The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

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ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

JULY 35¢

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Mystery Magazine

***including* BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

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WANTED!!!

(A Personal S O S from the Editors)

Dear Reader:

An urgent call for help . . . For some years now your Editors have been unsuccessful in locating certain first editions in the detective-crime-mystery field. If any reader can supply information leading to the apprehension of these first editions, we would be deeply grateful, and as a token of our appreciation would be happy to send the reader a complimentary one-year's subscription to EQMM, or if the reader is already a subscriber, an extension of one year free.

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a new story by

HUGH PENTECOST

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:

TITLE: ***Hunting Day***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Uncle George Crowder

LOCALE: Lakeview, United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A tale of dogs and hunting and a twelve-year-old boy and a town that laughed at a secret joke . . . until the joke turned on itself and wasn't funny any more.*

THE DEATH OF FRED SIMMONS of natural causes would have been taken by the town of Lakeview as a downright blessing. His death by violence might not have resulted in open congratulations being exchanged in front of the post office, but the prosecution in a murder trial would have had a hard time finding cooperative witnesses. However, when Fred Simmons *was* murdered, the town was stunned. For a week before the murder the town had been laughing at a joke on Simmons, but suddenly the joke turned on Lakeview and left it confronted by a horror that was hard to endure.

Fred Simmons's personality was obnoxious to the townspeople, even without totaling up a bill of particulars against him. He was rich, which is not a sin, but he would foreclose a mortgage without mercy. People said he would have lowered the boom on his own grandmother, which is probably true. His clothes were over-fancy for Lakeview; his sports car was custom-built, but he would never give local kids a ride in it; he raised hunting dogs, training them himself, but his approach to a sensitive animal was so brutal and heavy-handed that none of his dogs was ever any good under a gun.

Specifically, the bill of particulars against Simmons was even grimmer. It was said that Esther Quayle, a well-liked if somewhat flighty young girl, had drowned herself in the old quarry because Simmons wouldn't "do the right thing" by her. It was said that old man Humboldt, who had been a teller in the bank for years, had stolen bank funds because Simmons had put pressure on him to pay a usurious loan. Nobody ever knew for sure because Humboldt died of a heart attack in jail before he could be brought to trial. Then there was the beating it was believed Simmons had given old George Crowder.

George Crowder was a character. He came from one of the oldest and best families in town. He had been well educated, was graduated from law school with honors, had built himself a fine practice in the county and eventually became State's Attorney. Uncle George, as everyone called him now, had a keen wit and on the side was one of the best woodsmen the town has ever known. He always had a fine dog, and he knew and loved the woods and its creatures better than most men know their own children.

They said George Crowder would be governor one day, but it never came about. George Crowder had been the prosecutor in a famous local murder trial. He had got his conviction and the guilty man had gone to the chair. Only it turned out, almost a year later, that the accused man hadn't been guilty. A confession and corroborative evidence proved it beyond question. The day after it was certain, George Crowder closed his law office and disappeared from Lakeview for a long time. Rumor came back that somewhere he was drinking himself to death. When, eventually, he did return to Lakeview he was a changed man. The sparkle was gone. He was still gentle, but now he was silent. It was said that he had to come back because he'd run out of money. It was said too that his sister, who was married to Hec Trimble the druggist, was supporting him. George built a little cabin in the woods, a mile off the main road, and lived there, alone, with his setter dog, Timmy.

George Crowder was liked. He was well-liked. One day, shortly after Esther Quayle's suicide, George Crowder met Simmons in front of the post office. He told Simmons off. Simmons, in his imported hunting jacket, merely grinned at George and walked away. But that night someone broke into Crowder's cabin and nearly beat him to death. Old George would never open his mouth about it; he swore he never saw who attacked him while he was asleep. But no one in Lakeview had any doubt that it was Fred Simmons.

The day Simmons was murdered a coincidence was involved. Three men with first-class motives for killing Simmons appeared at the scene of the crime not ten minutes after it was committed. They were George Crowder, and Bob Landgrove who had been engaged to Esther Quayle before Simmons got in the picture, and Pete Humboldt, old man Humboldt's son, who always said, "Simmons might just as well have put a gun to Pop's head and shot him!" It was a coincidence that they all came, because it seemed certain that none of them was guilty. That was the horror of it—for everything pointed to the fact that Simmons had been murdered by a twelve-year-old boy.

Which brings us to the joke—the joke on Simmons.

People in a small town love to chew on human foibles, particularly if they reveal litte vanities or false prides. Hector Trimble, the druggist, was a respected and trusted man. He did a good business, kept a good modern store, and was a first-rate pharmacist. Hector, however, was just a shade pettish. He had a phobia about dirt—quite proper, you might say, in his line of business. He washed his hands at least twenty-five times a day. Also quite proper, you might say. And he would not allow his small son, Joey, to have any pets. Dog or cat hairs were anathema to him—they might wind up in somebody's prescription. Nothing wrong with Hector's ban on pets, except that he made such a constant point of it.

And that wasn't all. A cross, which was almost more than Hector could bear, was his wife's brother—George Crowder. Mind you, the druggist never complained about George's shiftless way of life. He complained about old George's dog. And everyone was sure that it pretty nearly killed Hec that his twelve-year-old son, Joey, idolized his Uncle George and spent every free hour he had with the old man and his setter dog, Timmy. Maybe it was true, the townspeople admitted, that Joey was learning shiftlessness from the old man, but he had also learned, at the age of twelve, to be one of the best shots in the county, and he could handle Timmy in the field like a professional. It must be said for Hector Trimble that he didn't put down his foot on this association. Maybe this was one area where the otherwise meek Mrs. Trimble showed unexpected stubbornness. There was no doubt she loved her brother George, remembered his days of glory, and loved him none the less in his decline.

