept talking to myself inside, I kept warning myself: "Stay where you are, now. Stay out of the act, now. You know what's going to happen if you don't! Keep the act clean, at least."

It wouldn't work. I tried not to look at my watch, but here was a big clock there facing the park to tell me anyhow. Eight minutes to showtime. You can still make it at an easy walk, from out here where you are. Five minutes. You can still make it, but you'll have to hurry a little now. Four minutes. Three. You ought to have your shirt off already.

I couldn't hold out. I got to my feet, like I was being dragged by the scruff of the neck. First I still tried to go the other way, away from the auditorium. I couldn't do that either. My feet turned around under me and started me back the right way. They were a performer's feet, a circus-man's feet. You couldn't tell them what to do.

First I was walking slow, still trying to hold out, still trying to fight against it. Then faster, faster all the time — until suddenly I was running like a streak, to make up for lost time. And presto, there I was, back in the dressing-room again, all winded and floundering into my chair.

It's an awful feeling, to know what you're going to do if you come back to a place, and yet not be able to stay away.

He was sitting there beside me, finishing up. I didn't look at him.

He didn't say a word to me about their getting married that afternoon; I guess they'd decided to keep it to themselves for awhile. All he did say was, "Where'd you disappear to? I wanted to blow you to a swell steak dinner tonight. Nat and me, we both looked high and low for you." So that told me, just the same as if he had.

I sat there in my undershirt; that was as far as I was able to get. I hung onto the edge of the dressing-table hard, the way I had that bench in the park, to try to fight it down. I hung on until my knuckles showed white. I was afraid to be in there with him alone like this. There were so many sharp things around loose. And he had that happiness still shining all over his face, almost like phosphorus.

He got up to make it decent for me. I said, "Leave the door open."

"There's women out there."

"Leave it open, I tell you! I can go over in the corner. I can hardly breathe in here." I caught hold of my own throat.

He was so dumb. God, how dumb a guy is when he trusts you! "Yeah, it is kind of stuffy," he agreed, with easy-

going unconcern. Nothing could have needled him tonight. It was his wedding-night. It was also his —

I was in my tights now, but I'd stopped again, I couldn't go ahead. I kept pleading to myself, "Wait till after the show, if you've got to get him. *But don't do it in the act.* Don't go out there with him now, or you're going to do it right in the act!"

He was standing looking over at me from the doorway now, from the passageway outside. He saw me sitting there without moving. He said, "What's the matter?"

I said, "I'm not coming out."

He came in again and stood behind my chair and tried to reason it out with me. He put his hand on the back of my chair. Luckily he didn't put it on me, on my shoulder or anything, or I think it would have happened right then.

I didn't hear most of what he said. I was looking at something in the glass. I seemed to see a death's head in the glass, where our two faces were, his and mine. I'm not kidding, I actually saw it there — some trick of the lighting and shadows, I guess. It came on slow, until I could see the deep, greenish holes where the eye-sockets were, and the grinning rows of teeth, and the shiny white dome of the skull. I couldn't see whose face it covered most, his or mine. Then it faded away, slow, again.

He couldn't do anything with me, and the time was getting shorter. He went outside finally and I heard him whispering to someone down the line. I knew what it was; he was putting her up to work on me, to see if she'd have any better luck. I'd been afraid of that. She was the only one that could, and I didn't want her to try.

I got up quick to try and close the door, but she was already standing there before I could make it. She looked so beautiful it hurt. But she had the wrong hand out, against the edge of the door. The one with the ring on it. His ring.

She said, "Is it something to do with the act, Joe?"

I said, "No, it's nothing to do with the act."

She said, "Then if it's something outside the act, keep it outside the act. This is the act, Joe. If there's one thing I've got no use for, it's a guy that'll let the act down."

I had one last plea left in me. Only one, and then no more. I made it. I made it good and strong too. My whole voice shook. I said, "*Don't* ask me to go out there tonight, will you, Nat? You run through it with him. Do what you can. Fake the triple plays. Only, *don't* ask me to go out there tonight."

She reached out and touched the side of my face, kind of soft. I wish she hadn't. Just as his touch would have meant death, hers meant — "We'll be waiting for you over by the entrance," she said. "There goes the fanfare." The doorway was empty.

I grabbed up my brush and gave a last lick at my hair. My hand stabbed down at the little tube of fixative I sometimes used to shine it up a little.

It was a petroleum-jelly base, with a little other stuff added. It was pretty well used up, folded over to within an inch or two of the cap. My hand didn't break motion. It swept it up and stuck it inside the waistband of my trunks. Then I swung around and out, and down the dressing-room alley after her, to take my place in the show.

It went off like clockwork, the turn I mean. It always did, it was such second nature to us by now. The precision-climb up the ladders to the two little take-off platforms, me on one side of the ring, the two of them over on the other. We even had that timed to a split-second, so that the two halves of us always got up to the top at the same instant, not unevenly. Then the steadying of the spots on us, the throwing off of the capes, the dramatic flourishes with the hands. And then into the business.

We mixed it up for awhile, and though it might have seemed break-neck to them down below, it was just warm-up stuff to us. "Treading air" from bar to bar, exchanging bars simultaneously so that we passed each other on the fly, turning right-about-face on the wing in midair, from one grip to the next. All that. We'd had that kind of stuff down pat when we were sixteen already. Pop had trained it into us. It was so automatic I could even think while I was doing it. I mean about other things. I didn't tonight; I didn't want to.

I did a specialty, and she did one, and Tommy did a lesser one of his own; not the flash-finish yet. Then the three of us worked together in one. The applause sounded like it always did, coming up from way down below: like giant feet treading on gravel. And that brought us up to the break.

We always broke the turn in the middle, and took a breather. We could have run right through it to the end without stopping, without getting too winded, but that was showmanship again. It made it seem like harder work to the audience if we knocked off a minute and passed the cloth around, while the announcer built up what was coming next over the amplifier below.

We were up to the show-piece at the end now. That was Tommy's. His blindfold dive down to me, waiting up-side-down for him way down below on the middle trapeze. Three complete turns in the air before he reached me. I knew that was when I was going to get him.

We passed the cloth around, lolling on our perches. I got it from him, and I always sent it on over to her after I was through with it. We never changed that. It doesn't pay to vary anything in a precision-act, not even the trimmings, like that was.

While I was twirling it around in my hands, I stuck a finger to my waistband and the tube came up hidden behind the flourishing cloth. I got the cap off with my nail, and pinched, and a coil of it spurted out across my palm. It lay there frozen, like a little twinkling snake. It *was* a snake; a snake whose bite was death. I got the

empty tube back into my waistband. I could get rid of it easy enough afterwards. And then, still under cover of the flirting cloth, I greased my wrists up good with it. I saturated the tape on each one, until they were as slippery as a pair of eels. That was where he was going to hang onto me, by the wrists.

It left a sort of cool feeling on my hands, like it always did when I used it on my hair. And that was all. I sent the cloth on to her, and that finished its rounds.

I wasn't in any danger, it didn't matter about me, I used my leg-muscles to hang on by. I'd stay up. Tommy was the one.

The spiel was through now. They lowered my trap into position, halfway down, far below the others, to give Tommy room enough for three spins. She traveled the bars over to his side and grounded on the platform there, to stand behind him, ready the blindfold, and poise him on the brink.

I turned over lazily on the bar, hung head-down by the crevices of my legs, flexed my arms full-length below me a couple of times, and waited.

He got the spotlight and the play. It was his stunt. It was also his finish.

A big hush fell. This always got them, every time. Well, it should have, it was no phoney.

I don't know if she found out, or if something really did go wrong up there. I'll never know. Maybe there was something about the feel of the cloth when she got it back from me. Or maybe she got a whiff of a scent that it had left behind, and remembered having noticed it before that on my hair. Or maybe it was just a guess, her instinct. Like that night in St. Louis, on the stairs.

If she did find out, it must have been hell for her. A hell I'd never wished for her. And only seconds in which to know what to do. The spotlight blazing on them both, for a thousand eyes to see. The drums already beginning to roll. She couldn't grab him and hold him back, we'd have been booed out of the ring and finished in circus-business.

But when you love a guy, I suppose there's always a way out.

But maybe it had nothing to do with her at all; maybe it really was a mishap. They'd been married today and maybe they were both a little excited. Or maybe it was just his lucky star.

I missed seeing it at the actual instant it occurred. I heard the gasp go up, and the drums falter. My head was upside-down, and by the time I'd bent my neck to look, his body was already dipping lopsidedly into thin air, off the side of the platform, like when you step into a hole over your head that you're not expecting. He had one hand on the guy-rope, that was all that saved him. Anything might have caused it; an accidental nudge of her elbow, or maybe too much of his heel had gone offside at the rim of the platform.

A great shuddering moan of terror, like wind through the trees, came

soughing up from below. He went spiralling down, in a sickening, dizzy corkscrew, all the way to the bottom. *But he never let go of the rope.* That one-hand hold on it he crushed tight into a life-and-death grip that nothing could have pried open. And the rope came searing steadily up through this, taking all the skin with it, I suppose, but at least breaking the velocity of his fall.

He landed in a huddle at the bottom. But then he picked himself right up, before anyone could get over to him. So he was evidently all right, nothing broken. You could tell by the way he stood there, though, head low, hand held tightly pressed between his thighs, that he was in stiff pain, couldn't go ahead. Probably his hand was raw.

She never came down off the platform. She was a natural-born trouper if there ever was one. Before they'd even finished helping him out of the ring, she must have passed some signal that I missed seeing, both to the announcer below and the electrician's box way up high in the flies. Suddenly the spotlight had blazed out on her again, brighter than ever, the announcer was booming out that the event would continue and she was adjusting the blind to her eyes.

So I guess she didn't know, after all, and it was just a star, not her.

There was a split-second in which she signalled me to drop my head and begin the count, with her eyes still clear, then before I could get my own maddened message back — to stop, not to go ahead — the bandage had dropped over her eyes and I was cut off from her.

The drums began their growling thunder. My voice couldn't reach her now.

There was no way to stop those drums. No way but one.

I opened my left leg a little, and I slipped down a notch on that side. I opened my right a little, and I dipped down a little on that side. They couldn't see it yet, nobody but me.

My left leg was starting to slip down by itself now, without my having to open it any more. Now my right was too. The bar was coming free. It was out. I heard the roar from hundreds of throats come shooting up past me, and I knew that was death.

He looked so jaunty, he looked so husky, he looked so dead.

There was a girl there, standing looking at him. Just standing looking at him, as though she'd never get through. There was a young fellow standing beside her with his arm around her, looking at her instead. There was a detective there, jotting something in a notebook. He was all through now. He'd found out all anyone could tell him. Anyone living.

This is what he jotted:

Name: Crosby, Joseph.
Age: Twenty-five.
Profession: Trapeze artist.
Cause of death: Accidental fall while engaged in giving a performance.

THE EIGHTY-EIGHTH STORY

You will recall that in our September 1945 issue we gave you certain Chestertonian statistics: that the great stylist wrote ten books of detective-crime shorts, containing eighty-six different stories. Then we offered readers of EQMM a "new" Chesterton story, one not included in any of the old master's published books. This eighty-seventh tale of crime and detection was "Dr. Hyde, Detective, and the White Pillars Murder."

At that time we thought we had unearthed the only "unknown" Chesterton short and we proclaimed our discovery with all the fanfare it deserved. Who, of sane mind, could have dared hope for still another epic discovery? — and we use the word "epic" in the sense that any *"new" story by Chesterton automatically rates that epitonic epithet. Yet once again your Editor's researches have brought to light a hitherto unsuspected minor classic.*

"The Man Who Shot the Fox" is Chesterton's eighty-eighth detective short story, and this time we challenge the Fates by refusing to label it the "last" of Chesterton's "unknowns." This time we go on record that we shall continue the quest for more lost treasures and if such Chestertonguemanship exists, we give our solemn and sacred word to find it!

So, to the criminological corps which now includes the incomparable Father Brown, the omniscient Horne Fisher, the poetic Gabriel Gale, the paradoxical Mr. Pond, the hypocritical Dr. Hyde, and the transcendental Mr. Traill, now add Chesterton's "healthy and humorous adviser," the tall, lean, redheaded detective, Philip Swayne. Like all the others, he has the Chestertonal touch.

THE MAN WHO SHOT THE FOX

by GILBERT K. CHESTERTON

THE Rev. David East was walking with a companion up the single steep street that constituted almost the whole village of Windover. Even on that sunny afternoon the street was practically empty in front of him except for two figures walking far ahead; in whom indeed (as it happened) he was sufficiently interested to have picked them out even in a crowd. But if he had been in a mood for idler fancies he might have pictured, fleeing in fantastic rout before him, a whole mob of mythological animals.

For that string of houses had once been something very like a string of public-houses. Each house was now a monument of his victory over something that was for him a monster; and

one that had been displayed on an escutcheon above the street, in the manner of a heraldic monster. He might well have prided himself on having played lion-tamer to the Red Lion and pig-sticker to the Blue Boar, Deer-slayer to the White Hart and St. George to the Green Dragon.

When David East began his eager ministry in those parts, the hamlet was almost built of hostelries; and the citizens would seem to have lived, not by taking in each other's washing, but by giving out each other's beer. He was in fact an earnest and enthusiastic preacher of the simple life; and it would be preferable, perhaps, if we could say that his eloquence had converted all that crowd of villagers, as it might well have done in any place where Puritanism has been a real popular tradition. But this was Old England, and a very old part of it, the Downs of Wessex; and he had needed to convert only one man: the man who walked at his side.

For the man was Sir Arthur Irving, the young squire who owned all that village; nor had he himself required much conversion. He had come from Cambridge with a youthful seriousness about his responsibilities as a social reformer; he was a young man of many intellectual tastes and even talents, including a talent for landscape-painting — which explained the light easel and camp-stool he was at that moment carrying to a sketching place on the hills beyond. In appearance he was tall and dark, with features distinguished and even handsome save for a slight elongation that would have been called equine in a caricature — a type that often goes with silence and generally with solemnity.

His companion, the Reverend David, was also tall and capable of a fairly continuous silence; but there the resemblance ceased. He was older than the squire, and his flaxen hair was blanched prematurely even for his age; the face under it looked boyish and even babyish, until a second glance showed something resolute in the round chin and in the short nose something of a doglike pertinacity, which unconsciously accompanied the politeness and even mildness of his manner. And in his face, as compared with the landscape painter's, there was a vividness which might be the difference between talent and genius.

Sir Arthur looked as if he had not spoken for months; but East, however silent, always looked as if he had just that instant spoken, or was just about to speak. A fanciful critic might have suggested that he never slept. And indeed a certain silent vigilance and ubiquity was his strength in all social work; he never lost a link in a labyrinthine network of religious and political engagements.

What East saw before him, in the street swept clear of its signs, was, however, one of his easiest though one of his largest triumphs. And yet at the very end of the straggling street, where the trees began to appear in a ragged fringe from over the brow of the hill, there was one sign left, and a strange one. Above the door of the last house,

suspended from a short pole, hung a real fox's brush; and, as Hood and a healthy age of punsters might have put it, thereby hangs this tale.

At that moment, however, David East was not thinking of his victories over the signs that had vanished or even of any defeat symbolized in the one sign that had remained. During his short speech and his long silence, his bright eyes had remained fixed on one of the two figures walking ahead — a feminine figure, that of the squire's sister, who was walking with a young man named Swayne. All four of the pedestrians had started out together, from the gates of the great country seat in the valley behind them, meaning to proceed together to the squire's sketching ground for a sort of light picnic. But Swayne and Mary Irving had insensibly drawn ahead; while the eyes of the men behind continued to follow them.

The mild and patient persistency which marked East's manner was at present that of the lover and not the reformer; and his friend the squire would have been much more comfortable if he had been talking to the reformer. For he himself was the sort of English squire who is perhaps all the more English for being the very reverse of bluff and hearty, but who is national only in a very negative way. It was perhaps something sensitive in him that made him fully himself only when things were going smoothly. They were not going smoothly now.

"I am very much distressed about this," he said, clearing his throat uncomfortably. "I am very much honored, of course, and all that. I have the greatest regard for you and your work, but I am very sorry this has happened. It can't altogether depend on me, you see; and the truth is, I fancy my sister — Well, the situation is a very delicate one to deal with."

If he had merely been at the Cambridge Union reconstructing the British Empire or in the House of Commons altering the hearths and homes of millions of his poor fellow-creatures, he would have been a weighty, polished, and fluent speaker. But as it only affected himself, his sister, and his friend (and perhaps another friend walking ahead), he was only an English gentleman, a much pleasanter thing, and gaped and floundered like a fish.

East was still gazing steadily ahead at the two figures which began to draw towards the dark fringe of the woods against an edge of evening sky.

"You mean," he remarked quietly, "that I am too late."

"I have no right to say that," replied Irving. "But I do fancy I know enough to be rather sorry about this."

"Mr. Swayne is a lawyer, I think," observed East with as much composure as if he had been changing the subject.

"Well, he is a barrister, I believe," answered the young squire, "but I don't think he does much at that or gets most out of it. He's written several novels that have sold pretty well, I fancy. Mostly about murders, I think. For the rest he's a sort of

free-lance journalist, but very consistent in his opinions; in fact, I should describe him as a rabid romantic. It's absurd for people to call him an adventurer; he's a very good family, and all that. But he's — well, I'm afraid he doesn't often listen to your sermons."

"So far as I know," replied East, with quiet contempt, "you are the only man of very good family who ever will listen to them."

Sir Arthur accepted the tribute rather hastily, for he was not unconscious of the abnormality of the social position. It is very rare indeed, in such a village of South England, that the chapel has grown greater than the church; but the circumstances in this case were peculiar. The Irving family had come from the industrial North only in the last generation, and the old squire, Sir Caleb Irving, had brought his religion with him. In fact (and the fact is far from rare), the old squire was really a new squire, and only an old merchant. But at least he had a new religion; indeed, he had had several new religions.

Nor was the religion preached by the Rev. David East, which had caught the old man late in life and in a mood of sincere penitence, by any means unworthy or unsuitable to a sincere penitent. If it concerned itself, like certain other Puritanic beliefs, largely with the prophetic books and with the divine cryptogram of the Apocalypse, it interpreted them in a very practical and even political fashion, translating every opened seal as a modern emancipation, and every vial of wrath as the result of a social sin.

It was probably an exaggeration or perversion of their meaning which represented them as explaining the vision of wheels in Ezekiel as the success of modern machinery. And it can not be called less than a libel to say, as so many said, that these simple believers regarded the beasts with many eyes as the best types of ideal government inspectors. Nor was there a word of truth in the absurd assertion that they explained the symbols of baptism by water and fire as meaning the necessity of hot and cold water in the bathrooms.

Sir Arthur frowned as he remembered these ridiculous, not to say rebellious, rumors. He knew from whom all such jokes originally came: from the one spot that was now his eyesore, from the one man who still remained an incongruous figure in that landscape, and who, a few hundred yards up the road in front of them, stood at his own front door under the sign of the fox's tail.

By the time they reached the brow of the hill, where the straggling houses ceased and the woods began, the gold of evening had already reddened into copper, and sparks of it, here and there low down amid the dark woods, had the look rather of rubies. It was indeed the time and tint of sunset which Irving had carried his easel all that way to copy; but at that moment his gaze was not fixed only on the sunset.

The couple walking ahead had

already paused to await his coming; and their two figures on the brow of the hill, dark against the red and orange glow, were alone suggestive of all the suspicions that had caused him to withhold hope from his companion. The attitudes were almost conventional, and quite conversational; yet it seemed impossible to doubt the nature of the conversation.

The Rev. David East seemed to take it very quietly, with head bent but eyes still bright and steady. It was not till long afterwards that Irving wholly understood the look in his face; but some part of it he understood only a few moments afterwards, with not a little amazement. For as he advanced, the group of two broke up and his sister came hurriedly towards him.

She was much smaller and slighter than her brother and much better-looking; being beautiful in the dark fashion in which he was only handsome, but also in a tragic fashion where he was only solemn. At this moment she looked especially tragic; and there was alive in her eyes that anxiety which is generally feminine, and comes of the co-existence of duty and doubt. She was of the sort that could be a martyr to her own faith, but only a skeptic about her own martyrdom.

But it was only a glimpse of this tragic mask that was given to her brother; for, very much to his surprise, she hurriedly excused herself from the party, saying she had forgotten to call at the carpenter's cottage opposite; into which she had vanished before her brother had recovered from his bewilderment.

The next moment he found himself drawn apart by his friend Philip Swayne; and was still more surprised to find that gentleman, whose levity he had generally reason to lament, was now sobered by some similar shock. Swayne was tall, lean, and active, with red tufts of eyebrow and mustache and a shrewd, humorous blue eye. But just now his red hair looked redder against an unnatural pallor, and his face looked not only lean but haggard. He carried an ordinary sportsman's gun in his left hand at the moment, and he held out his right hand, as if in farewell.

"Good-by, old chap," he said abruptly. "I've hung about here too long, and now I must bring my visit to an end anyhow. If you don't mind, I'll blaze away in your woods a bit to relieve my feelings, and then get down to the station. I confess I feel rather in the mood for shooting something; not to say shooting somebody."

"I don't understand," remonstrated the young squire. "Have you and Mary quarreled? I thought that she —

"Yes, yes," said Swayne gloomily. "I may be a fool, but I'm afraid I thought that she — Indeed, I can't yet shake off the notion that she thought that she — But anyhow, for some reason or other, it's all up; and the less I say about it the better."

The Rev. David East was standing some distance away, with head bent seriously after his habit, studying the pebbles on the road. But even as

Swayne uttered his last, bitter words, the girl came out of the carpenter's cottage and headed hurriedly down the road towards her home; but David East had looked across at her once, and smiled.

Before Irving could turn again to speak to him, Swayne had waved his hand with a farewell gesture, and, leaping clean over a bush by the roadside, had soon vanished into the first fringe of the woods.

From the little house by the edge of the woods, where the fox's tail hung above the door, there came a burst of riotous laughter and singing, of an unseemly sort which had not been heard in the model village since the signs had been swept from its street.

"It's that scoundrel serving out beer and brandy still!" exclaimed the squire, angrily. "I can't think why my father put up with him; I swear I'll not put up with him any longer."

"Your father did put up with him," said East, gently. "He made special provision for him when we cleared away the other public-houses. I confess I still think that ought to restrain you."

"I'm damned if I'll stand this any longer," he said. "I'll turn him out today."

Sir Arthur might have wavered for an instant in his indignant advance on the little house if a derisive voice from its doorway had not decided him. Outside the house, and immediately under its hairy sign, stood a rough bench and table such as are often found on the frontage of old inns; and on the bench, with his elbow on the table, sat the smiling proprietor of this irregular hostelry. His appearance was as strange as a living scarecrow's, for his raven-colored hair stood out in long crooked wisps like the ruffled or broken feathers of a raven; his lean, high-featured face was bronzed like a gypsy's; and his patched and tattered clothes seemed to be hardly held together by a broad, shabby old leather belt.

But it was perhaps the most fantastic fact of all that out of this walking rubbish heap of rags and bones there came the incongruous accent of an educated man.

"May I offer you a glass of ale, gentlemen?" he called out very coolly. "Mr. East, it will have a most inspiriting effect on your eloquence."

"Look here!" burst in the young squire. "I've come here to end all this nonsense; and what's more, I'll not have Mr. East talked to in this impudent fashion in the village. He's a better man than any of you beasts are ever likely to be; and you'd much better learn a few cleaner ideas from him."

"I am sure he is a perfect Galahad," drawled the man leaning on the table, "and calculated at any moment to follow the Gleam and go after the Holy Grail. But really, I am very unfortunate today! I should not have mentioned the Holy Grail, of course. How difficult you must find it to expurgate all the legend and literature of the world! And how unfortunate it is that the Christian Sacrament itself

did not take the form of lemonade! But — "

"If you blaspheme, it about finishes it for me," said the squire furiously. "Look here! I know nothing about you, except that my father called you Martin Hook, and let you hang on at this place for some reason I could never comprehend. I respect my father's memory; but I also respect myself and the people of this village; and there's a limit to everything. I'll give you the ordinary notice, though I'm not bound even to do that; but you must clear out of this."

The man called Hook put one claw-like hand on the table and took a flying leap over it. When he stood in front he was transfigured; all his lounging and sneering manner had dropped from him, and he spoke like an insulted gentleman.

"I shall not need your notice," he said. "Long ago I swore that if ever such a word was spoken to me, I would walk away on the spot; and if ever I walked away, I would never return. You shall never see me again, and I will never see you again; and perhaps it is as well. I will only stop to collect a few things."

He strode into the house with his new air of energy while they stood wondering outside. A rummaging about was heard in the dark and dismal interior. He reappeared with a sort of light luggage more fantastic than his clothes: a gun under his arm, a bottle of brandy sticking out of his pocket, some ragged books stuffed into the other pocket; and balanced in one hand a big packet of parchments or papers tied with red tape and yellow seals. But this last was the greatest surprise of all; for with a gesture like a conjurer's he sent the packet flying through the air in the direction of the squire, who had to forget his dignity and catch it like a cricket-ball.

Before he was free of the mere automatic accuracy of the act, the strange man who threw it was looking down on him from the steep bank behind the house, which was clothed with the beginning of a pine wood. Standing against the gray and purple shadows of the pine-trunks, his figure had something unearthly beyond all its ugly details; he looked at least as outlandish as a red Indian. And it was out of such a twilight, seeming indescribably distant and disconnected, that his voice came for the last time.

"Good-by, Sir Arthur," he said. "I am going far away from your village — possibly to starve; more probably to steal. Under these circumstances, I thought I would leave a piece of information with you. I am your brother."

The squire continued to stare at the gray and purple shadows of the pine-wood; but there were only the shadows to be seen. The first thing that snapped the long strain of the silence was the voice of David East, and his words sounded strange.

"What a sunset!" he said suddenly. "Real red sunsets are common enough in books; but they are very rare in sketch books — at least in genuine sketch books like yours. That sky is

the sort of thing you'll never see again all your life."

"Did you hear what that ruffian said?" articulated the squire at last. "What the devil has the sunset got to do with it?"

"It has nothing to do with it. That is why I mentioned it," answered East quietly. "Believe me, when you've had a shock, the very best thing is to go on doing exactly what you were going to do before. If you're thrown out of a cab, you should immediately get into another. If you were going to paint the evening sky, you'd better go on and paint the evening sky. I'll put up your easel."

"It's no good," said Irving. "I can't do anything. It's not worth the trouble of getting out the sketching-block."

"I will get out your sketching-block," replied East.

"I don't even feel as if I could take the old sketch off it," went on Sir Arthur. "A rotten sketch, too."

"I will take the old sketch off," said the other.

"It's getting too dark to begin all over again," murmured Irving, distractedly, "and my pencil's broken."

"I will sharpen your pencil," replied David East.

He had already fished out the block from the artist's materials, along with pencils and a big Swedish knife, with which he first slit off the top sheet of cartridge paper, and then proceeded calmly to sharpen the pencil. Sir Arthur Irving had a sense of soft and steady pressure, from a will he had never consciously appreciated before. He turned mechanically to stare at the blank white paper set up for him; and then at the great semicircular theater of the wooded hills enriched by the deepening tints of the sunset.

As he did so, there came in the utter stillness the crack and detonation of a gun. He swung round with the very sound of it; but he was already too late. The Rev. David East had fallen all his length, with his face sunken among the grass and bracken; and the fingers which were spread out, still touching the half-sharpened pencil and the knife, seemed almost to stiffen as Irving looked down at them. He had an instinctive and instantaneous knowledge that the man was dead. And amid all the immeasurable emotions that towered up in him too high for his mind to grasp, the one distinct sensation was a feeling of the huge and hideous disproportion of a man being killed while he was cutting a pencil.

His next action was equally instinctive, and perhaps more irrational. He stood rigid so long as the echoes of the volley alone mocked the silence; but as they died away, he heard another sound — an unmistakable brush or scurry in the thickets just behind him, as if someone were escaping after the catastrophe. He leaped forward with renewed life, raced across the intervening space, and plunged into the wood.

He was in time to arrest a retreating figure, who stopped at the noise of pursuit, and turned a pale face over his shoulder. It was the white face of Philip Swayne, whiter than he had

seen it that day; and he felt for the first time something Mephistophelian in the almost scarlet tufts of eyebrow and mustache.

"Oh, my God!" said Irving. "This is too horrible! Why on earth did you do it?"

"Do what?" asked Swayne shortly.

"By God, you are innocent then!" cried Irving.

"It may surprise you, but I am," replied Swayne, "and I think, after all these years, the bare possibility of it might have crossed your mind."

"But who could have done it?" cried the distracted squire. "I do beg your pardon, Swayne; but I've no time to do it properly now. For God's sake come back with me to the place at once."

The easel stood up, a dark and crazy skeleton out of the dim bracken; and just above it, on the ridge against the afterglow, stood another dark figure, crazier than any skeleton. It was the bird of ill omen. Their fancy had already compared the figure to a raven; now it looked like the raven of the old war ballads, hovering over the battlefield above the slain.

Though it was but a black, tattered, and fantastic outline, Irving had instantly recognized the man called Martin Hook, and plunged through the undergrowth towards him. Even as he did so, the strange man made a motion with his hand that seemed as horrid as a second crime. He lifted the light gun he carried, and shook it aloft like a sword or spear — one vibrant gesture of victory and vengeance.

The man started, however, upon finding himself observed, and even dropped his gun, throwing up his hands a moment either in exultation or wonder.

The next moment the young squire had sprung on him and bore him backwards to the earth.

There was an instant of almost startling stillness; and then the struggle was renewed on the ground, the man underneath rolling and kicking so far afield that the easel was sent staggering and was finally shattered by the squire's body, flung with a crash, as if through its whole framework. The wild man of the woods regained his feet; he had also regained his gun. As Swayne, hurrying to the rescue, rushed at him in turn, he swung up the butt-end like a club; but Irving also was on his feet again and, springing from behind, wrenched it away once more. They closed on the man, and both found themselves sprawling, their momentary captive towering above them with a leg of the broken easel quivering in his hand. It was only when Swayne had seized a strap from the artistic baggage by the body, and managed to twist it round the man's wrists, that their combined strength managed to master him.

That night after dinner, the young squire sat down with characteristic seriousness, in evening dress at an elaborate and well-ordered desk, to open and study the parchment packet that had been flung into his hand at the beginning of all these wild events. He read the papers steadily without a

word; and at the end his face was of an unaltered gravity, but of an altered pallor.

Up and down the veranda outside, his sister and Philip Swayne were walking; their figures crossed the window from time to time in the moonlight. He saw the long perspectives of paths and hedges and the tall poplars on the horizon.

After staring sadly for a few moments at the moonlit garden, he struck a bell at his side. Then he scribbled a few lines on paper and sealed it up in an envelope, exactly filling the interval of time before a gray-haired servant appeared.

"Please have this delivered," he said, "to Sir Martin Irving. He is in the local prison."

The manservant's heavy face almost awoke with wonder, and the hand held out for the letter hesitated. The young squire repeated firmly: "To Sir Martin Irving, in the prison. He is the man who used to be called Martin Hook. Find out if the police will allow him to receive that letter. They will read it themselves, of course."

And he got up and went out onto the veranda, leaving the servant with the letter in his hand.

The squire stood waiting outside the window, while Swayne and Mary Irving walked towards him. He had been apparently mistaken about their attitude before; but he felt fairly certain that he was not mistaken now. His sister's face, one never prone to exaggerate or even to express happiness, told him that some happiness at least had already come out of the tragedy in the woods. What was the nature of the obstacle that had separated the two only that morning he could not imagine, but it was clear that it had been an obstacle to the wishes of both; and that the obstacle was now removed, if only by the mad act of a murderer. And it weighed on him most heavily of all that he had now to throw another burden of trial and change and peril into the fine poise and balance of his sister's sensitive conscience.

"Mary," he said, abruptly, "there is something I must tell you at once. Another rather terrible thing has happened."

Philip Swayne turned easily on his heel, and tactfully strolled out of the veranda onto the lawns beyond. Mary stood still, as if looking after him, but she neither moved nor spoke.

"It is terrible to see you staring at our old park," he said at last, rather huskily. "For I, at any rate, may be looking at it for the last time. The long and short of it is that this place is not ours."

After a pause he went on: "I have just looked through all the legal papers and I fear they do establish the fact that my father had a legitimate elder son, disowned when he was about sixteen, when I was barely six and you were not born. They seem to have quarreled because the boy shot a fox; at which my father was naturally indignant, as a country gentleman concerned for the best opinion of the county; though perhaps his indigna-

tion carried him too far. The man who shot the fox, it would seem, tells a story of his own to excuse himself. He professes that the fox was threatening those pigeons that Father used to keep.

"I can hardly believe that, for surely he need only have said so, to have it regarded as an extenuation at least; for Father was very fond of the pigeons. He does not even pretend that he mentioned the pigeons at the time, and I think they must have been an afterthought. But though I can hardly believe his excuses, I fear there is no doubt about his claims. And all that would matter very little to me, estate and all, if it weren't for this last ghastly calamity — that the man who is to bear my title is standing almost under the gallows for the murder of poor East."

Still the girl did not move or speak, but stood with her face turned away like a statue in the moonlight. Irving began to feel her unshaken rigidity as something creepy and a new strain on his nerves.

"Mary," he said, "are you ill? Was it too much of a shock to you?"

"No," she replied. "It was not a shock to me."

"Then I don't understand what's the matter with you."

"It was not a shock," said the girl, "because I knew it before. Mr. East told me."

"What? Did East know? Had that anything to do with his death? Come, you must really tell me the truth," cried Irving, exasperated with her mute and motionless attitude. "Remember, I must still stand for the honor of our family, even if I am not the head of it. And everything that can be done by sorrow and justice is due to the man who died almost in my service."

"Yes," she said, after a moment's thought, "sorrow and justice are certainly due to all the dead — even to him."

"What do you mean?" demanded her brother.

"I say they are due even to him," she said steadily, "though he was a horrible man."

"What are you saying? I thought — I thought you promised to marry him only this morning."

"I promised to marry him because he was a horrible man," said Mary Irving.

There was an insupportable silence; and then she said, still looking at the moonlight on the lawns:

"I think I am the kind of woman who is always doing wrong through worrying about doing right. Anyhow, I knew about it, and he knew about it, and by this time Philip knows about it, because I have told him. You are the only one of us who did not know. And as I knew that when you learned it you would give up the estate instantly — "

"Thank you," said Irving sternly, and lifted his head.

"I thought it would kill you," went on his sister. "I thought all your life and hopes were bound up with this place, and that anything must be done

to keep the secret. Yes, even if I had to marry a blackmailer."

"Do you mean to tell me," cried Irving, "that this man I have known all my life, this man who was my father's friend, put you on the rack to torture you for such a purpose?"

"Yes," answered the girl, and lifted her own pale face. "He put me on the rack. But I did not speak."

"Will you forgive me if I leave you?" said Irving, after another silence. "I must think it out by myself, my dear, or you will have two mad brothers."

He wandered away into the garden, pacing the paths and lawns wildly with his face white in the moon; and when Swayne found him in the plantation he might almost have passed indeed for a wild man of the woods himself. But Swayne was a healthy and humorous adviser, and it was not long before they were both back in the study again, turning over the papers in a more equable fashion and elucidating them with the notes of some of Swayne's own investigations.

"His case is subtle, I think," said Swayne. "But have you considered his character in the light of that old affair of the fox and the pigeon? He was really quite right to kill the fox, which was in the act of eating a pigeon, and your father would have thanked him for it. But he never told your father. He preferred to drag out a squalid existence in that tumble-down tavern, alone with the one black joke of being in the right."

"Do you mean to say," asked Irving abruptly, "that he could have defended himself about the — " He stopped.

"There are two little problems," began Swayne, abruptly but calmly, "which puzzled me about that murder. The first was the struggle we had, when he stood with his hands up and you sprang at him. You bowled him over like a ninepin. And yet, a moment afterwards, he had the strength of ten devils. We are both strong men, and it took us all our time to hold him. What do you guess from that? I will tell you my guess. I guess that he had no idea at first that you were going to attack him, and that he was not lifting his hands to attack you. It may seem mad, but it is my serious belief that he was going to embrace you."

"Madness is hardly the word for it," replied Irving, staring. "Tell me what you're really driving at."

"The other problem," resumed Swayne calmly, "I came upon when I picked up that strap from beside the body. I saw it only in a flash; but you'll remember that the dead man's fingers still lay lightly on the pencil and the long Swedish knife with which he had been cutting it. But the knife was the wrong way round."

"The wrong way round," repeated Irving. Something cold began to creep through his blood.

"East was not holding it as a man holds a tool, with the point upwards. He was holding it as a man holds a dagger, with the point downwards. I do not wonder that you look at me like that. But it is best to say it, and get it

over. East was shot dead at the very moment when he was about to stab you where you stood."

Arthur Irving tried to speak; but no words came.

"You were standing with your back to him, you will remember, and giving him the very moment of opportunity. He wanted that opportunity badly, and had probably brought you over the brow of the hill out of sight of the village on purpose. He wanted it, then and there, for a very simple reason. It was his whole policy to keep your family in possession and marry into it; he knew your brother would never normally speak; and he had never calculated on his throwing you the packet of papers. If you went home and read them, his whole scheme was in ruins. If you merely died, your sister had the property and he had your sister's word.

"East was a gentleman of remarkable lucidity and presence of mind; and it was apparent to his intellect that you had better merely die. Only in the nick of time, your brother saw the gesture from the woods above. He also is a gentleman of great presence of mind; and the bullet went quicker than the knife. Your brother rushed down, in a real revulsion of feeling in favor of his own blood which he had rescued, and thinking only of a reconciliation. And he found himself again knocked down for having killed the fox when he had saved the pigeon. Only this time, by a new artistic touch, he was knocked down by the pigeon."

A knock came at the door, and the gray-haired servant again appeared, carrying a letter on a tray. Irving opened it and read slowly the lines of bold, irregular writing that completed the story:

My Dear Brother:

You are certainly behaving handsomely; and I feel I ought to do the same. I do not in the least want your great big ugly house; and I shall be quite content to go back to my beer at the sign of the fox's brush. I feel I must be equally forgiving about the affair of the other fox I shot, though I was very much annoyed about it. I had originally intended to say nothing, and only allow you to learn the truth when you had hanged me neatly at the end of a rope. The idea affected me as humorous.

Your legal friend wanted to establish my innocence in various ways highly wounding to my vanity. He offered to prove that I was not a murderer by proving, first, that I was a bad shot, which is a lie; second, that I was a lunatic, which is also a lie; and third, that I did not with cold premeditation intend to destroy the Rev. David East; which is the greatest lie and slander of all, and a gross reflection on my public spirit and sense of social reform. By elaborate lies like that he might have got me off; and by other elaborate lies like that he might equally well have got East off — probably by pleading that certain exercises with a Swedish knife were a part of Swedish drill.

But even if they had hanged East, they would only have done it after artificial, interminable ceremonies intended to show he was guilty; whereas I killed him swiftly because I *knew* he was guilty. And this is what reminds me so much of our poor father and the fox. If I had put on an absurd pink coat and wasted hours in wandering about with a litter of dogs, if I had kept a lot of silly rules, almost as silly as those of a law-court, he would have thought it quite natural that I should exist only to kill foxes. But because I sacrificed a wild beast devouring our own livestock, he could see nothing except that I had broken a rule.

Under these circumstances you will excuse me if I maintain that I am not mad, but you are; that it is you and all your law-courts and hunting fields and solemn sport and fantastic "fair play" that are mad. I kill vermin when the vermin is trying to kill; and it may surprise you to learn that I regard myself as a person of considerable common sense. Anyhow, all's well that ends well, as the fox said when his tail was put back at the right end.

Yours always,

Martin Irving

Irving looked at the last sentence with a faint smile; and his eyes again wandered to the window. By this time he was alone once more; for Swayne had taken the opportunity to slip out at the open windows, and was once more walking with Mary Irving on the veranda under the moon.

"Q"

Georges Simenon is now living in Montreal, Canada. Recently he paid a flying visit to New York and we had the pleasure and honor of meeting the bestselling detective-story writer of France, creator of the most famous contemporary French manhunter, Inspector Maigret.

Your Editor speaks French feebly; Monsieur Simenon has not yet mastered the deeper intricacies of the English language; so we carried on our conversation through an interpreter (M. Simenon's literary agent) who sat between us. Your Editor's head swung back and forth between M. Simenon and the interpreter as if we were watching a tennis match at Forest Hills. It didn't take long before your Editor was groggy — but not so groggy that we forgot to ask M. Simenon to inscribe our French first editions of his three books of short stories. M. Simenon was both charming and obliging — with the result that we now own the only inscribed and autographed set of Simenon short stories in all these United States.

These three books of shorts — LES 13 COUPABLES (THE THIRTEEN CULPRITS), LES 13 ÉNIGMES (THE THIRTEEN ENIGMAS), *and* LES 13 MYSTÈRES (THE THIRTEEN MYSTERIES), *all published in Paris by Arthème Fayard in 1932 — have never been issued either in England or the United States. We have already brought you four stories, two from the first book, and one each from the second and third. Now we bring you the third selection from* LES 13 COUPABLES — *another sharp, precise, pithy investigation by examining magistrate Froget. It is a circus story, with a backstage atmosphere of the cheap and sordid theatrical life of the Continent; compare its spirit with that of Cornell Woolrich's "If the Dead Could Talk," a tale of American acrobats, also in this issue.*

THE CASE OF THE THREE BICYCLISTS

by GEORGES SIMENON

(Translated from the original French by Anthony Boucher)

THE FACTS were so confused, the statements of witnesses so hesitant or contradictory, the line between truth and conjecture so hazily defined that examining magistrate Froget was obliged to fall back on the classic procedure of setting down an objective résumé of all the known data.

That résumé, when the formal questioning of the Timmermans couple began in the magistrate's office, read as follows:

"On February 3 the Powell Circus

opened in Nogent-sur-Marne, after a series of short jumps from Brussels. The tent was set up in the Place de Paris. Some of the performers lived in the caravans. Others stopped at the Hotel Gambetta. (Note: 3d class hotel. Door closed at night, but tenants can open it from inside. To come in, they have to ring and call out their number as they pass the porter's wicket.)

"The Timmermans, man and wife, who have an acrobatic cycling act with their niece Henny, occupied rooms 15 and 16 on the third floor. They had been with the Powell Circus for five months. Engaged while the troupe was playing Antwerp. Had then just returned from a disastrous tour of South America.

"Jack Lieb, 32, bachelor, juggler, with the circus on a one-month contract, had room 6 on the second floor. Gay boy, good-looking, with designs on most of the women and particularly on Henny.

"The run lasted until February 17. No show on the 18th. On the 19th the company was to leave for La Varenne. At eight o'clock, Jack Lieb and Henny were seen taking the street-car for Paris. No baggage. Henny told someone they were going to the pictures.

"At twelve-thirty that night, the hotel porter opens the door from his bed and hears a lodger call out number six. He is almost certain that this was Lieb's voice, but didn't know the man well and won't venture a positive statement. Neither is he sure whether one or two people came in.

"The Timmermans spent the evening at a café in Nogent, came home at ten.