The joke began rather unpleasantly. By cutting innumerable lawns Joey Trimble had acquired a new gun. The day he got the gun Joey went out into the woods to try it. He was getting ready to shoot at an improvised target set up against a sandbank in the woods

when he heard someone firing a heavy-gauge shotgun not far away. There were several shots, and then Joey heard a man shouting angrily, and then a scream of pain, as if a small child was being hurt. Joey went scurrying toward the sounds and stopped at the edge of a clearing where they came from. There he saw Fred Simmons, tall, blond, pretty like a movie actor, wearing his imported shooting jacket. Simmons had laid his gun down on a log, and he had a dog on a chain leash. The dog was an English setter, and he could have been Timmy's double in size and coloring, but he was cowering and whimpering, and he had no pride like Timmy. Simmons had the leash in his left hand and a leather whip in his right hand, and he was lashing the dog unmercifully.

"Act gun-shy on me, will you!" Simmons was shouting. The dog tried to move away and Simmons jerked the leash. Joey saw a force collar on the dog's neck. A force collar is a slip collar with spikes on the inside. When you yank on it the spikes bite into the dog's neck. Uncle George had told Joey only an expert trainer should be allowed to use one, unless you wanted to ruin the dog. It was typical of Simmons he would have everything—force collar, leash, whip, and a dog whistle.

Simmons didn't see Joey. He didn't know he was there until Joey grabbed at his arm.

"You leave that dog alone!" Joey cried, and was ashamed of the tears running down his cheeks. Simmons glared at him and tried to shake Joey off.

Joey hung on tight and Simmons tried again to push him away. He hit Joey hard with the heel of his hand, right on the breastbone, and Joey felt his wind go. He knew he couldn't hang onto Simmons's whip arm much longer, so he bent down and bit Simmons's hand as hard as he could. Simmons let out a yell you could have heard a mile away. Then he really punched Joey with his left hand and Joey fell down and waited to be killed. Simmons stood over him, his whip raised. Joey had one last consolation. Simmons had loosened his hold on the leash and suddenly the dog slipped out of the cruel force collar and streaked away across the clearing. Well, I've saved him, anyway, Joey thought, waiting for the whip to come down on him.

Simmons's eyes were like two bright new dimes. "You're George Crowder's nephew, aren't you?" he asked.

Joey was really scared then, because he knew Simmons hated his Uncle George.

Simmons hesitated. "Get out of here," he said, lowering his whip arm. "And stay out of here. Because when I find that lily-livered dog I'm going to blow his brains out."

That's when the joke began to get funny.

Joey hightailed it for Uncle George's cabin to tell him what had happened. When he got there Uncle George and Timmy were away, but crouched near the front steps was a dog that looked like Timmy. It was Simmons's dog, his back streaked from the whip lashes, his neck and throat bleeding from the teeth of the force collar. Joey thought the dog would run, but he lay still, shaking. Joey petted him and whispered to him. He got some water and food from the cabin, and after the dog had gulped both down he put his head in Joey's lap, gave a long shiver, and went to sleep. George Crowder and Timmy found them that way an hour later.

Then George and Joey had a debate about ethics. Should they return the dog? Joey contended Simmons didn't deserve the dog, any dog. Uncle George pointed out, drily, that it wasn't them that deserved who usually got. Still, Uncle George said, chewing on a straw, they didn't owe Simmons anything. They didn't have to take the dog back to him. Of course, if he came after it—

And that was when the joke got really funny. Every day Simmons went out in the woods, looking for his dog, armed with his whip, chain, and force collar, and his rifle. And every day the dog just accidentally got shut in Uncle George's woodshed. When Simmons was not in the woods Joey would take the dog out and work him. Of course, the dog had some training, but under Joey's expert hand he began to blossom. He'd answer to hand signals, he'd walk for miles at heel, and he had fine initiative when he was turned loose. He'd hold like a statue under a shot—when Joey fired it. Everybody in town seemed to know about it but Simmons, and everybody in Lakeview thought it was a wonderful joke.

Simmons came after his dog on the day he was murdered. He came at a different time of day than usual, which was a factor in the case. The bird season had just opened and there were hunters in the woods. Joey might not have been out with Timmy Two if Simmons had come searching at his usual time.

George Crowder had started out much earlier in the day, and he and Timmy One were somewhere to the east of the clearing, heading home. Pete Humboldt and Sheriff Egan were off to the south, hunting over the Sheriff's black Labrador. Somewhere to the west was Bob Landgrove, who had loved Esther Quayle, with his father, Old Amos Landgrove. Amos was something of a tragic figure. He'd been a fine cabinetmaker in his day, but arthritis had struck him cruelly, and his once skilled hands were knotted and swollen

so badly that he couldn't even feed himself or light his own pipe. Old Amos had just come along for the walk; he couldn't shoot a gun.

They all told much the same story afterward. They all heard a shot, then a scream like someone in mortal agony. Before any of them could reach the clearing they heard a second shot.

Sheriff Egan was the first to reach the scene. What he saw made his blood run cold. Fred Simmons lay near a stone wall that had a little strand of wire stretched across the top of it. His gun lay a few feet from him. There was a hole blown in Simmon's chest as big around as a stovepipe. But the thing that really raised the hair on Egan's neck was the dog. Timmy Two was crouched beside Simmons, and the Sheriff could see that Simmons's throat had been chewed viciously.

Egan wasn't too sure about who arrived next. He thought it was Pete Humboldt, but it might have been old Amos Landgrove, or maybe his son Bob. They all came about the same time. He knew it was Pete Humboldt who started toward the body.

"Hold on, Pete," Egan said. "Don't go near that dog. He's turned killer. Let me put a slug in him first."

Then it was that Joey yelled. "No, Mr. Egan! No! Please!" Joey was running toward them from the north.

"Stand back, kid. You see what the dog has done," the Sheriff said.