"At three in the morning the porter dimly hears the sound of people going out. Thinks there were several.

"*He does not open the door again that night.*

"At eight o'clock, the Timmermans raise a great hullaballoo and announce that their niece has run away. Claim they haven't seen her since seven the previous evening. Her bed, in room 16, hasn't been slept in. Her baggage has disappeared.

"They accuse Jack Lieb. They knock at his door. No answer. *Lieb has disappeared, along with his trunk.*

"The rest of the company receive the news cynically. The circus leaves Nogent. On the 19th it opens at La Varenne. Lieb's act is replaced. The Timmermans, without Henny, have to cut most of theirs and insert an advertisement in the professional papers asking for a partner.

"On February 23 the canal boat *Deux Frères*, trying to land a hundred meters upstream from the bridge at Nogent, strikes bottom, although its draft exceeds the normal depth there. The pilot takes a sounding with a boat hook, strikes some obstacle, and informs the lock-keeper. They investigate and drag out of the water a trunk with the initials J. L.

"When they open the trunk, they find the corpse of Jack Lieb. The murderer had to bend the body double. Some sodden banknotes (three 100-franc notes and five tens) are floating

around the body. Billfold intact in pocket.

"The autopsy shows that Jack Lieb was strangled, on about the 18th.

"The place where the trunk was found is 900 meters from the Hotel Gambetta. Trunk and body weigh (dry) 228 pounds.

"The authorities search vainly for Henny's corpse. She doesn't turn up living or dead; now on February 25, there is still no sign of her existence.

"The performers of the Powell Circus accuse the Timmermans, but without any evidence. The couple has always had a bad reputation. Wherever they have gone, trinkets and billfolds and purses have disappeared, although they have never been caught *in flagrante*.

"Problem: to establish, if possible, their guilt, and to learn the whereabouts of Henny's body."

They sat facing M. Froget — a man of fifty-two and a woman of forty-eight.

Franz Timmerman was born at Workum, in the north of the Netherlands. But he had spent the greater part of his youth in Belgium. At twenty he joined a German circus as stable boy. At thirty he married Célina Vandeven of Gand, an acrobat.

Célina had in her care the daughter of her dead sister. They carried the child around with them over all Europe. Soon the Timmermans became a bicycling trio, but the act never went over well. After their début, year followed year, always the same. They would go from one circus to another, play at foreign expositions, sometimes appear at provincial music-halls.

Franz is short-legged. Everything about him is hard: his flesh, the lines of his face, the stubborn expression of his too sharply defined features. On M. Froget's desk is a photo of him in his act, half acrobatics, half clowning. In the same photo Célina Timmerman is standing on the shoulders of her husband, who is mounted on a bicycle.

"In short, Timmermans," M. Froget said, looking elsewhere, "for a good dozen years your act has had no success at all."

The woman's bosom rose. She was about to speak, but the magistrate paid no attention to her. His voice went on, dry and precise:

"In your former engagements, as in your contract with Powell, it has been stipulated that you, Franz, were to double all evening as one of the clowns that invade the ring between numbers. Madame, for her part, was to act as dresser for the equestrians."

Timmerman said nothing. There was a hard glint in his dark grey eyes.

"For one reason or another, your own act was often omitted. At Nogent you were booed."

Mme. Timmerman twisted and gesticulated, her mouth open.

"You had the poorest billing in the troupe. You complained about it to anyone who'd listen. For ten years now you've been complaining. . . ."

Timmerman looked askance at the magistrate. The muscles of his jaw stood out.

"It is established beyond doubt that you have committed many petty thefts among your colleagues."

"That isn't so! They're trying to frame us! They —" Mme. Timmerman was suddenly on her feet.

"Please be seated again, madame. And answer only when I ask a question." The precise voice clipped off its words as though she had never interrupted: "The finale of your act consisted, if I am correctly informed, of a tour around the ring on the bicycle with your husband carrying you on his shoulders while your niece stood on yours."

"Yes. And we're the only act in —"

"Henny is twenty-two at present, is she not?"

"She was," Mme. Timmerman corrected.

"As you please. It has been established that she has had many lovers, with your consent."

The man said nothing. The woman was indignant. "Consent? Could we help it if she was man-crazy?"

"Did you know that she was going to Paris with Lieb on the eighteenth?"

"We had our suspicions."

"You saw her as she was leaving. She had no suitcase. Therefore, she returned in the course of the night. Your room adjoins hers. You heard nothing?"

"Nothing. If we had . . ." Mme. Timmerman seemed afraid to let her husband speak, she hurried so to get her answer in first.

"Will you tell me exactly what baggage you carried?"

"First of all our cycles and our props and costumes. Those stayed at the circus and went in the vans. Then we have a wicker trunk and a black wooden coffer for street clothes and the rest. And finally the two little suitcases, one for Henny and the other for us."

"The two trunks were in your room?"

"Yes."

"Your niece's suitcase was in her own room?"

"Yes. She took it away with her."

"With all her belongings?"

"All. Except her costumes for the act. They were at the circus."

"There was a communicating door between rooms 15 and 16?"

"Yes. We lived in one as much as the other. We did our own cooking to save money."

"You didn't know Lieb before he joined the Powell Circus?"

"No. He'd come straight from England, he said. We never played there."

"He talked of marrying Henny?"

"Him? Oh, no! He was a chaser. Any skirt was the same to him."

"He had the best billing in the circus, didn't he?"

"I guess so. Which just goes to show that it isn't talent that —"

"You were to leave the Hotel Gambetta early on the morning of the nineteenth. Was your baggage all ready?"

"Yes. We packed the trunks the afternoon of the eighteenth."

"And they were to be picked up early. Exactly."

Timmerman had been making such an effort to concentrate during this dialogue that his face was flushed.

"When you saw your niece for the last time, before she left for Paris with Lieb, what coat was she wearing? Her winter coat?"

"No, it was a nice day. For a couple of weeks she'd been wearing a green tailored coat she'd just had made. She liked to look smart; she'd spend as much to put on her back as we'd —"

"What was her winter coat like?"

"Brown, with real fur. Even if she did burn it down by the hem when she got too near a fire once but that didn't show much and —"

"Could you bring me this coat?"

"How could I when Henny carried off all her belongings like I told you?"

"Of course. Your windows opened on the Place de Paris?"

"Yes."

"You really couldn't provide me with any clothing that your niece had worn? A dress, underwear . . . even shoes? How many pairs did she have?"

"Three. But we haven't anything left except her circus costumes. They're still with ours in Powell's vans."

"You don't know what picture Henny went to?"

"How should we know?"

"Of course you were never in Lieb's room. But do you happen to know where he kept his trunk?"

"No."

"Yours was at the head of the bed?"

"One of them. The other was in a corner."

"But at the head of the bed was the wicker one with the clothing?"

"Yes. All roped up."

"Mlle. Henny could swim?"

"A little."

"Have you any other relatives?"

"A cousin of my husband's. But we never see each other any more. Sometimes a postcard —"

"Professional?"

"He's a farmer. At Warns, not far from Workum."

"You weren't in any need of cash when the crime was committed?"

"Why should we be? We'd just been paid, and we hardly spend a sou."

"On the nineteenth you had only seventy-five francs on you."

"Which proves we're innocent! You don't go killing people for nothing."

Mme. Timmerman was animated, and looked at her husband with a certain pride as though to say, "You see? You've got to know how to talk back to them!"

M. Froget's last question pricked her bubble:

"How long did you stand at the window?"

And he closed his files.

Without so much as looking at the accused, M. Froget went on drily as though he were reciting a lesson:

"As circus and music-hall performers, you fall into that class of supernumeraries known to the profession as supers or stooges. And you were stooges too in your petty efforts at criminality. Without your niece your bicycling act no longer holds up; she was necessary to your other act as well.

"On the eighteenth she goes off with Lieb, who has just received his very substantial salary. You have been paid off far more modestly. You are sure he will not be home before midnight. You enter his room. You take three hundred and some odd francs.

"Henny comes back with her lover. Lieb, noticing the theft, suspects you, bursts into your room, and threatens, no doubt, to be judge and jury himself and execute his sentence with his fists.

"You, Timmerman, overcome by panic, leap at his throat. Perhaps you did not intend to kill him? No matter. He is nonetheless dead, and behold the three of you trembling before his corpse.

"It is child's play to take the body downstairs noiselessly, shut it up in his trunk, *with the stolen money, so that no one will think of petty thievery and hence of you*, and carry it to the Marne.

"Henny disappears at the same time and goes off to hide somewhere in Holland, to give the impression of an elopement.

"You, Mme. Timmerman, stand guard at the window to open the door from inside when your husband returns."

There was a scene. The man began to curse harshly in Dutch. The woman yelped in two languages. And meanwhile M. Froget went on writing in his ten-sous notebook:

"Proof: The Timmermans claim not to have seen Henny, who nevertheless carried off *all her belongings*, among them a large winter coat and several pairs of shoes. Now all she had of her own was a small suitcase. And the *family* trunks had been packed the day before and stood locked and roped.

"In other words, *she must inevitably have awakened her uncle and aunt to take her belongings out of the trunks.*

"They deny it. Then they have an important reason for wishing to seem ignorant of her *voluntary* departure.

"Presumptions: The murderer could not have worked alone — since someone must have opened the door to him from the inside when he returned. The Timmermans' room looks out on the Place de Paris.

"Timmerman, who carries two women on his shoulders while riding a bicycle, is capable of carrying a 100-kilo trunk on those shoulders.

"Lieb had been robbed before the murder, as is proved by the notes scattered in the trunk. They were put there only after the crime, to avert the notion of theft. And the Timmermans were habitual petty thieves.

"The Timmermans, who had just received their week's salary, still had only 75 francs the day after the crime because they had had to give money to Henny for her trip."

The notebook has the later entry:

"Timmerman tried to pass himself off as insane, received the benefit of the doubt, and at least saved his neck from the guillotine."

In the margin appears in red ink: "Crime of a frightened coward."

It is not often that we preface a story in EQMM with a biography of the author (or authors), but in this instance the literary backgrounds of Lillian Day and Norbert Lederer are too interesting to pass up. Here are 'tec tintypes of the two authors who, as collaborators, wrote MURDER IN TIME *(1936) and* DEATH COMES ON FRIDAY *(1937) and who now have written their first joint detective short story especially for readers of EQMM.*

Lady first: Lillian Day has written short stories for "Saturday Evening Post," "Red Book," "Liberty," "New Yorker," and many other magazines. In the "old" days she wrote "True Story" serials and conducted lovelorn columns for MacFadden's and Dell's. With Lyon Mearson she wrote a Broadway play that starred no less a personage of the stage and screen than Humphrey Bogart. Miss Day's Hollywood successes include a Columbia picture starring Melvyn Douglas and Irene Dunne, a Warner's Class-A based on one of Miss Day's "SEP" stories, and M.G.M.'s "The Youngest Profession" based on Miss Day's bestseller of the same name which, on the screen, paraded such stars as Virginia Weidler, Robert Taylor, William Powell, Greer Garson, Lana Turner, Walter Pidgeon, Edward Arnold, and others.

Norbert Lederer's background is different but equally interesting: Ph.D. in Chemistry and Forensic Medicine, Vienna and Paris Universities; Member of the Peace Conference, 1918–19; tournament director of the American Chess Federation; author of TROPICAL FISH AND THEIR CARE *(1934); author of articles on chess, music, and criminology. And one more biographical note of tremendous importance to all students of the genre: this fact, unknown even to the best-informed aficionados, has never previously been made public. EQMM is honored to reveal, for the first time in print, that Dr. Norbert Lederer was for some years — hold on to your hats! — the secret collaborator of S. S. Van Dine!*

DEAD HEAT

by LILLIAN DAY and NORBERT LEDERER

THIS FALL, Emily Dunbar made up her mind, she would get a new outfit that matched. Brand-new, not made over or dyed or retrimmed. A coat, a hat, and a dress — all new and to match. For weeks she had scarcely glanced at the front page of the paper in her eagerness to get to the ads. She read all the fashion news and she knew about the new pencil silhouette, and

the tailored-look, and the Autumn colors. Whenever she could get out she went window-shopping, and sometimes she went in and even inquired about prices. It seemed funny to see the windows filled with woolens and felt hats and furs when the sidewalks were steaming with the July heat.

And then he had to go and get sick.

Not that they didn't have plenty in the bank, but Andrew would use the doctor bill as an excuse. Whenever she wanted clothes, or something for the house, the insurance bill was due, or the income tax, or the interest on the mortgage. Something that was a number on paper, for which one paid and got nothing.

He always had money for his collections — his bugs and his pipes and his stamps. They were "investments." He could sell them at a profit. But he never did and he never would. The house was cluttered up with them. Dust collectors, she called them.

Twenty-one years now. Soon it wouldn't matter what she wore. She was forty-three and looked older. Maybe it was just as well they'd had no children. He wouldn't even let her have a dog. He was only interested in animals when they were dead — stuffed or soaked in formaldehyde. That collector's bottle on his desk always made her shudder.

She sat waiting for Dr. Gorman, staring at the place where her husband had sat, pouring over his collections, or drawing letters for type. Endless alphabets, endless ink-stains, endless dust. She had hated his back, the diagonal cross of his suspenders in winter, the ribbed undershirt in summer. She would throw the desk out with all its filthy contents — she would have the room painted, perhaps even papered . . .

The doctor came in from the bedroom.

"He had a close shave but he's all right now. At first I thought it was just his stomach again, but it's acute poisoning. Antimony."

"How did he get that?" she asked.

"Filings from the type. We've known cases in printers' shops. He must have eaten a sandwich with some of the dust on his fingers. A little more and it might have been serious. I suspected it right away, so I had an analysis made."

"Never would wash his hands before eating," she thought, but she said, "what shall I do?"

"Continue the powders every three hours and as much milk as he can take. He'll be thirsty all the time. Keep a thermos bottle of milk next to his bed at night. By the way, how are you feeling? Still get those headaches?"

"Yes. I need fresh air."

"You can leave him for an hour in the afternoon. You must take care of yourself. Keep on with the capsules and try to get some sleep."

After the doctor had left, Emily went into the bedroom. Andrew was lying with his eyes closed, but she knew he was not asleep. She went into the kitchen to get herself some lunch. She had just started to scramble eggs when she heard his voice:

"Where are you?"

She turned off the gas and hurried to him.

"Close that window, will you, and help me up. God, how my legs hurt. I —" He was seized with a fit of coughing. When it subsided he took a swallow of milk and she helped him up. While he was in the bathroom she straightened out his bed. He wanted the window closed for spite, it seemed. There hadn't been a breath of air coming in.

She helped him back to bed. "My legs," he groaned. "I'm going to put in a claim against the company."

"They can't help it if you're a pig and don't wash your hands before eating."

"Oh, shut up," he replied and shut his eyes.

She went to the kitchen and finished her lunch. Then she got her mending basket and sat down in the big chair in the livingroom. The afternoon was oppressive. He never would go away in summer, even for a weekend.

Her eyes strayed from her mending. Flowered wall paper, and light gray paint. A pair of love birds between the windows, and a plant or two. Modern light wood furniture, with no old-fashioned curlicues to collect dust. The lion's head and the swordfish would go, of course. The lion's head sitting on top of the ash can would look funny. It sure would startle the garbage man. She almost smiled.

And those horrible cases of dead butterflies and beetles. They might fetch some money. She would give the rugs to Mrs. Heyman, the super's wife, and get a plain gray carpet. Everything new at once, like the ads in the magazines. Even when they had been married they had started with other people's old things.

Each afternoon, while Andrew slept, Emily kept refurnishing the room. Mulberry carpet with blue draperies, or gray and yellow. The day she decided on red, she looked up and saw him standing in the doorway, a bare paunch protruding from his gaping pajamas.

"Are you deaf?" he asked. "I've been shouting my lungs out."

"What are you doing up?"

"I can't stand it — it's stifling in there. I'm going to sit up a while."

He took his place at the desk, his back toward her as it had been every evening and every Sunday for twenty-one years. He started rummaging around.

"Where the hell is that envelope? Looks as if you've been dusting again. Every time you start cleaning, I can't find anything. Leave my things alone. Oh, here it is."

She went on with her sewing.

"My back is sore from lying," he said.

"Should I rub it with liniment?"

"No."

She selected a sock to darn. When her needle was in it criss-cross he said, "I'm thirsty."

She brought him a glass of milk.

"I hate the sight of milk," he said.

Each day he sat up a little longer.

On Saturday the blue striped pajamas changed to green. He slept better now, calling her only a few times during the night. She liked sleeping in the living room. The couch was hard, but she could read late and move around.

Sunday the thermometer mounted steadily. He sat up most of the day and had some chicken broth for lunch. When she had straightened up the house, Emily sat and read the paper. He took the comics and the sports and the racing news, while she looked at the illustrations of tailored suits and berets, of underwear and hostess gowns. She had never had a hostess gown. The thing she wore over her nightgown she still called a "kimono."

The afternoon sun crept along the floor, showing up the torn spots in the rugs. "Those rugs are a disgrace," she said.

"What's the matter with them? They're all right."

And a little later she announced: "I think I'll get a permanent wave."

"Are you crazy?" was all he said.

About seven he went to bed. She wet her hair and combed it up and then brought his milk.

"What are you all dolled up for?"

"I've had this dress for five years."

"You going out?"

"No. Mrs. Heyman is coming up."

"What for?"

"She's going to show me how to cut a pattern," she said, as if making a confession.

"Tell her to get the hell out. I don't want any gabbing. I'm going to sleep."

At that moment the bell rang. "If you don't tell her I'll tell her myself." He lay back and closed his eyes.

She went to the door and stepped outside. There were a few moments of whispering.

"Come in and shut that door," he shouted.

She closed the door and went into the bedroom. He had his eyes closed, which meant he wanted no further discussion.

She stood at the living room window for a long time. The street noises were clear in the static air, and the heat lay on the pavements and between the buildings, like a dead thing. Like a dead weight. Like dead heat. Through open windows she saw people eating and fanning themselves and playing cards in all stages of undress. The city was gasping on the seventh day of a heat wave. She heard the sound of tired laughter, and saw a man handing his wife a drink. She pulled the shade down sharply. She felt like a child who was being shunted off to bed, while things were going on.

Andrew's snores came through the open door. She sat down in his chair at the desk. She sat a long time, looking at the wall.

Then she began rummaging amid the disorder of letters, clippings, type. There were bottles of Chinese ink, lampblack. Pencils. A compass, a ruler, long shears. The collector's bottle. Paper clips twisted out of shape, and a jar of crumbly library paste. And those daily racing sheets. He had never had the nerve to bet,

but he picked the horses every day, and gloated when he'd named a winner.

On the left side of the desk was a large wooden type-case filled with metal letters. Once she had turned it upside down and cleaned it, and put the type in order. And he had raised a rumpus about it. Funny, she remembered some of the names — Roman, Pica, Ruby. They stuck to her fingers. If it would only rain! — just a shower for relief. Thinking of the deadly heat, she picked out first an H, then an E, then an A, finally a T. She slipped them into her pocket. Then she got her handbag, took out a nailfile, and tiptoed into the kitchen.

Tuesday he was worse. His skin looked dark and his eyes were puffy. He complained of pains in his legs, and nausea, and his thirst tortured him. He stayed in bed all morning. In the afternoon she went for a walk, window-shopping. Wednesday he was able to sit up only an hour.

Thursday morning he was exhausted. He had had a bad night. He told her to phone Dr. Gorman.

After the examination the doctor looked worried.

"If his condition doesn't improve by tomorrow, I'd like to take him to the hospital. He must have taken more of the stuff than I'd realized."

After lunch she sat in her chair, listening to his dry cough and his retching. She was mending one of his socks. When it was half finished she took it off the darner and put it back in the basket. At dusk he called her.

"I'm parched," he said. "Get me some milk."

She brought it and stood at the foot of the bed, watching as he drank it greedily. He looked at her, dully, not seeing. Suddenly a look of terror came into his eyes, but he went on drinking a moment, as if by momentum, and then stopped and put the glass down.

"You — you — " he began.

"What's the matter?"

He coughed and sank back on the pillow, closing his eyes. She took the glass out and washed it. Then she went out to do some marketing.

When she returned and switched on the light in the living room, something disturbed her. There was a disarrangement of its previous disorder. The telephone: that was it. She was sure the telephone had been moved. She went into the bedroom. He was lying as she had left him.

"Have you been up?" she asked.

"No," he wheezed.

She knew he was lying. What had he been up to?

She prepared his thermos bottle and took it to him. The river, she thought. No one would dream of looking in the river for the missing letters. . . . He seemed to be watching her under his eyelids as she undressed. She knew he was suffering. His lips were moving. He was trying to tell her something. She bent over him to catch the hoarse whisper. Two words. She missed the first one, but the second one sounded like "heat."

"What about the heat?"

He shook his head and was seized by a fit of coughing. Then he closed his eyes and lay still.

She lay reading, and listening to his breathing, from the next room. She detected a rhythmic cycle, a gradual decrease in intensity followed by a cessation, and then the breathing would increase. She felt he was awake. Why didn't he call her?

Finally she dropped off into confused dreams. In the morning he was dead.

Emily had one of her headaches when she returned from the cemetery. The heat had finally been broken by a thundershower. She removed her wet clothes and put on an old house dress. She began by emptying out the hall closet — boxes filled with junk — he never destroyed a postal card or an old tie. These old ties would be all right for the super and those dust catchers — dust unto dust — death was the end — it doesn't hurt after death. If you don't enjoy life while you're here, you're a fool. New clothes and new friends and movies — maybe even a trip — she never knew just how much he had had — tomorrow the lawyer's office for the will — glad he paid the insurance. That moment they lowered the coffin — well, it had to happen sooner or later — had he suspected? So what. So much the better. Unless he had — but Dr. Gorman had signed the death certificate without question.

Her headache was getting worse. It had been a strain. A nice quiet cup of tea and a long hot bath, to relax. She put on the kettle and took a capsule for her headache. Then she sat down at the desk and began cleaning up recklessly, tearing up an accumulation of those hated racing sheets. Nobody to bawl her out now.

She noticed some broken glass in the wastebasket — and some white crumbling plaster. The collector's bottle. One large piece had been scraped from the inside with a knife. Cyanide, he had told her. . . . So *that's* what he had been up to! Of all the rotten —

She shuddered as she realized what might have happened. But he hadn't been quite smart enough. Where would he have put the poison if he had thought of it? In one of her capsules, of course. He'd known that sooner or later she would take one for her headaches. She'd have them analyzed, just to see, just to make sure.

She went over to the mantel to get the box — the mantel — suddenly her throat felt dry — she reached out but the mantel was too high — her knees were giving way — my God — He *had!*

She tried to reach the telephone as she slipped to the floor. Her mind was clear for an instant and she remembered the look on his face. At the last possible moment she remembered something else — the first word he had whispered to her — the word before "heat." Dead. That was it — dead. Dead heat. And now she understood: it would all end this way — in a dead heat.

THE BOW STREET RUNNER

In Volume 3, pages 982–984, of the Encyclopædia Britannica (Fourteenth Edition), an article on BOWS AND ARROWS *is followed by a note on* BOWTELL. *In Volume 24 (Atlas and Index), page Bour-Boye, the word* Bowsprit *is followed by* Bowstring. *In neither place is there an article, reference, or cross-reference to "Bow Street" or "Bow Street Runner." In other words, Bow Street and the Bow Street Runner are both conspicuous by their absence in the foremost work of reference in the English language.*

The Bow Street Runner was England's detective immediately prior to the founding in 1829 by Sir Robert Peel of London's first official police force. A 19th century writer has given us the following picture of Bow Street Runners: "In fiction as well as in reality . . . the 'Bow Street Runner' [was] popularly supposed to be a miracle of detective skill; though, indeed, at the beginning of the century, the establishment at Bow Street for the detection of crime was of a character that would have made a modern policeman smile. The business of inquiry, pursuit, and arrest of criminals, was conducted by a few 'officers,' not more than eight in number. Each of these, however, had, from practice and training, acquired skill, and was so trained in the peculiar school or system of Jonathan Wild, that he was equivalent to a host of constables. The 'Bow Street runner,' as he was called, was a name of terror to the burglar and thief, and their red waistcoats were familiar everywhere."

Charles Dickens describes two "officers from Bow Street" in OLIVER TWIST: *"The man who had knocked at the door was a stout personage of middle height, aged about fifty, with shiny black hair cropped pretty close, half whiskers, a round face, and sharp eyes. The other was a red-headed, bony man, in top-boots, with a rather ill-favoured countenance and a turned-up, sinister-looking nose." Their names were Blathers and Duff.*

Before the London "bobby" took over the English-speaking detectival role, Bow Street boasted three "divisions": The Horse-Patrole consisting of fifty-four men and six inspectors, all splendidly mounted and armed to the teeth with cutlass, pistols, and truncheon, who watched the innumerable high roads that converged on London, on the prowl for the daring, hard-riding highwaymen whose battle-cry to luckless travellers was "Stand and deliver!"; the oddly named Police Dismounted Horse-Patrole whose duty was to protect the roads lying between the beat of the Horse-Patrole and London itself; and finally, the Day Patrole consisting of only twenty-four

men and three inspectors who in 1821 were a mere roving body confined altogether within the city limits of London.

These three divisions constituted England's preventive *element to crime; to track down thieves and murderers* after *the fact the Bow Street authorities relied on the so-called "Runners." Surely these "Runners" from a street named because it was shaped like a bent bow deserve some mention in the Encyclopædia Britannica!*

The truth is, however, that the Bow Street Runner has barely survived either in factual or fictional writings. Howard Haycraft's MURDER FOR PLEASURE *fails to list "Bow Street Runners" in its index; the phrase is similarly missing in reference books by Carolyn Wells, H. Douglas Thomson, and other historians of note. The only important contemporary account of the Bow Street Runner is a 3-volume book titled* RICHMOND: OR, SCENES IN THE LIFE OF A BOW STREET OFFICER: DRAWN UP FROM HIS PRIVATE MEMORANDA, *London, 1827, published anonymously but attributed to Thomas Gaspey. In the yellow-back days Charles Martel (pseudonym of Thomas Delf) told some tales of Bolter, an ex-Bow Street Runner, in* THE DETECTIVE'S NOTE-BOOK, *London, 1860. Both these books are predominantly fictional, and both are exceedingly scarce. In the factual field, the best history is probably Percy Fitzgerald's 2-volume* CHRONICLES OF BOW STREET POLICE-OFFICE, *London, 1888.*

'Way back in the November 1942 issue of EQMM, we brought you Samuel Duff's remarkable story, "The Bow-Street Runner" (note the coincidence of the author's surname and that of Dickens's second character); and now we bring you Jeffery Farnol's "Footprints," about Mr. Jasper Shrig, a gentleman of the vernacular and of — Bow Street.

And somehow it is rather fitting that Jeffery Farnol, a famous champion of the sword-and-cloak school, a romanticist par excellence, should give us that uncommon tale of ferreting which springs from one of the least familiar periods in the history of detection — the romantic, swashbuckling, colorful days of Bow Street bloodhounding.

FOOTPRINTS

by JEFFERY FARNOL

MR. JASPER SHRIG of Bow Street, leaning back on the great, cushioned settle, stretched sturdy legs to the cheery fire and, having lighted his pipe, sipped his glass of the famous "One and Only" with a relish that brought a smile to his companion's comely visage.

"Pretty cozy, Jarsper, I think?"

"There ain't," sighed Mr. Shrig, glancing round about the trim, comfortable kitchen, "a cozier place in London, say England, say the universe, than this here old 'Gun' — thanks to you, Corporal Dick. You've only got an 'ook for an 'and but you're so 'andy wi' that 'ook, so oncommon 'andy that there ain't no word fur it, so Dick — your werry good 'ealth, pal!"

Corporal Richard Roe, late of the Grenadiers, flushed and, being a man somewhat slow of speech, muttered:

"Thankee, comrade," and thereafter sat gazing at the bright fire and caressing his neatly-trimmed right whisker with the gleaming steel hook that did duty for the hand lost at Waterloo.

"On sich con-wiwial occasions as this here," murmured Mr. Shrig, also gazing at the fire, "when I'm as you might say luxooriating in a pipe, a glass and the best o' pals and comrades, my mind nat'rally runs to corpses."

"Lord!" exclaimed the corporal, somewhat surprised. "Why so, Jarsper?"

"Because, Dick, in spite o' windictiveness in the shape o' bludgeons, knives, bullets, flat-irons and a occasional chimbley-pot, I'm werry far from being a corpse — yet. Fur vitch I'm dooly thankful. Now talkin' o' corpses, Dick."

"But Jarsper — I ain't."

"No, but you will, for I am, d'ye see. Now folks as have been 'took off' by wiolence or as you might say The Act, wictims o' Murder, Dick — with a capital M — said parties don't generally make pretty corpses, not as a rule — no."

"Which," said the corporal, "can't 'ardly be expected, Jarsper."

"But," continued Mr. Shrig, sucking at his pipe with very evident enjoyment, "contrairywise I 'ave never seen an 'andsomer, cleaner, nater ca-darver than Sir W. Glendale made — so smiling, so peaceful — and mind ye, Dick, with a knife, a ordinary butcher's knife druv clean into 'is buzzum, up to the werry grip, or as you might say 'andle. Smiling he was, Dick, as if 'e 'ad been 'took off' in the werry middle of a beepotiful dream . . .

" 'Twas the face of a man . . . as died . . . in his sleep . . . fast asleep!" mused Mr. Shrig. "Now why should a man sleep . . . so werry sound . . . ? You'll mind the case I think — eh, Dick?"

"For sure, Jarsper, the misfortunate gentleman was murdered about a year ago —"

"A year?" mused Mr. Shrig, pausing with toddy glass at his grim, cleanshaven lips. "Say nine months, say ten — stop a bit till I take a peep at my little reader." Setting down his glass he drew from the bosom of his neat, brass-buttoned coat a small, much-worn notebook whose closewritten pages he thumbed slowly over, murmuring hoarsely:

"D. E. F. G. . . . Griggs . . . Goreham, Grant — and 'ere we are — Glendale . . . Sir William . . .

Baronet . . . Murdered . . . June 1 . . . sitting at desk . . . Murderer — wanting!"

"Ay," nodded the corporal, leaning forward to touch the cheery fire with caressing poker, "'tis one o' them crimes as was never found out."

"And, Dick, your memory sarved you true — for the Act was commit — eggsackly a year ago this here werry night!"

"And I suppose it never will be found out now — eh, Jarsper?"

"Why, since you axes me so p'inted, Dick, I answers you, ready and prompt — oo knows? Hows'ever I'm a-vaiting werry patient."

"Ay, but wot for?"

"Another chance p'raps . . . dewelopments!"

"Jarsper, I don't quite twig you."

"Dick, I didn't expect as you would. Lookee now — there's murderers vich, if not took and 'topped' or, as you might say, scragged — as gets that owdacious, well, murder grows quite an 'abit wi' 'em and — wot's that?"

"Eh?" said the corporal, starting. "I didn't hear anything."

"Sounded like a dog whining somewheres," murmured Mr. Shrig, glancing vaguely about. "There 'tis again!"

"That's no dog, Jarsper!" muttered the corporal. "Somebody's ill or hurt — that's a child's voice or a woman's."

"No, Dick, that's the voice o' fear . . . terror, Dick — lad. Now, stand by, pal." Then soundlessly the corporal unbarred the door, drew it suddenly wide and with a slithering rustle, a vague shape swayed in and lay motionless at his feet.

"A woman, Jarsper!" said he in a hushed voice, stooping above this vague shape.

"Oh, dead, Dick?"

"Looks that way, Jarsper."

"Then in wi' her — so! Now shut the door — quick! Lock it, pal, and likewise bar it and shoot the bolts!"

"Lord love us, Jarsper!" whispered the corporal, ruffling his short curly hair with glittering hook, and staring at the lovely form outstretched upon the wide settle. "Anyway, she ain't dead, thank God!"

"No, Dick, she's only swounding."

"But what's to do now, Jarsper? What's the correct evolution? How to bring the lady round, comrade?"

"Cold vater applied outwardly is reckoned pretty good, Dick, but sperrits took innardly is better, I fancy. So get the rum, pal, or brandy — vich ever comes 'andiest — stop a bit, this'll do!" And reaching his own glass of the "One and Only" Mr. Shrig knelt beside the swooning girl whose face showed so pale beneath its heavy braids and coquettish ringlets of glossy, black hair, and tenderly raising this lovely head, he set the toddy to her lips — but, even then, she shuddered violently and, opening great, fearful eyes, recoiled so suddenly that the toddy-glass went flying.

"Dead!" she cried in awful, gasping voice, then checking the outcry upon her lips with visible effort she stared from Mr. Shrig upon his knees, to the towering, soldierly figure of Corporal Richard Roe, and wringing her slim,

gloveless hands, spoke in quick breathless fashion:

"I want . . . who . . . which is Jasper Shrig, the Bow Street officer? I . . . I want Mr. Shrig of Bow Street —"

"Ma'm," answered Mr. Shrig gently, "that werry identical same is now a-speaking."

"Yes," she cried, leaning toward him with a strange eagerness. "Yes . . . I see you are, now! You . . . oh, you surely must remember me?"

"Ay . . . by Goles . . . I surely . . . do!" nodded Mr. Shrig.

"I am Adela Glendale . . . a year ago I was suspected of . . . of —"

"Not by me, lady, never by me, ma'm."

"No, no, you believed in me then, thank God! You were my good friend — then! But tonight . . . Oh, Mr. Shrig — dear Jasper Shrig . . ." she cried and reaching out she clutched at him in frantic appeal.

"You believed in me then, you were kind to me then, you stood between me and shameful horror a year ago . . . Oh, be kind to me now, believe in me now . . . for tonight . . . it has happened again . . . horrible! Oh, God help me, it has happened again!"

"Eh? . . . Murder?" questioned Mr. Shrig in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes — yes . . . and the house full of guests! But he's dead . . . Uncle Gregory is dead — horrible! See — look at me!" And with swift, wild gesture she threw open the long mantle that shrouded her loveliness and showed her white satin gown — its bosom and shoulder blotched with a hideous stain. "Look! Look!" she gasped, staring down at these dreadful evidences in horror. "His blood . . . I'm foul of it . . . dear Uncle Gregory!"

Mr. Shrig surveyed these ghastly smears with eyes very bright and keen, his lips pursed as if about to whistle, though no sound came; then he drew the cloak about her.

"And now," said he when their visitor seemed more composed, "now Miss Adele, ma'm, s'pose you tell us all as you know."

"But what — what can I tell you?" she answered with a gesture of helplessness. "I only know that Uncle Gregory . . . dear Uncle Gregory is . . . horribly dead. Oh, Mr. Shrig, I shall never forget the awful —"

"There, there, my dear!" said Mr. Shrig, patting the quivering hand that clasped his so eagerly. "But you mentioned summat about guests."

"Yes, there were people to dinner, five or six . . . But —"

"Oo invited them?"

"My half-cousin Roger . . . but oh, when I think of how Uncle —"

"Any strangers among 'em — these guests, Miss Adele?"

"No, they were family friends . . . But Uncle Gregory had not been very well today and so soon as dinner was over, he excused himself and went to his room."

"Upstairs to bed, ma'm?"

"Not upstairs. He sleeps on the ground floor at the back of the house,

looking on to the garden."

"And 'e vas ill today, you tell me? Sick, eh?"

"Oh, no, no, it was only a touch of gout."

"Gout, eh? Now did 'e say anything to you afore 'e went to his room?"

"Yes, he told me he felt very drowsy and could hardly keep his eyes open."

"But gout, ma'm, don't make a man drowsy. Had Sir Gregory drank much wine at dinner?"

"Very little."

"And yet," murmured Mr. Shrig, staring down at the slender hand he was still patting gently, "and yet — so werry sleepy! Did he say anything more as you can call to mind now?"

"He ordered the butler to take his coffee to the bedroom, and told me he would come back later if the drowsiness passed off. . . . And those were his last words, Mr. Shrig, the very last words I shall ever hear him speak —"

"And now, ma'm, tell me o' poor Mr. Roger, your cousin."

"Half cousin, Mr. Shrig!" she corrected hastily. "Roger was poor Uncle William's step-son —"

"Bit of an inwalid, ain't 'e?"

"Roger is a paralytic, he can't walk and uses a wheeled chair, but surely you remember this, Mr. Shrig, you seemed to fancy his society very much a year ago . . . when —"

"A year ago this werry night, Miss Adele, ma'm!" said Mr. Shrig with ponderous nod. "And a parrylitick . . . to . . . be . . . sure! Instead o' legs — veels, and at his age too, poor, unfort'nate young gentleman!"

"Roger is older than you think, older than he looks . . . sometimes I think he never was young, and sometimes —" here she shuddered violently again and clasped the strong hand she held fast between her own. "Oh, Mr. Shrig," she gasped, "what . . . what can I do . . . Uncle Gregory . . . I left him . . . sitting there in his great elbow-chair beside the fire . . . so still and dreadful! Oh, tell me . . . what must I do?"

"First," answered Mr. Shrig gently, "tell me just 'ow you found him?"

"As soon as I could leave the company I stole away . . . I knocked softly on his door . . . I went in . . . the room was dark except for the fire, but I . . . could see him . . . sitting in his great chair. I thought him dozing so I crept up to settle him more cozily and . . . to kiss him. I slipped my arm about him, I . . . I kissed his white head . . . so lightly and . . . Oh God, he slipped . . . sideways and . . . I saw —!"

"Dick," murmured Mr. Shrig, clasping ready arm about that horror-shaken form, "the brandy!"

"No, no!" she gasped, "I'm not going to . . . swoon. Only help me, Mr. Shrig, be my friend for I . . . I'm afraid! I was the last to speak with him, the last to see him alive —"

"No, Miss Adele, ma'm, the last to see 'im alive was the man as killed him."

"Oh . . . friend!" she murmured. "My good, kind Jasper Shrig," and, viewing him through tears of grati-

tude, bowed her head against the shoulder of the neat, brass-buttoned coat and, with face thus hidden, spoke again, her voice ineffably tender: "But I'm afraid for — another also, Mr. Shrig."

"Ay, to be sure!" nodded Mr. Shrig, "Oo is 'e Miss Adele, ma'm?"

"John!" she murmured. "Mr. Winton — you remember him? He was Uncle Gregory's secretary. But, oh, Mr. Shrig, three days ago they quarreled! That is, Uncle was very angry with poor John and — discharged him because . . . John had dared to fall in love with me."

"Humph! And do you love said Mr. John, ma'm?"

"With all my poor heart. So you see if you're my friend and believe in me, you must be his friend too, for the danger threatening me threatens him also . . . there is a dreadful shadow over us —"

"But then, ma'm, a shadder's only a shadder — even if it do go on veels —"

"Oh, Mr. Shrig —"

"And 'ave you seen Mr. John since day of discharge?"

Here she was silent, staring down great-eyed at her fingers that twined and clasped each other so nervously, until at last Mr. Shrig laid his large firm hand upon them and questioned her again:

"Miss Adela, ma'm, if Shrig o' Bow Street, bap-tismal name, Jarsper, is to aid you and said Mr. John you must say eggsackly 'ow and also vereabouts you seen 'im this night."

"I . . . I thought I saw him . . . in the garden," she whispered.

"Didn't speak to 'im, then?"

"No, I was too distraught . . . sick with horror, I could only think of —" the faltering voice stopped suddenly as there came a loud, imperious knocking on the outer door.

"Now oo in the vide universe —"

"That must be John, now!" she cried, looking up with eyes bright and joyous. "I hope, I pray it is —"

"But 'ow should he come to the 'Gun,' if you didn't tell 'im as you —?"

"Oh, I bade Mary, my old nurse, tell him I'd run off to you . . . and, oh, please see if it is indeed John." So, at a nod from Mr. Shrig, away strode the corporal forthwith. Voices in the passage, a hurry of footsteps and in came a tall young man who, with no eyes and never a thought for anything on earth but the lovely creature who rose in such eager welcome, dropped his hat, was across the kitchen and had her in his arms, all in as many moments.

"My dear," he murmured, "oh, my dear, why did you run away? What new horror is this —?"

"John, tell me, tell me — why were you in the garden tonight?"

"Dear heart, for word with you. Roger wrote me he'd contrive us a meeting, like the good, generous friend I'm sure he is —"

"Oh, John," she wailed, clasping him as if to protect, "how blind, how blind you are!"

"And, Mr. Vinton, sir," murmured Mr. Shrig, pointing sinewy finger,

"your fob as was — ain't!" The young gentleman started, turned, clapped hand to fob-pocket and glanced from the speaker to Adele with an expression of sudden dismay.

"Gone!" he exclaimed. "The seal you gave me, dear heart."

"Ay, 'tis gone sure enough, sir," nodded Mr. Shrig. "The question is: how? and likewise where? And now, seeing as none of us ain't likely to tell, vot I says is — Corporal Dick, send out for a coach."

Pallid faces, voices that whispered awfully and became as awfully hushed when Mr. Shrig, opening the door of the fatal room, passed in, beckoning Corporal Dick to follow.

"Dick," said he, softly, "shut the door and lock it."

A stately chamber whose luxurious comfort was rendered cozier by the bright fire that flickered on the hearth with soft, cheery murmur; and before this fire a great, cushioned chair from which was thrust a limp arm that dangled helplessly with a drooping hand whose long, curving fingers seemed to grope at the deep carpet.

"So, there it is, pal!" quoth Mr. Shrig briskly. "Let's see vot it's got to tell us."

And crossing to the chair he stooped to peer down at that which sprawled so grotesquely.

The big corporal, who had faced unmoved the horrors of Waterloo, blenched at the thing in the chair which death had smitten in such gruesome fashion amid the comfort of this luxurious room.

"Oh — ecod, Jarsper!" he whispered.

"Ay," nodded Mr. Shrig, bending yet closer, "'e's pretty considerable dead, I never see a deader, no! And yet, in spite o' the gore, 'e looks werry surprisin' peaceful . . . werry remarkably so! . . . Killed by a downward stab above the collar-bone, lookee, in the properest place for it. A knife or, say a dagger and same wanished . . . eh, where are ye, Dick?"

"Comrade," exclaimed the corporal in sudden excitement, "will ye step over here to the winder?"

"Eh . . . the vinder?" murmured Mr. Shrig, his keen gaze roving from the figure in the chair to the gleaming moisture beneath it, to those helpless fingers and the shining object they seemed to grasp at, to the small table nearby with open book, the box of cigars, the delicate Sevres cup and saucer. "Eh . . . the vinder? Why so?"

"It's . . . open, Jarsper!"

"Oh?" murmured Mr. Shrig, his roving gaze fixed at last. "Is it? Look thereabouts and y'may see summat of a dagger, pal, or say, a knife —"

"Why, Jarsper . . . Lord love me, here it is!"

"Werry good, bring it over and let's take a peep at it . . . Ah, a ordinary butcher's knife, eh, Dick? Vally about a bob — say, eighteen pence. Has it been viped?"

"No, comrade, it's blooded to the grip —"

"That cup and saucer now?" mused Mr. Shrig. "Half full o' coffee . . . vot's that got to tell us?" Saying

which, he took up the dainty cup, sniffed at it, tasted its contents and stood beaming down at the fire, his rosy face more benevolent than usual. Then from one of his many pockets he drew a small phial into which he decanted a little of the coffee.