Joey stopped, frozen with horror, as Egan started to raise his gun again. It never got to his shoulder because another actor appeared on the scene. George Crowder's voice was sharp. "Put that gun down, Sheriff, or I'll blow it out of your hands."

"And, by God, I think he meant it," Egan said afterward.

That moment of inaction gave Joey a chance to reach Timmy Two. He dropped beside the dog and cradled him in his arms. "Look, Mr. Egan," he said. "Not a drop of blood on his muzzle or jowls. Not anywhere! Not one drop."

Uncle George, his deeply lined face pale as parchment, joined the rest in staring down at the dog. "Joey's right," he said. "The dog never touched him."

Old Amos Landgrove, his knobby hands trembling, spoke up. "Seems simple enough. Simmons was climbing the wall, tripped over that wire, and got shot with his own gun."

The Sheriff picked up Simmons's gun and sniffed the barrel. "It's been fired all right," he said. "But this gun never killed him, Amos. This is a rifle. That hole was blowed in him by a heavy-gauge shotgun." An idea had crept into the front of Egan's mind and he tried to wipe it away. But he couldn't. "He was hunting for that

dog again," he said. "You can see that—whip, whistle. I guess he found him this time." The five men looked at each other, and then with a kind of horror coming over them they all looked down at Joey —Joey cuddling the dog in his arms.

"Did you shoot him, Joey?" Uncle George asked very quietly. "Tell the truth, boy. We'll figure out what to do."

Joey's eyes were bugging out, and he was unable to speak.

"Somebody better go for the State Troopers," Pete Humboldt muttered.

The joke was over.

"We all wished the so-and-so dead," Egan said later. "But not that way. Not with that kid's life ruined—a good kid like Joey Trimble. All the same, if I'd been the boy, and I'd seen Simmons going after that dog again, and if *I'd* had a gun in my hands—"

It was Uncle George who broke the sick silence. He spoke to Joey, and he spoke with a kind of grave courtesy.

"Joey, I don't know how to apologize to you for being such a damn fool for about thirty seconds," he said, "but I shall spend the rest of my life trying to make it up to you." He turned to Sheriff Egan and his pale blue eyes had a glint in them. "Look here," he said. "We're supposed to be old woodsmen, not old women. Something's been dragged along the ground here." He led the way and they followed, to a spot in the center of the clearing where the weeds and grass were all matted down and there was blood on the ground, plenty of blood. "Simmons was shot here," Uncle George went on, "and then his body was dragged over to the wall to make it look as if he tripped over the wire and fell. His gun was fired off. I made a mental note of it at the time and forgot it. Shotgun blast—scream—then a few minutes later, a rifle shot." Uncle George raised his pale blue eyes to old Amos Landgrove. "How did you manage to fire Simmons's gun, Amos? Stick of wood through the trigger guard?"

They all stared at Uncle George as if he'd gone off his rocker—all except old Amos, who smiled very faintly. Bob Landgrove took a quick step toward Uncle George.

"Why, you old—"

"Easy, son," old Amos said.

"You may have been the great legal mind of your day, George," Sheriff Egan said, "but when you accuse Amos—"

"Look at Simmons," Uncle George said. "Something is missing. Dog whistle, whip, gun. But where is his leash and the force collar? You been laughing about it all week. He carried it out here every day. Where is it now?" He turned to old Amos again. "What did you do with it, Amos? Throw it over the other side of the wall somewhere?"

"Wait a minute," Bob Landgrove said. "I won't stand for—"

"I'm sorry, Bob," Uncle George said, wearily. "We all come in here and see Simmons, shot in the chest. His neck is chewed up and a dog is lying beside him, a dog that hated him. And a boy is hanging around nearby with a shotgun, a boy who hated him. So we all say, the boy killed him and the dog chewed up his throat! God forgive us. Nobody chewed his throat! The body was dragged over here from where the killing happened. How would you drag it, Sheriff? Or you, Bob? Or me? We'd take him under the arms and we'd pull him."

"Well, how was he dragged?" Bob Landgrove asked.

"The force collar," Uncle George said. "It was slipped over his head and he was dragged that way—pulled by the leash. And the spikes of the collar bit into his neck. Amos had to pull him that way because he can't use his hands. He had to loop the leash over his shoulders and pull. That it, Amos?"

"That's about it," old Amos said, the faint smile still on his lips. "I shot him out there in the clearing. It had to look like an accident. So I dragged him over here—just the way you said, George. And I fired off his gun, just the way you said, with a piece of wood in the trigger guard." He looked straight at Uncle George. "You don't have to be told why, George. You know what he did to Esther Quayle. Fine girl. Bob's girl. Simmons killed her. Wrecked Bob's life. I always swore some day I'd get him. It doesn't matter. I'm no good to anyone any more. Can't even button my own pants. I'm glad I done it—"

"Father!" Bob Landgrove's voice was a shocked whisper.

"—and I only wish I hadn't been so stupid. Should have noticed his gun was a rifle, and mine was a—was a—"

"Yes, Amos?" Uncle George said, softly. "Where is your gun, Amos? And what kind of a gun is it? And you're dead right, Amos—you can't button your own pants and you can't fire a gun—not to aim it at anyone and hit a bull's-eye. You didn't kill him, Amos. You just set the stage afterwards."

Bob Landgrove seemed to forget that anyone was there but his father. "You saw me shoot him, Father, and you did all that?"

Tears ran down old Amos's cheeks. "I did my best for you, son," he said. "I'd of gladly took the blame for you."

Nobody spoke for a minute, then Uncle George said, "Now I guess somebody better go for the troopers."

"What I don't understand," Sheriff Egan said, "is what that dog was doing there!"

Uncle George pointed to the whistle hanging around Simmons's neck. "Silent dog whistle," he said.

"Simmons probably kept on blowing it. Of course, we didn't hear it. But the dog did."

"But the dog hated Simmons. Why would he answer Simmons's whistle?" the Sheriff asked.