"What now, Jarsper?"

"Why, Dick, I'll tell ye, pat and plain. There's coffee in this vorld of all sorts, this, that and t'other and this is that. And Dick, old pal, the only thing as flummoxes me now is veels."

"Wheels?" repeated the corporal. "Jarsper, I don't twig."

"Vell, no, Dick; no, it aren't to be expected. But you've noticed so werry much already, come and take another peep at our cadaver. Now, vot d'ye see, pal?"

"Very remarkable bloody, Jarsper."

"True! And vot more?"

"The pore old gentleman 'ad begun to smoke a cigar — there it lays now, again' the fender."

"Eh, cigar?" exclaimed Mr. Shrig, starting. "Now dog bite me if I 'adn't missed that. There 'tis sure enough and there . . . by Goles . . . there's the ash — look, Dicky lad, look — vot d'ye make o' that, now?"

"Why, Jarsper, I makes it no more than — ash."

"Ay, so it is, Dick, and werry good ash, too! Blow my dicky if I don't think it's the best bit of ash as ever I see!" Here indeed Mr. Shrig became so extremely attracted by this small pile of fallen cigar-ash that he plumped down upon his knees before it, much as if in adoration thereof and was still lost in contemplation of it when the corporal uttered a sharp exclamation and grasping his companion by the shoulder turned him about and pointed with gleaming hook:

"Lord, comrade — oh Jarsper!" said he in groaning voice. "See — yonder! There's evidence to hang any man, look there!" And he pointed to a small, shining object that twinkled just beneath the grasping fingers of that dangling, dead hand. "Mr. John's . . . Mr. Winton's seal!"

"Oh, ar!" murmured Mr. Shrig, his gaze roving back to the cigar-ash. "I've been a-vonderin' 'ow it got there, ever since I see it, Dick, so eggsackly under corpse's daddle."

"Why, Jarsper, he must ha' snatched it, accidental-like, in his struggle for life and, being dead, dropped it."

"Lord love ye, Dick!" exclaimed Mr. Shrig, beaming up affectionately into the corporal's troubled face. "Now I never thought o' that. You're gettin' as 'andy with your 'ead as your 'ook! Deceased being alive, snatched it and, being dead, naturally drops it. Good! So now s'pose you pick it up and we takes a peep at it."

"It's his'n, Jarsper, and no mistake," sighed the corporal. "See, here's a J. and a W. and here, round the edge: 'To John from Adele.' So, God help the poor sweet creetur, I says!"

"Amen, Dick, vith all my heart. So the case is pretty clear, eh?"

"A precious sight too clear, comrade."

"Couldn't be plainer, eh, pal?"

"No how, comrade."

"Then, Dick lad, the vord is — march! No — stop a bit — the window. Open? Yes. And werry easy to climb. But this here bolt now . . . this latch . . . pretty solid — von't do! But that 'ook o' yourn's solider, I reckon, and you're precious strong, so — wrench it off."

"Eh? Break it, Jarsper?"

"Ar! Off with it, pal! Ha — so, and off she comes! By Goles, you're stronger than I thought."

"Ay, but Jarsper, why break the winder lock?"

"Hist — mum's the vord, Dick — so march it is and lively, pal."

In the hall they were stayed by one who goggled at Mr. Shrig from pale, plump face, bowed, rubbed nervous hands and spoke in quavering voice:

"A dreadful business, sirs, oh —"

"Werry true!" nodded Mr. Shrig. "You're the butler, ain't you? Is your master about, I mean your noo master?"

"Mr. Roger is . . . is in the library, sir. This way, if you please."

For a long moment after the door had closed, Mr. Roger Glendale sat behind his desk utterly still, viewing Mr. Shrig with his dreamy yet watchful eyes.

"So, Shrig, we meet again?" he said at length. "Our last meeting was —"

"A year ago this werry night, sir!"

"A strange coincidence, Shrig, and a very terrible one. By heaven, there seems to be some curse upon this house, some horrible fate that dogs us Glendales!"

"Werry much so indeed, sir!" nodded Mr. Shrig, his voice sounded so hearty as to be almost jovial.

"And 'ow do you find yourself these days, Mr. Roger, pretty bobbish I 'opes, sir?"

Mr. Roger blenched, throwing up a white, well-cared-for hand:

" 'Bobbish'! A hideous word and most inappropriate as regards myself for —" the sleepy eyes glared suddenly, the pale cheek flushed, the delicate fingers became a knotted fist. "I am the same breathing Impotence! The same useless, helpless Thing!"

"I shouldn't eggsackly call ye 'useless,' sir, nor go so fur as to name ye ' 'elpless,' not me — no!"

"Then you'd be a fool, for I'm a log! I'm Death-in-Life, a living corpse, live brain in dead body — look at me!"

"And yet," demurred Mr. Shrig, "you're astonishin' spry with your fambles, sir, your 'ands, Mr. Rogers, or as you might say, your daddles!"

Mr. Rogers glanced at the white, shapely hands in question and flickered their fingers delicately.

"Well, Shrig, my cousin, Miss Adele, forestalled me in summoning you, it seems, but you have seen . . . you have looked into this new horror that has smitten us Glendales?"

"Vith both peepers, sir!"

"Well, speak out, man! Have you discovered any trace of the assassin? Formed any conclusions?"

"Oceans, sir!" nodded Mr. Shrig. "The ass-assin is as good as took! Ye see the fax is all too plain, sir! First,

the open vinder. Second, by said vinder, the fatal veppin — 'ere it is!" and from a capacious pocket he drew an ugly bundle and, unwinding its stained folds, laid the knife before his questioner.

"Very horrid!" said Mr. Roger in hushed accents, viewing the dreadful thing with a very evident disgust. "Anything more, Shrig?"

"Sir, me and my comrade, Corporal Richard Roe, found all as was to be found — this! Number three! A clincher!"

And beside that murderous knife he laid the gold seal, beholding which Mr. Roger started in sudden agitation, took it up, stared at it and, dropping it upon the desk, covered his eyes with his two hands.

"Aha, you reckernize it, eh, sir?" asked Mr. Shrig, thrusting it back into his pocket, and wrapping up the knife again. "Yes, I see as you know it, eh, Mr. Rogers?"

"Beyond all doubt . . . to my sorrow! And you found it . . . near . . . the body?"

"Beneath its werry fingers, sir, looked as if it had fell out of its dyin' grasp. Pretty con-clusive, I think. And now sir, 'aving dooly noted and brought along everything in the natur' of evidence, I'll be toddling — no, stop a bit — the cup!"

"Cup, Shrig? Pray, what cup?"

"The coffee-cup used by deceased."

"Why trouble to take that?"

"Well," answered Mr. Shrig dubiously, "I don't 'ardly know except for the fact as 'twere used by deceased aforesaid and might come in as evidence."

"How so, Shrig? Evidence of what?"

"Well," answered Mr. Shrig, more dubiously than ever, "I don't 'ardly know that either, but I'd better take it along. Ye see, sir, there's some coffee in it as they might like to examine."

"But my poor uncle was stabbed, not poisoned."

"No more 'e wasn't!" nodded Mr. Shrig. "And I ought to get my report in sharp. And if the said cup should be wanted I can fetch it tomorrow."

"You locked the door, Shrig?"

"Seein' as the key was a-missin', I did not, sir, but I've took all as is needful and vot I've left ain't a-goin' to run away, no, 'twill stay nice an' quiet till the undertaker —"

"Good night!" said Mr. Roger, ringing the bell at his elbow.

"Sir, good night!" answered Mr. Shrig, and, turning at the opening of the door, he and Corporal Dick followed the pallid butler, who presently let them out into a pitch-black night, whereupon Mr. Shrig became imbued with a sudden fierce energy:

"Now Dick — at the double!"

"Eh, but Jarsper what . . . where —"

"Run!" hissed Mr. Shrig, and seizing his companion's arm, he broke into a heavy, though silent trot. . . . In among shadowy trees, across smooth, dim lawns along winding paths to a terrace whence a row of windows glinted down at them; which he counted in breathless whisper:

"Number five should be it. . . .

At Number five she is! After me, pal!" And speaking, he opened this fifth window and clambered through with surprising agility. "Eh — back again?" whispered the corporal, glancing at the great chair before the dying fire. "What now, comrade?"

"The bed, Dick, it's big enough to hide us both, and — sharp's the vord!" The heavy curtains of the huge somber four-poster rustled and were still, a cinder fell tinkling to the hearth and then came the corporal's hoarse whisper:

"What are we waiting for, Jarsper?"

"The murderer."

"Lord!" . . . A distant clock chimed the hour.

Silence, for the great house was very still; the clock chimed the quarter, the dying fire chinked, this room of death grew slowly darker; the clock chimed the half-hour. . . . A faint, faint rattle at the door and into the room crept a sound of soft movement with another sound very strange to hear — a crunching rustle that stole across the carpet towards the hearth; a moving, shapeless blot against the feeble fire-glow, a faint tinkle of china and then a voice sudden and harsh and loud:

"In the King's name!" A leap of quick feet, a whirl of sudden movement, a flurry of desperate strife, an inhuman laugh of chuckling triumph, and then Mr. Shrig's gasping voice:

"Ecod, Dick, he's done us! Catch that arm . . . no good! I'm diddled again, by Goles, I am! Get the candles a-goin' — sharp!"

"Lord love us!" gasped Corporal Dick, the lighted candle wavering in his grasp, "Mr. Roger!"

"Ay — but look — look at 'im!"

Roger Glendale lolled in his wheeled chair, his eyes fixed upon the speaker in awful glare, his lips upcurling from white teeth . . . and from these writhen lips issued a wheezing chuckle.

"Right, Shrig . . . you were right . . . I'm not . . . not so helpless . . . as I seemed. I was Master of Life . . . and Death. I'm . . . master still! I'm . . . away, Shrig, away . . . And so . . . Good night!" The proud head swayed aslant, drooped forward — the shapely hands fluttered and were still, and Corporal Dick, setting down the candle, wiped moist brow, staring with horrified eyes.

"Love us all!" he whispered, "Dead — eh?"

"As any nail, Dick! Pizen, d'ye see?"

"Comrade, how . . . how did ye know him for the killer?"

" 'Twas very simple, Dick — in that bit o' cigar-ash as you p'inted out to me, I see the track of a veel, his footprints, so to speak, and — there ye are, pal!"

"Why then . . . what now, comrade?"

"Now, Dick, get back to them as is a-vaitin' so werry patient in the coach and tell 'em as Jarsper says the shadder, being only a shadder, is vanished out o' their lives and the sun is rose and a-shinin' for 'em and so — let all be revelry and j'y!"

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF WILLIAM MACHARG

William MacHarg, author of THE AFFAIRS OF O'MALLEY *(1940), is also co-author with Edwin Balmer of* THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF LUTHER TRANT *(1910), one of the most important books of detective shorts in the history of the genre. Luther Trant, 'way back in 1910, was the first storybook sleuth to adopt truly scientific psychology as a method of crime detection, including the earliest fictional use of that fabulous machine, the lie-detector.*

As late as 1944 your Editor possessed only a fair-to-middling copy of THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF LUTHER TRANT. *Since the book is a keystone in any collection of detective shorts, we yearned for an immaculate copy, known to the trade as "mint" — with the blind-decorated red cloth in its pristine hue and even more important, with the white spine-lettering unflaked. The book marts of the entire country, however, offered only inferior copies. So, one day in 1944, we sat down and wrote to Mr. MacHarg, on the theory that one of the authors would be most likely to own an extra copy in the desired brilliant condition. Here is Mr. MacHarg's reply, in part: "I have only one copy of* THE ACHIEVEMENTS, *and your copy cannot well be in worse condition than mine. The publishers, having no copy of the book themselves, borrowed mine some years ago when they were considering bringing out another edition, kept it for several years, and finally returned it in bad condition."*

It is strange how many authors fail to keep copies, especially first editions, of their own work. Many years ago we needed a copy of Gelett Burgess's THE MASTER OF MYSTERIES, *about detective Astrogon Kerby (Astro the Seer), published anonymously in 1912. We telephoned Mr. Burgess, taking for granted that the author could lend us a copy of his own book. To our surprise, Mr. Burgess himself was desperately seeking a copy. And during his last visit to the United States, John Dickson Carr confessed that he had virtually no copies of his many books and asked us, on our own bookhunts, to pick up any and all first editions of John Dickson Carr and/or Carter Dickson and forward them to England. And they say authors are vain and egocentric!*

Getting back to William MacHarg, it is startling to realize the remarkable span of his contribution to the detective short story. Co-author of a key book in 1910, he is still writing significant shorts today; a trail-blazer thirty-six years ago, he is still producing the tough, terse, prose-lean O'Malley yarns, conceived and executed with a realistic simplicity unmatched in the whole variegated field of the contemporary detective story.

NO CLUES

by WILLIAM MACHARG

"We got a murdered girl," O'Malley said, "and that's all we know about it. They don't know who she is or where she come from or who bumped her off; they can't find out. She was found in a vacant warehouse near the river, and she don't look like any girl that would be found in no place like that. Well, I don't think they'll ever learn a thing about it. You might remember the case."

"I remember something in the papers a month ago," I told him, "but I've seen nothing since."

"Because there wasn't nothing more to say about it. They worked on it but they're where they started."

We went and looked at her. She was rather pretty and seemed in her late twenties. In her icy casket, in which police procedure preserves unidentified murder victims while waiting to learn who they are, she looked as if she were asleep. Her hands were marked where someone had stripped off her rings. We saw the officer in charge.

"You going to work on this?" he asked O'Malley.

"I guess I got to."

"You've got a lifework, detective."

"Yeah? Well, then I'll get a pension."

We examined her clothes. They were good — neither expensive nor inexpensive. The labels had been taken out of them. The laundry marks had been cut out of her underthings. A cleaner's mark had been cut out of her gloves. The linings had been cut out of her shoes.

"The guy did a full-time job against getting her identified," the officer remarked to us.

"How was she killed?" I asked.

They showed me. She had been struck on the back of the head. The weapon perhaps had been a hammer.

"Anything to work from, O'Malley?" I inquired.

"I don't see a thing."

We went to the warehouse. It hadn't been used for a long time. Most of the windows were broken and the floors were covered with rubbish. The big front doors were locked but a smaller door stood open. It was near the river and, not far away, tall office buildings looked down on it. The girl had been found in a small inner room and only chance had led to the discovery; some boys had found her, hidden under rubbish.

We searched the place carefully, but it had been searched twenty times before and nothing had been found. We didn't find anything.

"Not much to be made of this, O'Malley," I observed.

"Do you expect me to make anything? Smarter guys than me have been working on this, and they come out where they went in. The kid wasn't killed here; they didn't find

blood enough. She was killed and got brought here afterward — it might be in a boat, but I think it was a car. A man killed her; a woman couldn't have hit her that hard a blow.

"My idea is she come from out of town. There ain't no girl like that reported missing and in a month she'd ought to have been missed. If she come from out of town she had some baggage. Well, where is it? All places where she might have left it have been checked, and they checked all hotels. Wherever she come from, she didn't leave nobody behind that expected to hear from her, or in a month we'd ought to have had some inquiry. It might be the killer had all them things fixed."

"However that was," I replied, "he was clever enough to leave no trace to tell you who, or what, or where he is. It seems to me he's safe."

"Sure he would be if he thought he was."

I thought that over. "That sounds rather metaphysical, O'Malley."

"Whatever *that* is! Anyway, we know some things about the guy."

"Yes? What?"

"He knew about this warehouse and that she might not be found for quite a while; it was just luck them kids found her. It's pretty sure he brought her here in a car, so probably he owns one; and we know he's worrying for fear he might get caught."

"You can't be sure of that last," I said. "He may not be the kind to worry."

"Yeah, sure he is. He done too many things to hide who she was. A guy that does that many things ain't ever sure if he done 'em right, or if he done enough; so he keeps worrying."

We went back to police headquarters.

I saw O'Malley every day for the next week, and he said he was working on the case, but I couldn't see that he was doing anything. However, the case came back into the newspapers. The police were again questioning all the people they had questioned before, and the papers said new evidence was being discovered; they had found a witness who saw a car parked at the warehouse the night the girl was killed, and they hoped to identify the car. There were other items almost every day. The end of the week I met O'Malley on the street.

"You seem to be making progress on that case," I said.

"We ain't moved a step."

"You're holding out on me," I complained indignantly. "I know you don't like to talk about a case while you're working on it, because you think the fewer people who know what's going on the better. I'm used to that. But you say you've got nothing on this case and the newspapers have had a lot about it."

"I guess they have."

"The papers say the police found an imprint on the girl's leg made by the rubber mat on the floor of a car, which shows that she was put into a car right after she was killed."

"You seen the dead kid. Did you see any pattern?"

"No," I admitted, "I missed it."

"You'd ought not to believe all you read in them papers. I got a tip now that might turn out something. A guy came to headquarters and complained that a man in a car had been following his wife on the street. I thought I'd see him."

"Do you think that has anything to do with the murder?" I asked.

"It might."

We saw the man at his office. His name was Stelling. He was a good-looking, dark-haired fellow and was employed by an importing company. He described a man who had trailed his wife repeatedly on the street — a heavy-built, blond man in a green sedan.

"Did you see the guy yourself?" O'Malley asked him.

"If I had I wouldn't be coming to the police about it; I'd take care of him myself. My wife described him to me."

"We'll see if we can spot him."

"I wish you would. As I told them at police headquarters, I'm nervous about it because of that murder. My wife thinks this fellow makes a practice of following women, and a woman might be murdered just that way. Was the car in that case a green sedan?"

"I don't know what kind of car."

"Probably," Stelling said, "the floor-mats in several thousand cars would have the same pattern. Is the pattern that you found distinctive?"

"I didn't see no pattern."

"You dumb cops don't know much," Stelling declared disgustedly. "The public has plenty of reason to be worried. Apparently a girl can be killed in this town without anything being done."

"I guess a smart guy wouldn't be a cop," O'Malley told him.

"That guy's got a nice office," he remarked as we were descending in the elevator. "You notice the view out of his window?"

I hadn't.

"I guess we'll see his wife."

Mrs. Stelling was a quite beautiful girl in her early twenties. She seemed surprised that her husband had been to the police and asked how he had described the man. She declared she couldn't add anything to the description. I thought she had been given a bad fright; she seemed nervous and worried. But I couldn't believe that her experience shed any light on the murder and I told O'Malley so after we had left her.

"Well, maybe not," he said. "I guess I worked enough today and it's time to quit. I'll let you know if anything turns up."

He phoned me the next day and picked me up. We drove to a police garage. They had a car there, but it wasn't a green sedan; it was a small gray car with a rumble seat, and fingerprint men and other headquarters men were going over it.

"Do you suspect this of being the murder car?" I asked.

"We think it might be."

There was no floor-mat in the rumble and there were small dark

spots on the cushions. One of the men poured some liquid from a little vial onto the cushion and where the liquid touched the spots it turned to bluish-green.

"Blood, okay," he stated.

We went to headquarters and O'Malley went into the inspector's room and I waited. After a while a couple of plain-clothes cops came in, and Stelling was with them, laughing and joking, and they went into the inspector's room. They had left the door a little open and I went and peeked in. Stelling was sitting facing several cops and he wasn't laughing any more.

Then one of the cops came behind him, carrying the dead girl's clothes, and threw them up over his head so that they fell into his lap; and he stared at them and then leaped away from them and shrieked and put his face into his hands. Then someone closed the door.

I waited a long while until O'Malley came out.

"What's this about Stelling?" I demanded.

"Why, he killed that kid."

"He did? Who was she?"

"She was his wife."

"But," I declared, "we met his wife."

"Yeah, one of 'em. This was another."

"I don't understand this case," I said.

"Well, Stelling married that dead dame when he was living in Detroit. She'd come there from somewheres else. He got tired of her and deserted her and come to New York and she didn't know where he was. He met that other dame in the Bronx and got married to her. Then somebody that had known him in Detroit happened to meet him here and told the kid in Detroit. She got his business address some way and she wrote him. She said she was coming here.

"He wrote and tried to keep her off, but he couldn't do it; she insisted she was coming and Stelling couldn't see no way out of it. Finally he come to the idea that his only way out was murder. The kid in Detroit put her trunk and what few things she had in storage, and she come here with no baggage but a suitcase. There wasn't nobody in Detroit likely to make inquiries about her. Stelling met her at the train with his car and they drove around till night, talking things over.

"I don't know if you noticed at that apartment building in the Bronx a row of little garages for the use of the tenants; Stelling used one of 'em. When it was late enough so that he knew there'd be nobody around he drove there with her. He killed her in the garage. He took everything off her that he thought might get her identified and put her into the rumble seat of his car. He knew about that warehouse and that nobody hardly ever went into it. So he took her down there and left her. Then he went back and buried her suitcase and the hammer he killed her with and her rings under the floor of the garage; and he went home to his other wife.

"He figured that when she got found nobody would ever learn who she was, and he pretty near got away with it."

"So that was how it was!" I commented. "Apparently Stelling gave himself away to you, but I can't see just why he did it, or how."

"Why, it was a tough case. Most always you can't find out who killed somebody without you know who it is that got killed; this time we had to do it. I told you before what kind of guy I thought done this crime. He propably hadn't ever done no other murder, and he figured this one all out before he done it, to get rid of everything that afterward could point to him. He was the kind of guy that would even make a list of them things and cross 'em off. Well, a guy that does things that way is afterward always worrying for fear he might have left something out; he keeps thinking of some other thing he might have done and is afraid he ain't done enough.