Uncle George looked down at Joey Trimble. "Show him, Joey."

From his shirt pocket Joey took a duplicate of Simmons's whistle.

"Bought it for Joey a couple of days ago," Uncle George said. "Dog wasn't sure about it yet, but he knew it meant come. So he went to it and waited for orders—even if Simmons was lying there. That dog is trying awfully hard to do what Joey asks him to. He got a little mixed up, is all." He looked down at the boy. "Come along, Joey, and bring your dog. I'll start apologizing on the way."

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **AGATHA CHRISTIE**

TITLE: ***Investigation by Telegram***

TYPE: "Armchair" Detection

DETECTIVE: Hercule Poirot

LOCALES: London and Derbyshire, England

TIME: A generation ago

COMMENTS: *Ill with the flu, the great Poirot must use Captain Hastings as his legman. But detection from a bed is no handicap to Hercule!*

AFTER ALL," MURMURED POIROT, "it is possible that I shall not die this time."

Coming from a convalescent influenza patient, I hailed the remark as showing a beneficial optimism. I myself had been the first sufferer from the disease. Poirot in his turn had gone down. He was now sitting up in bed, propped up with pillows, his head muffled in a woolen shawl, and was slowly sipping a particularly noxious *tisane* which I had prepared according to his directions. His eye rested with pleasure on a neatly graduated row of medicine bottles which adorned the mantelpiece.

"Yes, yes," my little friend continued. "Once more shall I be myself again, the great Hercule Poirot, the terror of evil-doers! Figure to yourself, *mon ami,* that I have a little paragraph to myself in *Society Gossip.* But yes! Here it is! 'Go it—criminals—all out! Hercule Poirot—and believe me, girls, he's some Hercules!—our own pet society detective can't get a grip on you. 'Cause why? 'Cause he's got *la grippe* himself'!"

I laughed.

"Good for you, Poirot. You are becoming quite a public character. And fortunately you haven't missed anything of particular interest during this time."

"That is true. The few cases I

have had to decline did not fill me with any regret."

Our landlady stuck her head in at the door.

"There's a gentleman downstairs. Says he must see Monsieur Poirot or you, Captain. Seeing as he was in a great to-do—and with all that quite the gentleman—I brought up 'is card."

She handed me the bit of pasteboard. "Mr. Roger Havering," I read.

Poirot motioned with his head toward the bookcase, and I obediently pulled forth "Who's Who." Poirot took it from me and scanned the pages rapidly.

"Second son of fifth Baron Windsor. Married 1913 Zoe, fourth daughter of William Crabbe."

"Hm!" I said. "I rather fancy that's the girl who used to act at the Frivolity—only she called herself Zoe Carrisbrook. I remember she married some young man-about-town just before the War."

"Would it interest you, Hastings, to go down and hear what our visitor's particular little trouble is? Make him all my excuses."

Roger Havering was a man of about forty, well set up and of smart appearance. His face, however, was haggard, and he was evidently in great agitation.

"Captain Hastings? You are Monsieur Poirot's partner, I understand. It is imperative that he should come with me to Derbyshire today."

"I'm afraid that's impossible," I responded. "Poirot is ill in bed—influenza."

His face fell.

"Dear me, that is a great blow to me."

"The matter on which you want to consult him is serious?"

"My God, yes! My uncle, the best friend I have in the world, was foully murdered last night."

"Here in London?"

"No, in Derbyshire. I was in town and received a telegram from my wife this morning. Immediately upon its receipt I determined to come round and beg Monsieur Poirot to undertake the case."

"If you will excuse me a minute," I said, struck by a sudden idea.

I rushed upstairs, and in a few brief words acquainted Poirot with the situation. He took any further words out of my mouth.

"I see. I see. You want to go yourself, is it not so? Well, why not? You should know my methods by now. All I ask is that you should report to me fully every day, and follow implicitly any instructions I may wire you."

To this I willingly agreed.

An hour later I was sitting opposite Mr. Havering in a first-class carriage on the Midland Railway, speeding rapidly away from London.

"To begin with, Captain Hastings, you must understand that Hunter's Lodge, where we are going, and where the tragedy took

place, is only a small shooting-box in the heart of the Derbyshire moors. Our real home is near Newmarket, and we usually rent a flat in town for the season. Hunter's Lodge is looked after by a housekeeper who is quite capable of doing all we need when we run down for an occasional week end. Of course, during the shooting season, we take down some of our own servants from Newmarket. My uncle, Mr. Harrington Pace—as you may know, my mother was a Miss Pace of New York—has, for the last three years, made his home with us. He never got on well with my father, or my elder brother, and I suspect that my being somewhat of a prodigal son myself rather increased than diminished his affection towards me. Of course I am a poor man, and my uncle was a rich one—in other words, he paid the piper! But, though exacting in many ways, he was not really hard to get on with, and we all three lived very harmoniously together. Two days ago my uncle, rather wearied with some recent gayeties of ours in town, suggested that we should run down to Derbyshire for a day or two. My wife telegraphed to Mrs. Middleton, the housekeeper, and we went down that same afternoon. Yesterday evening I was forced to return to town, but my wife and my uncle remained on. This morning I received this telegram."

He handed it over to me:

COME AT ONCE UNCLE HARRINGTON MURDERED LAST NIGHT BRING GOOD DETECTIVE IF YOU CAN BUT DO COME—ZOE.

"Then, as yet you know no details?"

"No, I suppose it will be in the evening papers. Without doubt the police are in charge."

It was about three o'clock when we arrived at the little station of Elmer's Dale. From there a five-mile drive brought us to a small graystone building in the midst of the rugged moors.

"A lonely place," I observed with a shiver.

Havering nodded. "I shall try and get rid of it. I could never live here again."

We unlatched the gate and were walking up the narrow path to the oak door when a familiar figure emerged and came to meet us.

"Japp!" I exclaimed.

The Scotland Yard Inspector grinned at me in a friendly fashion before addressing my companion.

"Mr. Havering, I think? I've been sent down from London to take charge of this case, and I'd like a word with you, sir."

"My wife—"

"I've seen your good lady, sir—and the housekeeper. I won't keep you a moment, but I'm anxious to get back to the village now that I've seen all there is to see here."

"I know nothing as to what—"

"Ex-actly," said Japp soothingly. "But there are just one or two little points I'd like your opinion about all the same. Captain Hastings here, he knows me, and he'll go on up to the house and tell them you're coming. What have you done with the little man, by the way, Captain Hastings?"

"He's ill in bed with influenza."

"Is he now? I'm sorry to hear that. Rather the case of the cart without the horse, your being here without him, isn't it?"

And on his rather ill-timed jest I went on to the house. I rang the bell, as Japp had closed the door behind him. After some moments it was opened by a middle-aged woman in black.

"Mr. Havering will be here in a moment, I explained. "He has been detained by the Inspector. I have come down with him from London to look into the case. Perhaps you can tell me briefly what occurred last night."

"Come inside, sir." She closed the door behind me, and we stood in the dimly lighted hall. "It was after dinner last night, sir, that the man came. He asked to see Mr. Pace, sir, and, seeing that he spoke the same way, I thought it was an American gentleman friend of Mr. Pace's and I showed him into the gun-room, and then went to tell Mr. Pace. He wouldn't give any name, which, of course, was a bit odd, now I come to think of it. I told Mr. Pace, and he seemed puzzled like, but he said to the mistress: 'Excuse me, Zoe, while I just see what this fellow wants.' He went off to the gun-room, and and I went back to the kitchen, but after a while I heard loud voices, as if they were quarrelling, and I came out into the hall. At the same time, the mistress she comes out too, and just then there was a shot and then a dreadful silence. We both ran to the gun-room door, but it was locked and we had to go round to the window. It was open, and there inside was Mr. Pace, all shot and bleeding."

"What became of the man?"

"He must have got away through the window, sir, before we got to it."

"And then?"

"Mrs. Havering sent me to fetch the police. Five miles to walk it was. They came back with me, and the constable he stayed all night, and this morning the police gentleman from London arrived."

"What was this man like who called to see Mr. Pace?"

The housekeeper reflected.

"He had a black beard, sir, and was about middle-aged, and had on a light overcoat. Beyond the fact that he spoke like an American I didn't notice much about him."

"I see. Now I wonder if I can see Mrs. Havering?"

"She's upstairs, sir. Shall I tell her?"

"If you please. Tell her that Mr.

Havering is outside with Inspector Japp, and that the gentleman he has brought back with him from London is anxious to speak to her as soon as possible."

"Very good, sir."

I was in a fever of impatience to get at all the facts. Japp had two or three hours' start of me, and his anxiety to be gone made me keen to be close at his heels.

Mrs. Havering did not keep me waiting long. In a few minutes I heard a light step descending the stairs, and looked up to see a very handsome young woman coming towards me. She wore a flame-colored jumper that set off the slender boyishness of her figure. On her dark head was a little hat of flame-colored leather. Even the present tragedy could not dim the vitality of her personality.

I introduced myself, and she nodded in quick comprehension.

"Of course I have often heard of you and your colleague, Monsieur Poirot. You have done some wonderful things together, haven't you? It was very clever of my husband to get you so promptly. Now will you ask me questions? That is the easiest way, isn't it, of getting to know all you want to."

"Thank you, Mrs. Havering. Now what time was it that this man arrived?"

"It must have been just before nine o'clock. We had finished dinner and were sitting over our coffee and cigarettes."

"Your husband had already left for London?"

"Yes, he went up by the 6:15."

"Did he go by car to the station, or did he walk?"

"Our own car isn't down here. One came out from the garage in Elmer's Dale to fetch him in time for the train."

"Was Mr. Pace quite his usual self?"

"Absolutely. Most normal in every way."

"Now, can you describe this visitor at all?"

"I'm afraid not. I didn't see him. Mrs. Middleton showed him straight into the gun-room and then came to tell my uncle."

"What did your uncle say?"

"He seemed rather annoyed, but went off at once. It was about five minutes later that I heard the sound of raised voices. I ran out into the hall and almost collided with Mrs. Middleton. Then we heard the shot. The gun-room door was locked on the inside, and we had to go right round the house to the window. Of course that took some time, and the murderer had been able to get well away. My poor uncle"—her voice faltered—"had been shot through the head. I saw at once that he was dead. I sent Mrs. Middleton for the police. I was careful to touch nothing in the room but to leave it exactly as I found it."

I nodded approval. "Now, as to the weapon?"

"Well, I can make a guess at it, Captain Hastings. A pair of revolvers of my husband's were mounted on the wall. One of them is missing. I pointed this out to the police, and they took the other one away with them. When they have extracted the bullet, I suppose they will know for certain."

"May I go to the gun-room?"

"Certainly. The police have finished with it. But the body has been removed."

She accompanied me to the scene of the crime. At that moment Havering entered the hall, and with a quick apology his wife ran to him. I was left to undertake my investigations alone.

I may as well confess at once that they were rather disappointing. In detective novels clues usually abound, but here I could find nothing that struck me as out of the ordinary except a large bloodstain on the carpet where I judged the dead man had fallen. I examined everything with painstaking care and took a couple of pictures of the room with my little camera which I had brought with me. I also examined the ground outside the window, but it appeared to have been so heavily trampled underfoot that I judged it was useless to waste time over it. No, I had seen all that Hunter's Lodge had to show me. I must go back to Elmer's Dale and get into touch with Japp. Accordingly I took leave of the Haverings, and was driven off in the car that had brought us up from the station.