"That ain't his danger; his danger is he'll do too much and point himself out, but he don't know that. Whoever killed that kid had had a month of worrying. I seen that if he just sat still and done nothing he was safe. So I figured to make him worry some more and maybe do something. I seen the newspaper boys that cover headquarters and asked them would they print whatever stories I give 'em on the case and ask no questions; they asked their editors and then said they would. So then I give out them stories. We figured the dead kid had been taken to that warehouse in a car; so I give out the story that we'd found a witness that had seen the car. Of course we hadn't found no witness.

"I give out other stories. I give out that one about the print of a floor-mat on the dead kid's leg; you seen the kid, you know there wasn't no print there. But the killer wasn't sure there wasn't; he knew there might be. And I passed word around to all the station-houses that if somebody come in, no matter why, and talked about the murder, they was to find out who they were and let me know. Well, several people made mention of the murder and I checked 'em up and found they couldn't have had nothing to do with it. Then Stelling come in. He'd read them stories in the papers and he'd worried until he had to do something. He come in and complained about a guy following his wife; he'd fixed up a complaint that would make it seem natural for him to speak about the murder. I was sure of that after I'd seen him.

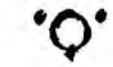
"He wasn't really interested in his story about some guy following his wife, but he was interested in how much us cops had found out about the murder; and out of his office window the guy could see that warehouse. Then I seen Mrs. Stelling in the Bronx. She didn't know her husband had been to the police. Of course no guy had followed her. She did know by how Stelling had been acting that something was wrong with him; she didn't know what. So she was in a

spot when we asked her about some guy following her.

"When I seen she was afraid to talk for fear of getting her husband into trouble, I knew we had to get hold of Stelling's car. Some cops picked Stelling up at the same time they got the car. He'd taken the floor-mat out of the rumble, after the story come out in the papers, and cut the mat in little pieces and scattered 'em in waste-cans. He didn't see that having no floor-mat itself was evidence against him. And we found blood on the cushions. And when they threw the dead kid's clothes in his lap he broke and confessed."

"It seems rather miraculous," I reflected. "You had only the murdered girl, and you made the killer show himself to you among six million people and tell you who it was that he had killed."

"Why, we outthought the guy. You maybe think it's miraculous that us cops done that, with no more than what we got to do our thinking with."



THIRD-PRIZE WINNER : Q. PATRICK

In his discussion of Ellery Queen in MURDER FOR PLEASURE *(1941), Howard Haycraft wrote: "There is even, it is reliably reported, soon to be an 'Ellery Queen, Jr.,' who may conceivably remove the hoodoo that has always hovered over boy detectives." Mr. Haycraft was not misinformed; since he made that announcement there have been three Ellery Queen, Jr. juveniles —* THE BLACK DOG MYSTERY *(1941),* THE GOLDEN EAGLE MYSTERY *(1942) and* THE GREEN TURTLE MYSTERY *(1944) — and a fourth,* THE RED CHIPMUNK MYSTERY, *will probably be published this year. The boy detective is Djuna, the lad-of-all-work who made his début in* THE ROMAN HAT MYSTERY *(1929) as "an Admirable Crichton of a new species." Whether Djuna, as Master Manhunter, broke the jinx Mr. Haycraft referred to is best left to the judgment of our Jr. readers.*

Mr. Haycraft's critical opinion of boy detectives en masse is only partly justified. True, most juvenile sleuths, both boys and girls, have not set the Hudson on fire in the United States, or the Thames in England; yet there are some who deserve kinder words. Surely Barney Cook, the boy bloodhound of Harvey J. O'Higgins's THE ADVENTURES OF DETECTIVE BARNEY *(1915), is a worthy American standard-bearer; and Eddie Parks, the Newsboy Detective of George Ade's* BANG! BANG! *(1928) has his amusing moments parodying the Dime Novel (and Horatio Alger) opera. And young Philip John Davenant hardly brings shame to the English teen-'tec in Lord Frederic Hamilton's six books about P. J. (1915–1923).*

No, the boy-and-girl detectives are not half as bad as they are painted. Maurice Leblanc created a topnotch schoolboy sleuth in Isidore Beautrelet who almost out-Lupins the great Arsène in THE HOLLOW NEEDLE *(1910); and in* THE SECRET TOMB *(1923), an obscure Leblanc work, there is a charming and clever girl investigator named Dorothy. There are others too who merit closer study. How many of you know that as early as 1910 Harper & Brothers published an anthology of manhunting minors? It is titled* THE YOUNG DETECTIVES *and historically at least, it is an important book — probably the first specialized anthology of detective-crime short stories to appear in America.*

But coming right up to date on the subject of cub criminologists and damsel detectives, we can offer no more cogent testimony to their growing excellence than to cite Craig Rice's wonderful book, HOME SWEET HOMICIDE *(1944), in which the three Carstairs children — Archie aged 10, April*

aged 13, and Dinah aged 15 — romp hilariously through murder and mayhem, out-policing the police as only the youngest generation, whippersnappers or not, can do. But then Mr. Haycraft voiced his pessimism three years before Craig Rice solved the juvenile delinquency problem of the modern detective story.

All of which brings us to another author who is strangely preoccupied with children-and-crime. Q. Patrick (alias Patrick Quentin, alias Jonathan Stagge) has written some extraordinary short stories dealing with scion psychology. His brilliant "Portrait of a Murderer," which first appeared in "Harper's Magazine," issue of April 1942, and was reprinted in your Editor's anthology, ROGUES' GALLERY *(1945), is the story of an English schoolboy — a nondescript lad with light, untidy hair and quick brown eyes — who at the tender age of fourteen was already a potential murderer; adolescent Martin Slater planned and executed the cruel, calculated murder of his father during an otherwise happy holiday at home. It is a tale no fancier of the macabre is likely to forget.*

For EQMM's first short-story contest, Q. Patrick fashioned another variation in detection, but this time the child — Beverly Braun, only eleven years old — is the key witness for the prosecution. Her story is the crucial testimony in a murder case and she tells it in her very own words — exactly what she saw and overheard that fateful night when uncle Joe was shot dead. Q. Patrick's tour de force — there is no other phrase for it: in an entirely different way it is as brilliant a study in child psychology as the authors' other boy-and-girl detective stories — won a third-prize in EQMM's contest, along with Craig Rice's "Goodbye, Goodbye!" (published last month) and Ngaio Marsh's "I Can Find My Way Out" (to appear in the next issue of EQMM) and Michael Innes's "Lesson in Anatomy" (scheduled for later this year). And like the other prizewinners, "Witness for the Prosecution" will not fade quickly from your memory.

WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION

by Q. PATRICK

MY NAME is Beverly Braun. Im eleven years old. Mummie says I must always say Im eight cos mummie is only twenty seven. She has been twenty seven almost as long as I can remember. When I ask if people dont grow one year older every birthday she laughs. She says artists dont Beverly. When they get to thirty they start going back wards. So I suppose

mummie got to thirty three years ago. I dont mind cos I like haveing a young and pretty mummie. I get lots of uncles and they give me things.

And one of my uncles was shot dead the other day.

Mister Pratt who is a very nice policeman told me I would have to talk to a judge soon. And that is why Im writeing this all down. In case I dont remember everything when I talk to the judge.

I better begin at the beginning. When daddy went away to be a soljier we were very poor and mummie and I lived in a tiny apartment in New York with Anna. Anna is kind of a servant although she isent a servant cos she eats meals with us and shes a Sweed. Shes awful old and she nursed daddy when he was a baby in Sweeden. She dosent smell very nice. When daddy went away he said youll look after them wont you Anna. And she cried a lot and said wild horses wouldent drag her away from her precious darlings.

And so there was Anna all the time and always scolding mummie about my uncles and for spoiling me saying I was far to knowing for my age. Which seems like a good thing to me cos no one can know to much.

Mummie is a singer and she sings lovely. She looks like an angle when she sings. She dident use to sing when daddy was home but after he went and we were poor she said to Anna Id better start in again and make some money. And Anna said no dont you can have all my money.

But mummie did any how.

At least she tried to and uncle Frank tried for her. Uncle Frank knows all about the places where people sing. But it wasent any good and I heard uncle Frank say to mummie honey you just arent corny enough. And mummie cried a bit and uncle Frank said he would lend her 100 dollars. But mummie said no shed rather take it from any one but him. I dont understand this. Uncle Frank is a friend of daddys and he wanted to marry mummie before she married daddy. He is very nice and not stern like daddy is.

And when I was alone with uncle Frank I started to cry a bit to. I told him I dident get enough to eat. So he gave me five dollars and told me not to tell mummie about it but to buy her a chicken or some candy with it. And I bought a little ring with a green stone in it which the man in the store said was a real emerald. I was going to give it to mummie but it was to small for her. So I dident tell her or Anna about it. I just kept it in my most secret hiding place with my green necklace which I sort of found once and a gold compact which one of mummies friends gave me once. At least I think she was going to give it me. There was another one in her bag. And I figgered she couldent use two very well.

And so we went on being very poor. I had to wear my best dress to school on weekdays and I dident have any best dress at all. Then one day uncle Frank came to take mummie and me to the movies. And I cried and said I

couldent go in my dirty old dress. And next day uncle Frank sent me two new dresses. Mummie scolded me about it at first and then laughed and said you have takeing ways darling. And Anna frowned and said like mother like daughter.

And then one day mummie got a telegram to say that daddy was missing and probably dead. It was a Sunday morning. Mummie and I were in bed when Anna brought in the telegram. And Anna was crying. Then mummie started to cry so I thought I better cry to. But I couldent cry very much cos if daddy was dead mummie could marry uncle Frank and I would be a bridesmaid at the wedding. Besides daddy wasent kind to me and once he wipped me cos I borrowed a watch from a girl at school. She said I wasent going to give it back to her. Which was silly cos the watch dident even work. But daddy wipped me with a hairbrush and the bristly side to. And he said if I ever borrowed anything else hed send me to a reform school for ten years. And mummie came in and said if you lay a hand on Beverly Ill leave you. And he said you get the hell out of here or Ill take the brush to you. But he couldent cos it was broken. And mummie dident leave him although I hoped she would.

And so to cheer mummie up after the telegram I said never mind you can marry uncle Frank now. And she said what an awful thing to say. And I cant marry for a year any how. Well just have to go on being poor unless I can get a job.

And Anna said I was a wicked child to be so hartless about the best father that ever breathed.

We were very poor then. But it was fun cos I had lots of uncles and parties and movies. And I dident have to rite letters to daddy every week cos there was no place to send them to. So instead I wrote stories which I like writeing much better. And I hid them in my secret place. And my uncles offen brought me candy and things. And when Anna was out mummie sometimes let me stay up till after eleven. And once I had some wine called sham pain but I dident like it much and it gave me a prickly feeling in my nose.

It was uncle Joe who brought the sham pain and he was the oldest uncle I ever had. He was bald and had a mushtash which was almost white. And I dident like him much. But mummie said I was to be very polite to him cos he owned some theaters and he was going to pay her a lot to sing in one of them.

And one nite after I was in bed I heard them talking very loud and they were talking about me. So I went and listened a bit. And I heard uncle Joe say yull have to send the kid away to school. And mummie said Beverly goes with me or I wont go to your old Philadelphia. And uncle Joe said well if you think the work is such a disgrace I dont see why you want the kid hanging around. And mummie said pray god she wont know what kind of work it is. Nor Anna either. And he said well you wanted work dident

you and you wouldent want to waste that figure. And then he used a word Id never heard about what mummie was going to do in his theater. And he said it was no disgrace. But art.

I cant remember the word now. But I looked it up in a dictionery. It meant to mock or mimick. So I knew mummie was going to mock or mimick in Philadelphia. And she thought it some sort of disgrace and prayed god I wouldent know about it.

We went to Philadelphia right away. Uncle Joe had got an apartment for us in a great big building near a square where there were lots of children and sailors. It wasent a very big apartment and there were only two bedrooms. But it was very sumptious in chairs and tables and the kitchen was very white and shiny. But it really wasent big enough for uncle Joe to cos he said yull have to squeeze me in when Im in Philadelphia. And mummie started to get colds a lot then and I had to sleep in Annas room so as not to catch them. I dident like that much cos of Annas funny smell. And she was always talking about daddy and what he did when he was a little boy.

Mummie wouldent talk at all about her work so Anna and I had a secret plan. Anna was going to ask mummie what theater she was working at. Then we were going to buy tickets and sit in the very front row and clap very loud when mummie mocked and mimicked. And then we were going to send her some flowers so everyone would think she was the best mocker and mimicker in the whole world. And the evening she was going to work for the first time Anna said that shed like to hear her sing. And we were eating strawberries. Mummie put her fork down and went very white. And she must have guessed our secret plan cos she said dont you dare come near the theater Anna and if you let Beverly come Ill never speak to you again as long as I live. And she got up without eating any of her berries. And Anna said I could have them.

Mummie worked every night except Sunday and sometimes in the afternoon. She must have been awful clever at mocking and mimicking cos we were ever so much richer than we had been in New York. I had real cream with my sereal every day and there were lots of flowers in the house. And mummie must have made lots of new friends cos the telephone was always ringing. It was mostly men and they asked for Trixie.

At first I used to say there wasent anyone called Trixie there cos mummies name is Dorothy. Then I asked Anna about it and she said it was mummies stage name probably. But mummie said we were never to talk to anyone on the phone except uncle Joe or maybe uncle Frank when he called which was nearly every day.

And I had a new pair of shoes with sort of shiny buckles on them and mummie gave me a necklace for my eleventh birth day which might be real pearls if they werent quite so pink. And it was on my eleventh birthday when we met uncle Joe in the street.

Anna and I had gone out to buy a special chicken for dinner and we saw uncle Joe coming out of a jewel shop. He was smiling a lot and he called to Anna and said look at what Ive just bought for a certain little lady. And he pulled a box from his pocket and showed her the most beautiful bracelet of diamonds and real emeralds Ive ever seen. They must have been real cos there was one like it in the window. It cost 500 dollars.

And when uncle Joe saw I was staring at his bracelet he said no peeking little lady. Then he put the box back in his right pocket. He said he was coming to dinner and he wanted to have some of the goolash which Anna makes so well. But Anna said he couldent have goolash cos it was my birthday treat and I had chosen chicken.

I was so excited about the bracelet which uncle Joe had bought for me that I couldent think of anything else except that uncle Joe was the kindest uncle in the world. The bracelet would just go with my ring and I wouldent have to hide it the way I have to hide my ring. I wore my very best dress with white fur on the edges. And Anna spent almost an hour curling my hair and putting pink on my fingernails. There was a cake with eleven candels on it which was going to be a surprise for me. Though I knew all about it any how. But I dident mind much cos I was only thinking about the bracelet.

Uncle Joe came rather late and he seemed sort of funny and talked very loud. He gave me a kiss which smelt funny. Then he said heres a birthday present for a good girl. It was a very big package. I thought he had wrapped up the bracelet so as to make it more fun opening lots of boxes.

I went away all by myself to open the package so I could take a long time and give myself a sort of extra surprise as each box got smaller. But there werent a lot of boxes at all. There was just one box with a silly doll in it. A big fat doll with horrid stringy hair and blue eyes that dident even shut when she lay down. And no underwear.

Surely uncle Joe knew that a grown up girl of eleven dident want a silly doll. I cried a little by myself. And I hated uncle Joe cos he had almost promised me the bracelet from what he said to Anna out side the store in the morning.

Then I started to think how the bracelet almost was like my own and how I wanted to look at it just once more. And there was nothing wrong in that. I remembered uncle Joe had put it in his right pocket so I made a plan. I went into the room where mummie and uncle Joe were drinking and laughing and I climbed on to his knee. And I kissed him and said thank you for the doll which I hated really. And he said so you like your dolly do you.

And while I was hugging him I slipped my hand in to his right pocket where the bracelet was. And he dident notice anything.

I ran out in to the bedroom and opened the package by myself and

there it was my beautiful bracelet with real emeralds. I put it on and the diamonds sparkled like stars. Then mummie called me to dinner and I hid the bracelet in my secret place. There was chicken and ice cream and the cake for dinner. But I dident even eat very much. I just wanted to go back and look at my bracelet.

After dinner uncle Joe said poor mummie ought to have a birthday present to. Then he winked at me and said maybe if shed shut her eyes shed have a surprise. Then he put his hand in his pocket while mummie kept her eyes closed.

But of course his pocket was empty.

Uncle Joe swore like anything. Then he ran out into the hall and looked in his overcoat. But the bracelet wasent there either. And Anna and I helped him look every where in the apartment. Then he said dam it I just have dropped it in the taxi and there goes 500 smackers. So he called up the taxi or someone but they dident help much. And suddenly he said no it couldent have been in the taxi cos the package was in his pocket when he rang the bell of the apartment cos he felt it there.

Then I saw mummie was looking at me in a funny way. She made me go out alone with her into the kitchen. She said Beverly did you steal uncle Joes package. And I said no I dident steal the bracelet. And I dident really steal it. I only just borrowed it to look at again. And mummie said sort of sadly how did you know it was a bracelet if you dident take it. Yud better run and look through your things and see or else I will have to come and look through them for you.

And I was a bit scared then cos if mummie went through my things she might find my secret place. So I went in to my room and I got out the bracelet. It looked lovely. But I put it back in the box. Then I hid it under my skirt and I went back in to the living room.

I was going to put it under the couch so it would look like it fell out of uncle Joes pocket. But he saw me and ran across the room and snatched the box. And he said you theeving little rat. You took it I knew you did. And he hit me in the face very hard. Then mummie came rushing in and said dont lay a finger on the child. And uncle Joe swore a lot. Then he said Beverly ought to go to prison or to boarding school and by golly shes going before shes a day older.

Then Anna came in and saw me crying. And she picked me up and swore at uncle Joe partly in Sweedish and said it was all the wages of sin.

She took me in to the bedroom and brought me another piece of cake which I couldent eat cos there was candel greese all over it. And she said poor baby you like pretty things dont you. Well you shall have my broch which is the only jewelry I have. And she gave me an ugly old broch which she brought over from Sweeden with her. It had an o nix in it which Anna said is a sort of precious stone. Though it isent really. And she said I could sleep in her bed if I was unhappy. And

I said no thank you Anna I think Im getting a cold and yud better not catch it.

Later on mummie came in to kiss me goodnite. She must have made friends with uncle Joe cos she was waring the bracelet. She looked pretty as an angle and she said poor baby it was your birthday and you dident have any real treet. And I said my bestest treet would be to wear the bracelet just for tonite. So mummie laughed and slipped it off saying alright just for one nite. But you must never take anything that doesent belong to you again. Never never.

And I promised.

After mummie had kissed me goodnite and cried a little more I gave Anna back her old broch. And Anna let me keep on the lite til almost 12 oclock and we talked about all the pretty clothes and jewelry I was going to have when I grew up. And Anna said daddys mummie who was my grandmother in Sweeden had some lovely jewels and she was very pretty and I was just like her.

That was the week before uncle Joe was shot dead. But first of all uncle Frank came down to stay in Philadelphia. He lived in a hotel just near and we had a lot of fun the first day or two though he whispered a lot to Anna and they had a secret which I dident know.

And one nite he came in late before mummie was back from work. I heard him say to Anna good god its worse than I thought. I saw her and weve got to stop it. And when mummie came in I pretended I was going to the bathroom. But really I went and listened a bit. And I heard uncle Frank saying Ill kill Joe Pinker for this. He ought to be ashamed and him with a wife and three kids in the Bronx. And mummie said well its a job and he got it for me and you couldent get me one. And uncle Frank got very mad and said if you call it a job taking all your clothes off in front of people. And mummie said she dident take off all her clothes and it was singing mostly. And he said a little goes a long way or something. Mummie must have been crying cos uncle Frank said dont cry Dot you can always marry me and Ill love you in any case. And mummie said she couldent marry him cos daddy wasent properly dead yet. And uncle Frank said hed stick around any how.

And then Anna came spying on me and made me go back to bed. So I asked her why mummie took off her clothes in front of people. She said hush child and go to sleep.

And next day the misterious thing happened. It was the day before uncle Joe was shot dead. Mummie was out to a rehersal or something. Anna and I were eating lunch in the kitchen when the bell rang. Anna went to the door and dident come back for a long time. When I went to look for her she wasent there or anywhere. And I was sort of scared in case it was a burglar or something. And I looked out of the window. And down in the street on a corner I saw Anna. But she hadent got a hat or coat on.

She was talking to an old man with

white hair who Id never seen before. Then after a bit she threw her arms around him and kissed him and he kissed her. And when she came back home she was singing like anything and ever so happy.

I said Anna I believe you got a sweat hart cos I saw you kissing him on the corner. And she said yes hes my old sweat hart come back to his Anna. So I said will you marry him and go away from me. And she said never never darling and she squeezed me so tight something started to creak.

Then she told me that if I was a good girl she would take me to see her sweat hart in his hotel that afternoon. But it was to be a surprise and I musent tell mummie. So I promised.

And before we went she brushed my hair for a long time very hard and she wouldent let me ware the pink pearls mummie gave me or any jewelry. And she took all the red off my fingernails cos she said her friend was sort of old fashioned and dident like makeup on young girls.

Then she told me I was to be very careful not to say anything about her friend looking old or funny cos he had been ill for a long time.

Then we went out into a very crowded street to a little hotel which smelt nasty and then up in to a room which smelt nasty to. And there was Annas old man sitting by the window. He jumped up when we came in and took me in his arms saying so this is my own darling little Beverly. And I couldent stop him kissing me though I struggled a bit.

When he put me down he said arent you glad to see your poor old daddy. But I laughed and said you arent my daddy. My daddy was young and hansome with black hair and lots of white teeth. But he kept saying he was my daddy although his teeth were sort of black and they werent all there. And Anna said he is your daddy and the Japs were very crool to him in prison and that's why he isent young any more.