I found Japp at the Matlock Arms and he took me to see the body. Harrington Pace was a small, spare clean-shaven man, typically American in appearance. He had been shot through the back of the head, and the revolver had been discharged at close quarters.

"Turned away for a moment," remarked Japp, "and the other fellow snatched up a revolver and shot him. The one Mrs. Havering handed over to us was fully loaded and I suppose the other one was also. Curious what darn fool things people do. Fancy keeping two loaded revolvers hanging up on your wall."

"What do you think of the case?" I asked, as we left the gruesome chamber.

"Well, I'd got my eye on Havering to begin with. Oh, yes!" noting my exclamation of astonishment. "Havering has one or two shady incidents in his past. When he was a boy at Oxford there was some funny business about the signature on one of his father's checks. All hushed up of course. Then, he's pretty heavily in debt now, and they're the kind of debts he wouldn't like to go to his uncle about, whereas you may be sure the uncle's will would be in his favor. Yes, I'd got my eye on him, and that's why I wanted to speak to him before he saw his wife, but

their statements dovetail all right, and I've been to the station and there's no doubt whatever that he left by the 6:15. That gets up to London about 10:30. He went straight to his club, he says, and if that's confirmed—why, he couldn't have been shooting his uncle here at nine o'clock in a black beard!"

"Ah, yes, I was going to ask you what you thought about that beard?"

Japp winked. "I think it grew pretty fast—grew in the five miles from Elmer's Dale to Hunter's Lodge. Americans that I've met are mostly clean-shaven. Yes, it's amongst Mr. Pace's American associates that we'll have to look for the murderer. I questioned the housekeeper first, and then her mistress, and their stories agree all right, but I'm sorry Mrs. Havering didn't get a look at the fellow. She's a smart woman, and she might have noticed something that would set us on the track."

I sat down and wrote a lengthy account to Poirot. I was able to add various further items of information before I posted the letter.

The bullet had been extracted and was proved to have been fired from a revolver similar to the one held by the police. Furthermore, Mr. Havering's movements on the night in question had been checked and verified, and it was proved beyond doubt that he had actually arrived in London by the train in question. And, thirdly, a sensational development had occurred. A city gentleman, living at Ealing, on crossing Haven Green to get to the District Railway Station that morning, had observed a brown-paper parcel stuck between the railings. Opening it, he found that it contained a revolver. He handed the parcel over to the local police station, and before night it was proved to be the one we were in search of, the mate of that given us by Mrs. Havering. One bullet had been fired from it.

All this I added to my report. A telegram from Poirot arrived while I was at breakfast the following morning:

[illegible]
JAPP WOULD HAVE SUCH AN IDEA
[illegible]
WORE THIS MORNING SAME OF MRS.
[illegible]
THEY ARE UNDEREXPOSED AND NOT
[illegible]

It seemed to me that Poirot's style was unnecessarily facetious. I also fancied he was a shade jealous of my position on the spot with full facilities for handling the case. His request for a description of the clothes worn by the two women appeared to me to be simply ridiculous, but I complied as well as I, a mere man, was able to.

At eleven a reply came from Poirot:

ADVISE JAPP ARREST HOUSEKEEPER [illegible]

Dumfounded, I took the wire to Japp. He swore softly under his breath.

"He's the goods, Monsieur Poirot! If he says so, there's something in it. And I hardly noticed the woman. I don't know that I can go so far as arresting her, but I'll have her watched. We'll go up right away and take another look at her."

But it was too late. Mrs. Middleton, that quiet middle-aged woman, who had appeared so normal and respectable, had vanished into thin air. Her box had been left behind. It contained only ordinary wearing apparel. There was no clue in it to her whereabouts.

From Mrs. Havering we elicited all the facts we could:

"I engaged her about three weeks ago when Mrs. Emery, our former housekeeper, left. She came to me from Mrs. Selbourne's Agency in Mount Street—a very well-known place. I get all my servants from there. They sent several women to see me, but this Mrs. Middleton seemed much the nicest, and had splendid references. I engaged her on the spot, and notified the Agency of the fact. I can't believe that there was anything wrong with her. She was such a nice quiet woman."

The thing was certainly a mystery. While it was clear that the woman herself could not have committed the crime, since at the moment the shot was fired Mrs. Havering was with her in the hall, nevertheless she must have some connection with the murder, or why should she suddenly take to her heels and bolt?

I wired the latest development to Poirot and suggested returning to London and making inquires at Selbourne's Agency.

Poirot's reply was prompt:

USELESS TO INQUIRE AT AGENCY THEY WILL NEVER HAVE HEARD OF HER FIND OUT WHAT VEHICLE TOOK HER UP TO HUNTERS LODGE WHEN SHE FIRST ARRIVED THERE.

Though mystified, I was obedient. The means of transport in Elmer's Dale were limited. The local garage had two battered cars, and there were two station flies. None of these had been requisitioned on the date of the housekeeper's arrival. Questioned, Mrs. Havering explained that she had given the woman the money for her fare down to Derbyshire and sufficient to hire a car or fly to take her up to Hunter's Lodge. There was usually one of the cars at the station on the chance of its being required. Taking into consideration the further fact that nobody at the station had noticed the arrival of a stranger, black-bearded or otherwise, on the fatal evening, every-

thing seemed to point to the conclusion that the murderer had come to the spot in a car, which had been waiting near at hand to aid his escape, and that the same car had brought the mysterious housekeeper to her new post.

I may mention that inquiries at the Agency in London bore out Poirot's prognostication. No such woman as Mrs. Middleton had ever been on their books. They had received the Hon. Mrs. Havering's application for a housekeeper, and had sent her various applicants for the post. When she sent them the engagement fee, she omitted to mention which woman she had selected.

Somewhat crestfallen, I returned to London. I found Poirot established in an armchair by the fire in a garish silk dressing gown. He greeted me with much affection.

"*Mon ami* Hastings! But how glad I am to see you. Veritably I have for you a great affection! And you have enjoyed yourself? You have run to and fro with the good Japp? You have interrogated and investigated to your heart's content?"

"Poirot," I cried, "the thing's a dark mystery! It will never be solved."

"It is true that we are not likely to cover ourselves with glory over it."

"No, indeed. It's a hard nut to crack."

"Oh, as far as that goes, I am very good at cracking the nuts! A veritable squirrel! It is not that which embarrasses me. I know well enough who killed Mr. Pace."

"You know? How did you find out?"

"Your illuminating answers to my wires supplied me with the truth. See here, Hastings, let us examine the facts methodically and in order. Mr. Harrington Pace is a man with a considerable fortune which at his death will doubtless pass to his nephew. Point No. 1. His nephew is known to be desperately hard up. Point No. 2. His nephew is also known to be—shall we say a man of rather loose moral fiber? Point No. 3."

"But Roger Havering is proved to have journeyed straight up to London."

"*Précisément*—and therefore, as Mr. Havering left Elmer's Dale at 6:15, and since Mr. Pace cannot have been killed before he left, we conclude quite rightly that Mr. Havering did *not* shoot his uncle. But there is a Mrs. Havering, Hastings."

"Impossible! The housekeeper was with her when the shot was fired."

"Ah, yes, the housekeeper. But she has disappeared."

"She will be found."

"I think not. There is something peculiarly elusive about that housekeeper, don't you think so, Hastings? It struck me at once."

"She played her part, I suppose, and then got out in the nick of time."

"And what was her part?"

"Well, presumably to admit her confederate, the black-bearded man."

"Oh, no, that was not her part! Her part was what you have just mentioned—to provide an alibi for Mrs. Havering at the moment the shot was fired. And no one will ever find her, *mon ami,* because she does not exist! 'There's no sech person,' as your so great Shakespeare says."

"It was Dickens," I murmured, unable to suppress a smile. "But what do you mean, Poirot?"

"I mean that Zoe Havering was an actress before her marriage, that you and Japp only saw the housekeeper in a dark hall, a dim middle-aged figure in black with a faint subdued voice, and finally that neither you nor Japp, nor the local police whom the housekeeper fetched, *ever saw Mrs. Middleton and her mistress at one and the same time!* It was child's-play for that clever woman. On the pretext of summoning her mistress she runs upstairs, slips on a bright jumper and a hat with black curls attached which she jams down over the gray transformation. A few deft touches and the makeup is removed, a slight dusting of rouge, and the brilliant Zoe Havering comes down with her clear ringing voice. Nobody looks particularly at the housekeeper. Why should they? There is nothing to connect her with the crime. She, too, has an alibi."

"But the revolver that was found at Ealing? Mrs. Havering could not have placed it there?"

"No, that was Roger Havering's job—but it was a mistake on their part. It put me on the right track. A man who has committed a murder with a revolver which he found on the spot would fling it away at once—he would not carry it up to London with him. No, the motive was clear, the criminals wished to focus the interest of the police on a spot far removed from Derbyshire; they were anxious to get the police away as soon as possible from the vicinity of Hunter's Lodge. Of course the revolver found at Ealing was not the one with which Mr. Pace was shot. Roger Havering discharged one shot from it, brought it up to London, went straight to his club to establish his alibi, then went quickly out to Ealing, a matter of about twenty minutes only, placed the parcel where it was found, and so back to town. That charming creature, his wife, quietly shoots Mr. Pace after dinner—you remember he was shot from behind?—reloads the revolver and puts it back in its place, and then starts off with her desperate little comedy."

"It's incredible," I murmured, and yet—"

"And yet it is true. *Bien sur,* my friend, it is true. But to bring that precious pair to justice, that is another matter. Well, Japp must do what he can—I have written him fully—but I very much fear, Hastings, that we shall be obliged to leave them to *le bon Dieu.*"

"The wicked flourish like a green bay tree," I reminded him.

"But at a price, Hastings, always at a price, *croyez-moi!*"

Poirot's forebodings were confirmed. Japp, though convinced of the truth of his theory, was unable to get together the necessary evidence to insure a conviction.

Mr. Pace's huge fortune passed into the hands of his murderers. Nevertheless, Nemesis did overtake them, and when I read in the paper that the Hon. Roger and Mrs. Havering were among those killed in the crash of a private plane to Paris I knew that Justice was satisfied.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HELEN McCLOY**

TITLE: ***The Silent Informer***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Dr. Basil Willing

LOCALE: Cape Cod, Massachusetts

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Gertrude Ehrenthal, the famous concert pianist, had the stricken look of widowhood. She wore stark black and white. At least one person thought she needed "a touch of red."*

SHE WAS LOVELY THE FIRST TIME Basil Willing saw her, in the village street. She seemed all one color—her skin tanned a pale gold; her hair, dark gold; and her eyes, a warm amber, like sherry by firelight. Her dress was white dimity, sprigged with rosebuds, and there was a pale pink rose in the olive-green ribbon of her yellow Leghorn hat.

He asked his neighbor, Paul Amory, who she was. "A girl of the golden west?"

"No, the Swaynes are Boston. They've been coming to this part of the Cape in summer for a long time. Sybilla's just nineteen."

She looked quite different the afternoon she came up the path to Paul's beach cottage. An ugly, brown stain spread across the billowing, white skirt. There were smears of mud along the hem. Both men had risen. Paul cried, "Sybilla! What happened?"

"Everything." She was on the verge of tears.

"Is someone following you?" Basil looked toward the dunes. A tall clump of bayberry was quivering as if someone had just forced a path through it.

"I don't think so, but . . ."

Paul said, "This is Dr. Willing. He has the cottage near mine."

She turned to Basil. "You're a criminologist, aren't you?"