And I was very polite and said isent it funny that daddy looks older and mummie looks younger all the time. And the man who said he was my daddy asked me how would you like to go away with me and Anna baby. And I said if mummie comes to.

Then he started asking me all sorts of questions about mummie and uncle Joe. And he got very stern. And Anna kept saying things to him in Sweedish which I dident understand. And he was mad about something cos he dident kiss me when we left. But he said he was coming to see mummie after dinner tonite but not to tell her cos it was a surprise. And then he said some more to Anna in Sweedish and after that we said goodby.

And Anna cried a bit when I said I dident like my old new daddy much. And she shook her head and said theres murder in his hart and I for one dont blame him if he does. And I asked her what she meant. But she shook her head again and said we must think up some way to stop this. So before we went home she went to uncle Franks hotel. But I dont know

what she said to him cos she left me in the lobby. And a kind old gentleman saw me there and said well little girl youre a bit young to be alone in a hotel lobby. And I smiled at him very politely and he gave me an ice cream cone.

It was all awful misterious. I dident know if my daddy who was sort of dead really was this old daddy who had come back. And I dident know what Anna meant by murder in his hart. But I knew what murder is cos Ive seen it lots of times in the movies. And I like murder movies best.

But everything seemed alright that evening. Anna cooked a speshially good dinner and mummie looked lovely in her black dress with the bracelet on. Uncle Joe came to dinner and we had sham pain. But Anna wouldent take any. And she shut her mouth kind of tite when uncle Joe tried to make her.

And then after dinner when mummie went to put on her things to go to the theater the bell rang. I went to the door with Anna and uncle Frank was there. He was all panting. And he said good god Anna hes got a gun and I cant get it from him and hell be up here any minute and all hell will brake lose. And Anna said what shall we do.

Then she looked at me and said Beverly do you want your daddy to go to prison again. And I said well I suppose not.

Then Anna whispered to uncle Frank and he took 5 dollars from his pocket. And Anna said he would give it to me if I would do something for her and uncle Frank.

And I said what is it. And she said do you know what a gun is cos your daddy has got one in his pocket. And I said proudly of course I know what a gun is and I know how to use one cos Ive seen it in the movies. Then she said they would give me 5 dollars if I took the gun from my daddys pocket the same way I took the bracelet from uncle Joe. And I would never never be wipped or punished for it.

And I said I would try.

So I waited outside in the hall with uncle Frank until daddy came up the stairs. And when I saw him I put up my arms and said hello daddy. But he dident kiss me or speak to me. He just started talking very fast to uncle Frank. And I remembered how I used to go through my daddys pockets when I was a little girl looking for presents and things. So I pretended to be a little girl and I said have you got a present for me daddy. Then I put my hands in his pocket and there was the gun. It was quite a little one and not a bit heavy. Daddy dident seem to notice me taking it cos he was still talking so fast to uncle Frank.

Then daddy pushed past me into the apartment with his hat on. And I ran to the kitchen and gave Anna the gun. She said thank god for that. And put it in the kitchen drawer of the table with sort of a shiver. And as she shut the drawer I saw someone standing by the door watching her. But I couldent see very well who it was.

Then Anna gave me the 5 dollars and told me to go in to our bedroom and not to come out until I was told to.

So I went in to the bedroom. But I opened the door a little bit so I could hear things. And I heard daddy go stomping into the living room and there were loud voices. Then mummie screamed and said George I thought you were dead, I swear it. And then I heard a bump and uncle Franks voice said leave him to me George. Then there was another bump and mummie screamed again. And then Anna went rushing in from the kitchen and said youve killed him George. We must get a doctor.

And after a bit I saw uncle Frank and Anna carrying uncle Joe into mummies bedroom. And there was blood on his face and he was all kind of limp.

Then they went back into the living room and started to talk all at once. And I tiptoed out into mummies room to look at uncle Joe cos Id never seen anyone dead not even in the movies.

But he wasent dead at all. When he saw me he sat up and started to swear at me. And he said its you you theeving little bastard. Well Im going to have you put in prison along with your mother and the rest of them. Then he tried to sit up on the bed and he looked real scarey with the blood all over his face.

So I ran away.

And as I told mister Pratt the policeman I dont know what happened after that. But there was an awful bang. Then uncle Frank came running up to me. He picked me up in his arms and gave me to Anna saying get the kid out of here before the police come. George has shot him.

Then he took some keys from his pocket and gave them to Anna saying quick take her over to my room at the hotel. Shell be alright there and Ill come over later.

So Anna and I went to uncle Franks hotel. And Anna left me there. It was a lovely big room and there were lots of little bottles which smelt almost as nice as mummies perfumes. And I tried most of them. It was quite fun.

And after a while uncle Frank came in alone and he looked a bit stern for him. He said Beverly theres been a terrible accident and your uncle Joe has been shot dead. And I said oh.

Then he told me that a policeman was coming to talk to me and ask me some questions. And I was to be very careful and tell the truth cos the police thought daddy had done it. But daddy said he hadent.

Then uncle Frank went out and came back with mister Pratt. He is a very nice policeman and quite young like Dick Tracy. And he shook hands very politely with me. Then he said youre quite a girl arent you and that was a fine brave thing you did taking your fathers gun from him. So I suppose Anna or uncle Frank told him about it.

Then he asked me lots of questions about how I was getting along at school and how I liked uncle Joe and which room I slept in. Then I told him all about mummies having colds and how uncle Joe and uncle Frank loved mummie and wanted to marry her. When I saw uncle Frank looking a bit

cross I said quickly that uncle Frank was much kinder than uncle Joe and loved mummie ever so much more. And mister Pratt said hum hum.

Then he turned to uncle Frank and said if only George Braun had shot him in the heat of a quarel there isent a jury in the world that would send him to prison. And as it is he probably wont get more than a year or so being a war hero and all that.

Then mister Pratt asked me if anyone had been in the kitchen when Anna put the gun in the drawer. And I said there was someone standing by the door but I wasent sure who it was. And he said if it was your daddy that would make it a sinch. And I said I would try to remember who it was.

Then he said thats right try to remember all you can and well have another chat tomorrow. So thats why I am writeing this down so I can remember everything.

And after uncle Frank and mister Pratt had gone Anna came in to sleep with me. But I wasent a bit sleepy. So I made Anna tell me all about what had happened and what the police were going to do.

She told me that they were holding daddy at the police station cos he had said he was in the bathroom when the shot was fired and they dident believe him. And daddy swore he dident do it. He said he dident even know that the gun was gone from his pocket or that it was hidden in the kitchen drawer.

And Anna said that mummie and uncle Frank were in the living room together when the shot was fired. So that gave them something funny which sounded like Ali Baba and which meant that they couldent have done it.

And I asked her where were you Anna. And she looked kind of funny and said I was at the telephone calling a doctor when the gun went off. So I asked her why the police dident think she done it cos she knew where the gun was and she hated uncle Joe any how and wanted him to be dead.

And she said maybe they would accuse her of killing him. And she prayed god she could suffer instead of my daddy who had suffered enough and she was only a old woman any how. And she would be glad to go to the electric chair for her George.

And then I told her mister Pratt said daddy would probably only get a year in prison if he did it. And one year wouldent be so bad for him cos hes sort of used to being in prison any how. And Anna said that was a crool way for a daughter to speak.

So I said it isent crool Anna cos if you shot uncle Joe yud be sent to the electric chair. And so would uncle Frank or mummie if they did it wouldent they. And she said yes I suppose so but your mummie and uncle Frank had an Ali Baba any how. Then she looked sort of sad and said probably their Ali Baba wouldent do them any good cos the police know now that uncle Frank was in love with your mummie.

So I said well isent it better for daddy to spend one more year in prison than for anyone else to have to

go to the electric chair.

But she said to go to sleep.

But I dident go to sleep for hours and hours. I started thinking how mummie or Anna or uncle Frank might be sent to the electric chair. And how awful that would be. And I thought if daddy did it and went to prison for a while mummie could divorse him and marry uncle Frank. Then she wouldent have to take off her clothes in front of people or mock or mimick any more. And I could be bridesmaid at the wedding. And perhaps mummie would give me the bracelet cos she wouldent want to ware it any more now that uncle Joe was dead.

And I thought how glad I was uncle Joe was dead and how scared Id been that he would tell daddy about my borrowing the bracelet. For daddy would have wipped me and sent me to reform school as I knew. But if daddy was in prison for a bit he couldent make me go away to school and uncle Frank and mummie wouldent make me never never.

So I made a secret plan and went to sleep.

And next day mister Pratt came to see me with an old man who was my daddys lawyer or something. And mister Pratt asked me if Id remembered who it was standing by the kitchen door when Anna put the gun in the drawer. I said no I havent remembered who it was but I do remember it was someone with white hair cos I remember seeing white hair as he turned away.

And mister Pratt looked at the lawyer and said that clinshes it cos George Braun was the only one with white hair.

Then the lawyer asked me lots of questions. And I told him how Id seen uncle Joe lying on mummies bed befor the shot was fired. And I said that he was swearing and trying to get up. And the lawyer was very excited and said to mister Pratt Ill get Braun to confess and claim self defense and he probably will get off very light indeed.

Then they both thanked me very politely and said I was a good girl. And I was to tell the judge everything very truthfully just as I had told them. And I was to try and remember everything I could. So I have been remembering everything and that is why Ive written it all down so as to tell the judge.

But I shant tell the judge about the bracelet and the silly doll. I shant tell the judge what I did after uncle Joe swore at me in mummies bedroom and scared me so by saying hed have me sent to prison.

I shant tell him that I went into the kitchen and got the gun out of the drawer and then went back to mummies room through the bath room. And I shant tell him that I opened the door a crack and pointed the gun at uncle Joe and then pulled the little thing the way they do in the movies. Or that I dropped the gun and ran back to my room when I heard them coming.

It would be silly to tell the judge all that because they all think daddy did it and daddy will only get a year

or maybe two in prison. But if they knew it was me who shot uncle Joe they might send me to the electric chair.

And I wouldent like that.

— A simple child,
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death?
— WORDSWORTH

To date we have published seven case histories of the Department of Dead Ends, written by Roy Vickers, the contemporary master of the "inverted" detective story. With the appearance of the eighth — "The Case of the Honest Murderer" — we think the time has come to tell you some personal things about the author . . .

Those who knew Roy Vickers well found it hard to believe that he was not sacked from Oxford (we are quoting, of course, from Mr. Vickers's own reminiscences). As a matter of historical fact, Mr. Vickers left Oxford voluntarily, convinced that wealth and fame were waiting for him as an author. Luckily for the budding writer he was eating at the Middle Temple (whatever that means!). For two shillings the Middle Temple gave Mr. Vickers a dinner of three ample courses and virtually unlimited wine (oh, frabjous days before the war!); and at mid-day Mr. Vickers could order a healthy whack of bread and cheese for a mere threepence. The major problem, of course, was the two and threepence.

For two years Mr. Vickers wrote steadily and did not receive a single typewritten rejection slip — they were printed forms every time. Yet each day he required two and threepence for meals alone. So, between scribblings, Mr. Vickers functioned as a salesman. He handled insurance, cigarettes, houses, typewriters, time-recorders (whatever they are!), and stationery. At the end of two years he took stock: his literary output totaled one novel, five short stories, twenty articles, and a five-act drama in blank verse — all unborn so far as life-in-print was concerned. There was no blinking the fact that as a creative writer Mr. Vickers, in his first two years of effort, had failed to set the Thames on fire. He decided to strike out on a new line — he became a "ghost" writer.

(End of Installment One. To Be Continued in the Preface to Mr. Vickers's Next Story. Watch for Further Adventures in the Life and Times of an English Crimeteer!)

In the meantime, read the story of Tellman Prue and the murder in a cowshed . . .

THE CASE OF THE HONEST MURDERER

by ROY VICKERS

At one time the name of Tellman Prue was a symbol in England. If you said you were "waiting for a Tellman Prue," you meant that you had put your name on the waiting list for a flat, in London or one of the

bigger provincial cities, built by Tellman Prue — in the financial as opposed to the architectural sense.

At twenty, Prue was earning a doubtful three pounds a week as a commercial traveller. At thirty-eight, when he was manipulating millions, he was living on about seven thousand pounds a year when he could have lived on ten times that amount if he had been a greedy fool.

He was not a fool nor even a humbug — for he rarely told a lie until he had first convinced himself that it was the truth. Anyhow, he is the only forger and financial trickster in the history of crime who paid every creditor in full — the only murderer who believed that he could "get away with murder" not by corrupting the jury, but by convincing them that he had acted from the loftiest motives. He conducted his own defense, which amounted to a demand for a vote of thanks. Between sentence and execution he wrote an autobiography, including a truthful account of his forgeries and his murder, believing to the last that one had only to understand him to forgive him.

We can most profitably pick him up on the morning of April 4th, 1935, a Monday, when he entered his office as usual at ten o'clock and told his secretary that he wished to see his clerk, Brigstock.

"Mr. Brigstock isn't here yet, Mr. Prue."

"Isn't he? That's very funny! I've never known him late before. Well, send him in as soon as he arrives."

Those who remember that he murdered Brigstock on Saturday, April 2nd, might think that this indicated competence as an actor. But that is to ignore his abnormal power of deceiving himself. By the time he was saying that he was surprised at Brigstock's nonappearance, he really *was* surprised.

A branch manager of Parr's Bank called in person, and again Prue was surprised — indeed he passed through progressive stages of surprise and consternation as the bank manager explained:

"It's about that loan for twenty thousand, Mr. Prue, for which you deposited Bologna Bearer Bonds. You read about that bank hold-up in Rome last week? It included a parcel of Bologna Bonds."

"Really! How does that affect my loan?"

"On Saturday morning, Mr. Prue, *The Times* published the numbers of the missing bonds. The series is the same as — as yours. We submitted your bonds to expert scrutiny on Saturday afternoon —"

"*And they are forgeries?*" It was a correctly horrified whisper. But Prue actually felt horror. His hand trembled as he spoke to his secretary on the house telephone and demanded Mr. Brigstock. "If you can't make contact with him by 'phone, send a boy in a taxi to his private address. Unless he is dangerously ill he must come back with the boy."

"Brigstock, if I remember rightly," said the bank manager, to bridge an

awkward silence, "handed the bonds to me personally."

"Excuse me. I can think of nothing until I have straightened my account with you." Prue rang the Central Bank, and asked for the manager by name.

"I want to write a check for twenty thousand this morning. That parcel of Chilterns will be sufficient cover, won't it? Thanks."

Prue wrote the check and handed it to the manager, who had no doubt that Prue was an innocent victim of someone else's forgery. They discussed procedure with Prue's solicitor, who advised Prue that, whatever Brigstock might have to say when he arrived, it would do no harm to call in Scotland Yard at once. The bank would, of course, release the bonds as soon as Prue's check was cleared — which meant almost at once.

In due course, Scotland Yard discovered that Brigstock had left his flat in Clapham on Saturday evening but had not returned.

"When did you last see Brigstock, Mr. Prue?"

"To answer precisely, at a few minutes to midnight on Saturday at the corner of his road in Clapham. I had driven him there myself from my house in Hampstead. He was my confidential clerk and would often come to my house when there were arrears of detail to be cleared up." Mr. Prue was unable to supply a photograph of Brigstock.

There were few questions, for the case seemed clear. The original, genuine Bologna Bonds had passed through the firm of Tellman Prue. Brigstock had free access to them over a period of seven months — time enough to have them copied by a forger. The original Bonds, after being sold by Tellman Prue, had eventually drifted back to Italy. Their theft by bank robbers and the subsequent publication of their numbers in *The Times* on Saturday morning had made it clear to Brigstock that his forgery was about to be discovered. So he had absconded. On Tuesday evening his description was broadcast by the B.B.C., with the usual suggestion that he might be suffering from a lapse of memory.

On the following Saturday morning there were two more surprises for which Tellman Prue had not prepared himself. The first was when his secretary announced that Mrs. Brigstock was in the outer offices and wanted to see him. Brigstock had never mentioned that he was married, even when he had whined for a rise in salary.

The second surprise was when the woman was shown in — a shabby but moderately attractive woman of about his own age.

"Good heavens! You're Rose Marples, aren't you?"

"I was, Mr. Prue. Fancy you remembering after all these years!" Her self-esteem was stimulated and her smile was good to see, though it soon vanished. "I mustn't take up your time, Mr. Prue. Will you please tell me what's really happened to Frank? There've been detectives

about our place — and it's all nonsense about his having lost his memory as they said on the radio. He wasn't that sort." She added: "Has he stolen something and bolted?"

"I don't know."

"Meaning he has. It's a funny thing — he must have been leading a double life, because he never had any money to spare in ours. That'll mean your firm doesn't owe him any salary, not even for the week."

"We don't need to look at it that way," said Prue. "Frank — your husband — is a most — er — esteemed assistant —"

"Well, I'd better own up to you he wasn't my husband. My real husband — heaven knows where he is! — left me after a few months, and I was working in a Lyons until about five years ago when I ran across Frank. Mother thinks my husband's dead and that Frank and I are married. Mr. Prue, he always tried to keep it from me that he was working for you, but of course I found out. It seemed queer to me. Because it was kind of you to give him a job when he couldn't find work."

It was not kindness that had prompted Prue to employ Brigstock, but a subtle cruelty, of which Prue would not let himself be aware. Both were sons of small farmers in Stainham, some thirty miles out of London. Each had lost his father in the Boer war. Each was an only son: to each widow had been left just enough for the boys to attend the County Secondary school instead of becoming laborers.

During boyhood they were close friends by tradition, not by choice. Prue was too indolent to apply his cleverness consistently to school subjects and could barely keep pace with the pedestrian Brigstock, a fact which Brigstock's mother constantly commended to the notice of Mrs. Prue. Moreover, Prue was frequently in disciplinary and financial difficulties and Brigstock was not. In time, each fastened his budding romanticism upon Rose Marples, the daughter of the village policeman, and therefore a social stratum or two beneath them.

They made a gentleman's agreement by which each took her out on alternate Sundays. Each enjoyed a single goodnight kiss on the doorstep of her father's cottage, which soon proved insufficient for Prue. A somewhat robust attempt to extend his privileges frightened the girl, who transferred her undivided regard to Brigstock until she found him too unenterprising and at seventeen ran off with a no-good beer salesman.

Prue, in effect, forgot the girl immediately. But in early manhood he revived her memory by promoting the incident to "an unhappy love affair" which made him unfit to invite any woman to so permanent an alliance as marriage.

In 1916, during the first European War, Brigstock was exempted from Army service on medical grounds. Prue forged a similar exemption. Throughout the war he drifted in and

out of various jobs earning little but almost unconsciously accumulating experience.

Brigstock kept steadily on in the same job as junior accountant at five pounds a week. In 1919 Prue was in danger of being prosecuted for as little as ten pounds, which he had embezzled from his employers. He went to Brigstock, whose mother had boasted that her son had saved more than a hundred pounds. Brigstock probably intended to lend, but he began by trying to deliver a homily and Prue got the money from his own mother, who could very ill afford it, since Prue had not yet eased her financial burdens.

In 1921 Brigstock became unemployed through the failure of the firm. In 1923 he was still unemployed, when Prue, who had lost touch with the village, affected to find him. The career had started. The one-time farm house, garden and appurtenances had been bought for his mother with reversion on her death to Prue.

Brigstock gratefully accepted the offer of employment at his former salary of five pounds a week. From that day in 1923 to April 2nd, 1935, when he murdered him, Prue's treatment of Brigstock was remarkable in that everybody agreed that Prue was of a kindly, generous disposition. Brigstock could have told a very different tale — even if the tale had been true only of Brigstock.

And it was Brigstock who discovered the forgery, for Prue had not read the notice in *The Times*.

It was at the end of the morning. The banks had closed at mid-day. Prue's secretary and the clerks had gone. The two men were alone in the office.

Prue was badly shocked. In a single glance, he perceived that Brigstock had worked the whole thing out and must know exactly how it had been done.

Brigstock was a nervous little man with a drooping mustache, a laborious neatness of dress, and a half apologetic air which made him look like a downtrodden citizen in a comic strip.

"You sold the originals without telling me, Mr. Prue," he blurted out. "You palmed the forgeries off on me. And I took them to the bank. You made me your catspaw."

"What are you going to do about it, Brigstock?" He still spoke as the other's employer.

"Jim!" The use of the first name put them on a man-to-man basis. "I thought at first I was going to blackmail you. I've sunk as low as that, thanks to the way you've treated me. But that isn't my line. I'm going to tell the bank all I know, and then the police. And I'm going to give evidence against you in court. And when the judge sentences you I shall feel I've been paid. '*Come here, Brigstock.*' '*Yes, Mr. Prue.*' You haven't spoken a decent word to me in these dozen years without some sting in the tail. You've found fault over trifles every working day I've been in this office. And on top of it all you've been meaner than anyone would believe.

I'm worth a thousand a year to you, and you know it. You've given me two rises of ten bob a week each and I've had to cringe round you to get 'em. And now I'm going to hear you sentenced to prison. You'll get seven years, which will mean four and a bit with good behavior. That means I'll have four happy years thinking of you scrubbing your cell and trying to make up to the warders. That's what I'm going to do about it, Jim."

I knew then that this poor stunted little man intended to wreck my life's work, wrote Prue in his astonishing autobiography. *In duty to the thousands who would suffer by his wanton act, I knew I had to take the law into my own hands. I could not kill him in the office. Moreover, I owed it to myself to correct his cruelly false impression of me.*

"My poor old Frank! I don't mind the things you say about me. But I do blame myself for not seeing that you were in this dangerous condition. You're on the verge of a nervous breakdown. You're living in a dream world where the commonplace exchanges of office life seem to you a calculated insult. And the upshot will be that you are going to bust this show up and incidentally land yourself in the breadline. Who will employ you after your association with a scandal like this?"

"But you admit that you forged those bonds?"

He spoke as if I were a common swindler. At the moment of writing this — when I am nominally awaiting execution — I owe no man a farthing. Had I not committed technical forgeries, hundreds of widows and orphans would have lost their little fortunes.

"Of course I admit I forged those bonds. Frank, do you think I spent that ten thousand on wine and women? I did not. I used it to start that new block of flats at Ealing. That block will pay the money back if you let it."

Prue was warming up. He was still in danger; but already he had the conviction that he would be successful.

"As to your being worth a thousand a year as an accountant. Listen! This is the first forgery you've spotted — helped by that unfortunate notice in *The Times*. There have been a round half-dozen such forgeries since you've been in this office. They've all been made good and they've all done their work. Not a penny went into my private pocket."

This unexpected confession threw Brigstock off his balance. Prue proceeded to crush him.

"You are paid — what is it? — three-fifty. Allowing my house as a necessary expenditure to keep up credit, I doubt whether I get as much as that to spend on things I want. Why, dammit, if you drop this tomfool stunt of spoiling the show, I'll punish you for giving me this shock by making you a partner, fifty-fifty. I don't suppose you'll make any more money, but at least you'll get rid of the idea that I'm bullying you. Every check that goes out will have to bear

your signature as well as mine. Then you can't feel you're being kept in the dark. As to this ten thousand, we can, of course, get another loan from the Central and explain quite frankly to Parr's that we've been the victims of a forgery."

"I don't know whether I'm standing on my head or my heels. You can talk anybody into anything, Jim."

"Then let's say no more now. Come to my house tonight at nine and tell me what you've decided."

The bait had been taken. It remained for Prue to play his fish. Greed and fear were the two factors in human nature that had been very useful to Prue. Brigstock would condone the forgery for the bribe of partnership — signing the checks would give the poor worm a sense of power. Fear would make him demand guarantees against future forgeries which might land them both in the dock.

At nine o'clock, at Prue's house in Hampstead, Brigstock began by demanding some details as to how the proposed partnership would work out. Here he was given the illusion that he had overruled Prue on one or two minor points.

At a quarter to ten he accepted a whiskey and allowed himself to expand. "D'you know, Jim, even when we were boys, I always felt there was a queer streak in you. But you meant to be fair to everybody, and I believe you mean to be fair to me now. And before I give you a final 'yes' or 'no' I'm going to ask you whether there's any other hanky-panky with Bonds or any other securities that I don't know about?"

The little man's vanity was inflated and Prue's task was comparatively easy.

"Well — er — in the sense of your words, Frank, no. No."

"You're hedging, Jim."

"No — I said in the sense of your words. As a matter of fact that Chiltern parcel which will clear the Bologna loan on Monday — that's genuine. But I — er — made copies — in case they might come in useful later on."

After that it was plain sailing. Brigstock demanded that the forgery should be handed to him.

The greedy fool believed he was outwitting me, so — although it involved lying, which is repugnant to me — I told him a wild tale in such a way that he would be sure to insist on my proving it immediately.

"My dear fellow, you don't imagine I keep such things on the mantelpiece. They're not here."

"Where are they, Jim? I'm going to save you from yourself. If you want me to agree —"

"All right! You'll jump out of your chair when I tell you." A careful timing and then: "Do you remember Rose Marples?"

Brigstock did not in any literal sense jump out of his chair, but his astonishment was even more profound than Prue had expected.

"D'you remember when we both thought we were in love with her? I never got anything but a brother-

and-sister kiss, and I don't suppose you did. D'you remember how, after both reading 'Westward Ho', we called her the Rose of Stainham and started some Spanish-Main-treasure stuff?"

"I remember your cooking up some story about a sea-chest belonging to your grandfather and digging in that old cowshed of yours and burying the chest." Brigstock sniggered. "But, of course, I didn't take it seriously."

"You needn't be so superior, Frank. You half believed it — enough anyhow to do your share of the digging. And you put your will in the chest leaving everything to the Rose of Stainham if you should happen to be killed by pirates. Well, that's where the Chiltern forgery is — that's where the Bologna forgery was."

"Huh! I may have half believed the Spanish Main yarn. But I was a kid then, Jim."

"Hasn't it occurred to you that with my — what you call — queer streak, I'm likely to use a queer way of protecting myself? Anyhow, believe it or not as you please. I take it you don't propose to run down to Stainham tonight and put in an hour's digging before you go to bed."

I thought it would take me much longer, but as usual I had over-estimated my opponent's intelligence.

"You've nailed your colors to the mast, Jim. If you are deceiving me now, I wash my hands of you. If you're telling the truth I'll hold my peace forever. But I must know the truth tonight. It won't take you much more than an hour, if that, to drive us to Stainham."

With a protest that he had had a hard day — that digging by artificial light was no picnic — Prue allowed himself to be persuaded into making the journey, from which Brigstock never returned.

The amateur murderer who makes next to no preparation for his crime always seems to have good fortune. That illusion is created by the fact that such murders would not have taken place had not circumstances happened to be favorable.

There was the favorable circumstance that the little farm house had been untenanted since Mrs. Prue's death; that the hedge petered out at the top of the lane so that the car could be run off the road alongside the one-time cowshed, enabling the observation lamp and flex to be inserted in a hole in the wall of the cowshed.

There was one spade and one hoe — in lieu of a pick — taken from the tool shed of the Hampstead house.

"I'll take first spell," said Prue. With the hoe he loosened the cobbles over a wide area.

"You're overdoing it, Jim," said Brigstock. "If it's the same chest it wasn't more than three feet long."

"True, but it's a good three-feet-six down and we have to dig round it. While I'm sweating at this, you might get the rugs and anything else from the car and blot out those two windows in case any lovers are about in the lane."

While Brigstock was busy with the windows, Prue worked fast. Within an hour he had dug a hole something under six feet in length, over two feet in width and about a foot and a half deep.

"Like to take on now, Frank?"

Brigstock took the spade. Prue reckoned that he would be good for another couple of feet, as the ground was soft enough. Actually, Prue had forgotten the original chest. The grave, as it was soon to be, was scarcely three feet deep when Brigstock's spade struck metal.

"Ah! Here's the chest we buried. Perhaps you'd like to finish this little pantomime, Jim. I'm getting tired."

"What do you mean by pantomime, old man?"

"You bought those Chiltern shares seven months ago. This earth hasn't been disturbed for years."

Prue fired twice at a range of a couple of inches.

Then he unscrewed the bulb of the observation lamp. In darkness he crept out of the cowshed, remained there nearly an hour, listening. Assured that the shots had not been heard, he returned to the cowshed at a few minutes before one.

It took nearly another half-hour to dig round the chest and remove it. Then he placed the body in the grave.

Before the grave was half-filled he rested and contemplated the chest. If he were to put it back it would displace too much earth. The chest, anyhow, was evidence of nothing. But the contents might identify him and would have to be carefully destroyed. There and then, to guard against possible forgetfulness, he carried the chest out to the car, having scraped off the earth with the hoe.

When he had replaced the earth and the cobbles the whole made a mound some two feet high. That would not matter. In a year or so it would have subsided.

He nearly forgot to retrieve the rug from the window. That warned him to check and double-check everything.

Dawn was breaking when he emerged from the cowshed. He still lingered — he had no sense of fear, only a sense of cautiousness. He even waited a few minutes after he had backed his car onto the road while he examined his shoes.

He had wiped off some of the earth on the grass, had scraped some from the soles. But there was earth inside his shoes. He removed them and emptied the earth out of the window. His socks and trousers were earth-stained. No matter. Success would depend upon no one linking him up with burial operations at that time and at that place. Not a single light showed in the village, half a mile down the hill.

Three miles from Stainham he stopped near the river. From the car he took a suitcase. The lock of the chest had been out of use when the boys had buried it. It was caked with dry earth and he chipped his fingers in opening it. He emptied the contents into the suitcase; he weighted the

chest with stones, wedged the lid open, then threw it into the river.

He removed and shook the mat. He knew that this would not protect him against microscopic examination — but there wasn't going to be any microscopic examination.

He drove home, garaged the car, replaced the gardening tools, took the suitcase into the little back sitting-room in which he spent most of his time at home, and tipped the contents onto the hearthrug. A century old pistol, a carving knife, six sporting cartridges, several novels including "Westward Ho," a tin of condensed milk and three small bundles of papers tied with red tape.

One bundle contained nonsense of his own which he hastily burned in the grate without examination. Another was labelled: *The Will of Francis Brigstock, Esquire.* He pressed the tape and it broke. The "will" was exactly what he expected, written in romantic legalistic jargon, leaving all his property to "Rose Marples known as the Rose of Stainham . . . and I direct that the said Rose Marples shall make generous provision of my fortune for my aging mother."

The third little bundle contained Rose's will, which surprised him. As he opened it, something fell from the folds. He picked it up. It was a photograph of Brigstock at the age of sixteen. Prue stared at it, then burst into laughter. Brigstock had hardly changed at all, except for the drooping mustache. The fancy seized him to draw in the mustache. His hand went to his vest pocket for his fountain pen — a presentation pen, gold-cased and inscribed. The pen was not there and he assumed that, as often happened, he had left it at the office. It did not occur to him that it might have dropped out of his pocket while he was digging.

When he had burned all that was burnable, he locked up the other articles and went to bed.

He woke about eleven and rang for breakfast in bed. Throughout the day he remained apathetic, reading the papers and dozing. In the evening his brain woke up.

If there had been any trail he would have known it by now. Brigstock had not known he was going to Stainham and could have told nobody.

The disappearance of Brigstock had no logical nor imaginable connection with the long disused cowshed at Stainham. The house he would keep untenanted indefinitely.

In short, it was one of those murders in which, once the getaway is made, all traces are lost. Moreover, there would be no murder-hunt, because it would be assumed that Brigstock had absconded.

When Rose thanked him for his kindness, Tellman Prue silenced her with a graceful movement of his hand.

"I did what I could for Frank, my dear. He was not an easy man to handle. Now if you aren't in a hurry, come and have a spot of lunch with me and we'll discuss some arrangement." Prue added: "Nowhere dressy.

I generally have a chop and chips at a quiet little place in Holborn."

Strangely, he hadn't thought of Brigstock as a person but as a problem to which there had been only one perilous solution — until this woman had walked into the office. Now Brigstock was a personality — a factor in his life — a rival who had somehow tricked him into committing murder. He had a superstitious feeling that he must not let Rose slip away.

In the quiet little restaurant he said that he would continue to pay her Brigstock's salary until "something eventuated." He made no condition, but it was understood that she was to meet him at the quiet little restaurant every Saturday to receive payment.

By the second Saturday after the murder, all feeling of personal danger had passed. The police, helped by himself, had investigated all that was known of Brigstock's life history, which was of no use at all. A man of blameless character had perpetuated forgery and made his getaway. Prue was very forthcoming, even to the admission that he felt himself morally obliged to take some interest in the lady who had lived as Mrs. Brigstock.

As soon as they met, Rose told him that she had wormed out of one of the detectives what had happened. In the circumstances she could not, she said, accept any more money from Tellman Prue. She added: "I didn't know Frank had it in him."

"Were you very much in love with him, Rose?"

"No. I wouldn't say that. He wasn't much as a man, but he had a sort of fascination."

As she said it, Rose suddenly became desirable in his eyes. She would need dressing — well, he could dress her as Brigstock never could.

"Others must have felt it besides me," she went on. "He must have taken your money to get at another woman I knew nothing about."

He asked about their life together and was intensely interested in her frank answers. He became aware of his own interest and resolved to ask no more direct questions. Already he had determined to take this woman to himself.

His sudden desire for her puzzled him. He was in no sense enamored. He could still see the traces of the village girl in her. And he despised her for the ease with which he had persuaded her to go on accepting Brigstock's salary.

All this he recorded in his autobiography, together with his own very characteristic explanation. *When I decided to kill Brigstock it was no part of my intention that any innocent person should suffer. I became her lover in order to compensate her — to pay her back ten-fold for that which I had unwittingly taken from her.*

Within a month of the murder he had installed her in a modest flat five minutes' walk from his house. She was obedient, faithful to their arrangement, and eager to please him, though it did not escape him that she failed to find in him the "sort of fascination" which she had found in Brigstock.

One night, stung by emotional unease, he blurted out:

"You don't like me as much as you liked Frank."

"What a silly thing to say! Why I do believe you're jealous of Frank! Come to think of it, you always have been!"

This occurred in the early summer of 1936. It was a trifling jar which passed from the memory of both, but it left in the girl's mind the definite conviction that Prue had some "feeling" about Brigstock.

The fifteen months that followed the murder of Brigstock were the most successful of Tellman Prue's career. The Chiltern shares, which had not been his to pledge, had been redeemed. The Ealing block had yielded a large profit to him in a skillful manipulation of the shares, and he used these resources to attract more capital for the Victoria block, his most ambitious undertaking.

In August 1936 he received a visit from Detective-Inspector Rason of the Department of Dead Ends at Scotland Yard.

The forged Bologna Bonds — which had hung in the air as no trace was picked up of Brigstock — had passed to the Department of Dead Ends. To the same Department came another parcel of Bologna Bonds, also forgeries, this time from America. Added was a request that expert comparison of the two sets of forgeries be made and a report returned.

"The first report was negative, Mr. Prue: but the second says that the forgeries are almost certainly the work of the same man. From other information received from New York you may take it that Brigstock has doubled back to Britain."

Prue nodded sagely. Brigstock was being mistaken for the forger. It didn't matter.

"I suppose that means you'll find Brigstock in a day or two and I shall have to give evidence. I can't pretend to be pleased. We've written off the loss and forgotten it. Still, what do you want me to do? He's hardly likely to walk into my office."

"He won't come near you, Mr. Prue. But the Americans say he has very little money. And he might approach — er — the lady. What do you think her reaction would be?"

Prue shrugged. "You never can tell with women. She's a generous soul and I can't see her handing him over. I daresay you know I'm running a flat for her. I practically told one of your fellows last year."

He complied with the request to give the address. Rason thanked him and asked:

"D'you happen to have a photograph of Brigstock, Mr. Prue?"

"No. I was asked for one at the time. I don't think there is one of him."

That evening, Prue went round to the flat. To his surprise, Rose did not mention the detective. Just before he was leaving he asked:

"Did you have a caller today?"

"Then you knew. I wondered."

"Then why make a mystery of it?" demanded Prue.

"It's not me that's making the mystery. Oh, you needn't think I'd let you keep me, Jim, and then play double with you about Frank. If he is in England and if he does come near me I'll tell you and you know I'll keep my word. As to that detective, what he really wanted was a photograph, which they wanted at the time and I hadn't got because he never had one taken."

"Hm! Well, that's that!"

"No, it isn't. I've got one of him when he was sixteen. He gave it me — oh, you know when! It's among other knickknacks of mine at mother's. I'm going down tomorrow to get it for him."

Prue thought it over. Again it didn't matter.

"It seems rather unnecessary," he said indifferently. "I don't want to hound the poor fellow. Do you?"

He did not expect an answer, but one came.

"I don't know that I'd be sorry if they found him."

"That strikes me as a very unkind attitude."

Rose laughed loudly.

"I've often wondered why he ran away. The more I think about it the more sure I am he didn't really steal your money. Come to that — *you* don't think he stole your money or you wouldn't be jealous of him."

"So you think he was innocent — and that I share your belief! Dear me!"

"Oh, I don't know the ins and outs of it with all those stocks and shares. It's just a feeling I have. I don't say you *believe* it — I say you feel he didn't do it, same as I do."

There was no conceivable danger, yet it was a dangerous topic. Prue decided to leave it alone.

"Have it your own way, dear, but I think you need a holiday. I'll try and fix a few days next week. See you tomorrow night."

On the following night he again waited for her to speak and again had to prompt her.

"Been down to your mother's?"

"Yes. But the photo wasn't there. And it was some time before it came to my mind." She broke off and giggled. She was in an odd mood, he thought. Inclined to be almost affectionate.

"D'you remember when you and Frank both thought you were in love with me? And I thought I was in love with both of you? Coo! We were silly! I suppose all kids are."

"Yes, darling, but were you reminded of it by not finding his photograph?"

"There was some nonsense which you started, all mixed up with a book you'd both read; all about pirates and treasure and the rest of it and me as the glamour girl who was going to be rescued or something." She giggled again. Prue's thoughts leapt ahead and saw what was coming. "Of course, I knew it was all tommyrot but poor Frank didn't."

"Yes, he did. He told me afterwards — after we were working to-

gether — that he didn't believe a word of it."

"He was pulling your leg. He believed it all right. He made a will, leaving everything to me. And to play up, I made a will leaving everything to him — when we were sixteen, I ask you! Then I gave it to him to lock in that chest of yours which you buried in the cowshed, and the photograph must have slipped in somehow. And I suppose it's there still."

For a moment he had a vision of the cowshed as he had last seen it. The earth and cobbles would not have settled down yet — there would still be a grave-like mound.

But there was, as yet, no need for alarm. It only required tactful handling. He began with a tactful chuckle.

"Did he tell you we called you the Rose of Stainham? Boys get that kind of fantasy that's half real to them — especially if the girl is stand-offish, as you were."

"Oo, I wasn't! You used to help yourself, if I remember rightly, when you took me home."

"I don't know about Frank, but you kissed me like you'd kiss your sister. Perhaps that's why I'm jealous of Frank, eh, darling? By the way, sorry to spoil the romantic atmosphere. But I dug up that chest some time ago and burned the contents. If his photograph was there it was burned too."

"Oh, dear, I wish I'd known!" wailed Rose. "But I suppose it can't be helped."

"What d'you mean you wished you'd known?" he demanded.

"Well, you see, that Inspector Rason came down with me. And when mother and I couldn't find the photo, I told him what I've just told you. And when he asked me, I said I was sure you wouldn't mind, so he took George and Will Comber up to dig that chest out of the cowshed. They'll be pretty wild with me, I reckon."

It was in that moment that James Tellman Prue remembered that he *had* had his fountain pen on him when he began to dig Frank Brigstock's grave. . .

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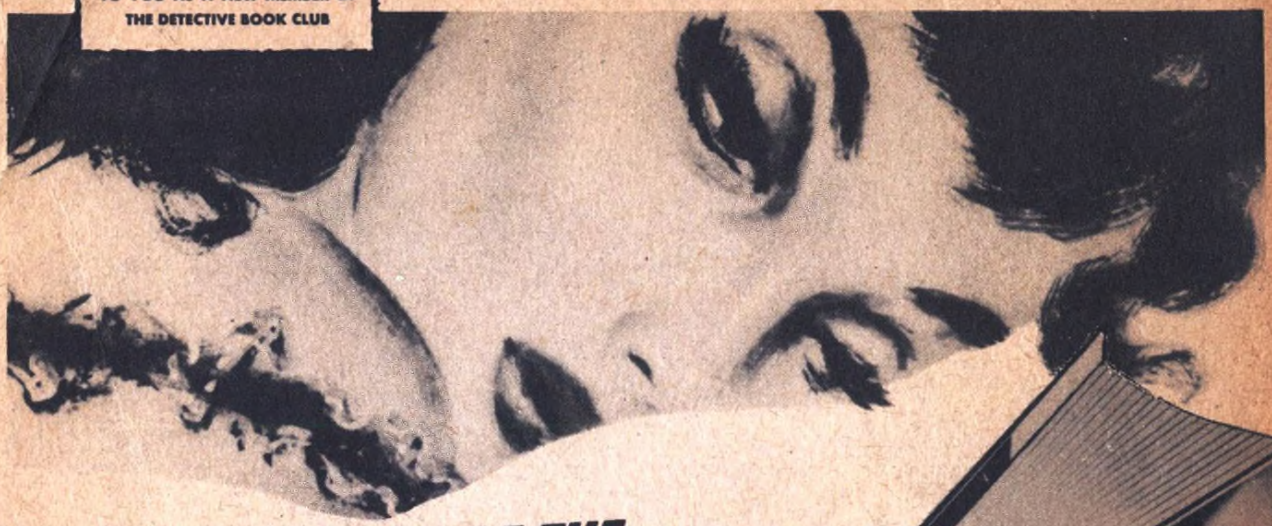

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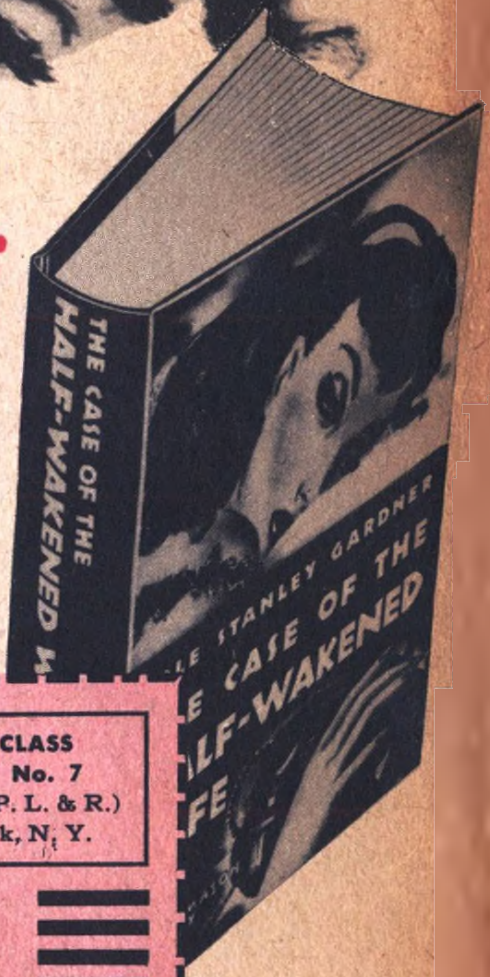

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