He smiled. "Just a psychiatrist who has worked with the police in New York.

"I didn't know that." Paul glanced at him in surprise. "What happened to your dress, Sybilla? Did you see Mrs. Ehrenthal?"

"I saw her all right." The golden skin was flushed a ripe apricot. "I'm so ashamed. And I still don't understand it."

"Tell me," said Paul.

Basil made a move to go. The girl herself detained him. "Maybe you can help. It's nothing criminal, but it is. . . . peculiar. Every summer this village has a square dance and covered-dish supper for local charities. Summer people, like us, who've been coming here for years, pitch in and help. This year there were so many more summer people than usual that our committee decided to get a paid organizer from New York and the agency sent us Paul. He mailed printed notices of the dance to everybody in the local telephone book and he gave each of us a list of people to see personally. On my list was Gertrude Ehrenthal. You've heard of her? She used to be a famous concert pianist. She's a widow now and wealthy."

"I ignored her wealth," said Paul. "I just wanted her to play for us."

"But what made you think she would?" protested Sybilla. "She's one of those women who have nothing to do with village life or even with other summer people. She's a New Yorker and she just isn't interested in us. She bought the old Ashley place three years ago, when the Ashleys were so hard up. Jim Eggers, the real estate man, has been trying to buy it back for the Ashleys ever since, but she won't sell. I knew she had never acknowledged the printed notice of the dance you sent her and I was sure she would turn me down, but . . . You were so insistent that I finally bearded the lioness in her den this afternoon. I wish I hadn't.

"Just as I rang the front doorbell, a big boxer came loping across the turf and stood beside me. He looked so fierce I was a little afraid of him. I felt quite relieved when the door was opened by a young man and the dog ran into the house ahead of me. I told the young man I'd come to see Mrs. Ehrenthal about the square dance. He showed me into a drawing room and said he'd tell his mother I was there. The dog crouched on a white bearskin rug while I waited. His paws had left a muddy track on the white velvet carpet. It was a lovely room in shades of white—pearl and oyster, cream and ivory, with touches of gilt.

"The son came back with Mrs. Ehrenthal. She was very New Yorkish and clever-looking—"

"What was the son like?" asked Basil.

"Oh, I don't know." Sybilla, who

was so ready with words for Mrs. Ehrenthal, had none at all for the famous woman's son. "He was all right, I guess . . . When I told her about the square dance, she surprised me by saying, 'I'd love to play for an audience once more. I'll write you a check for our tickets and then you must have tea with us.' She even explained about not answering our printed notice. It had been addressed to the wrong post office box—703—and, as hers is 610, she'd only just got it.

"All the time we talked the dog had been roaming the room and leaving that muddy track wherever he went, even on a window seat with pearl-satin cushions. A little maid brought in a big tea tray and Eric—the son—set up an old tip-table. Just as he was handing me a plate of small cakes, the dog put its muddy forepaws on my skirt and snatched a cake out of my hand. Mrs. Ehrenthal exclaimed, 'Oh, your pretty dress!' I was brought up properly, so I said, 'It doesn't matter,' and sipped my tea and tried to pretend nothing had happened. When the dog realized I had no more cake, he bounded toward the cake dish on the table. Those old tea tables with hinged tops are rightly called 'tip-tables.' He lunged and the whole thing toppled over with a hideous crash of delicate china. Tea streamed over the rug—they'll never get the stain out—and scalded my knees.

"I lost control. I cried out, 'Really, I should think you'd train your dog!' And then . . . Oh, you can never guess what happened. Mrs. Ehrenthal said, 'My dog? I thought of course it was yours!'

"Oh, laugh, if you like. That part is funny, I know. But it wasn't a bit funny afterward. I believed her when she said the dog wasn't hers, but she didn't believe me when I said it wasn't mine. She behaved as if she thought I was just trying to get out of paying for the damage. She said, 'My dear Miss Swayne, do you seriously expect me to believe that dog is not yours? Why else would he come into the house with you?'

"You see the son had answered the doorbell himself and seen the dog come in with me. Evidently he'd told her something like: 'There's a girl here to see you about the village dance and she's brought her dog with her.' They had never seen me before. They had no way of knowing whether I had a dog or not and they'd been too polite to say anything about the dog when they thought he was mine—just as I'd been too polite to say anything about him when I thought he was theirs.

"By this time the dog had run out an open French window with Eric chasing him, so I was alone with her when I left. I said, 'I never saw that dog before in my life,' and walked out. But I still don't understand it. Why did the

dog walk into the house with me if it wasn't theirs? And why wouldn't they believe me when I said it wasn't mine?"

"Do the Ehrenthals own another dog?" said Basil. "Perhaps a female?"

"No. She said they'd never had a dog."

"Maybe she was lying herself." Basil's eyes twinkled. "Maybe she isn't as wealthy as you think and needs a new carpet, so she staged the whole thing with her own dog, hoping she could make you pay for the damage."

"But she couldn't hope to prove in court that the dog was mine when he isn't," answered Sybilla, seriously. "And it would be hard to stage a thing like that. You'd have to spend weeks training a dog to upset a tea table on purpose. And she couldn't have known beforehand that I was coming there this afternoon."

"Perhaps the dog belongs to the son," suggested Paul. "Maybe he acquired it this afternoon and, now the animal's done so much damage, he doesn't dare admit to his mother that it's his."

Basil spoke more thoughtfully. "You say the dog was a boxer. Was he brindled, with a brass-studded collar?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"It's just occurred to me that maybe I do."

"You mean Loki?" Paul was astonished. "He'd have to cross Route 28 to get to the Ehrenthals. I've trained him not to cross highways. He might be killed."

"Where is Loki now?"

Paul let out a piercing whistle.

"Your dog?" Sybilla was amazed. "Why haven't I seen him before?"

"You never came up here before," answered Paul. "I don't take him to the village. He's too big for a car dog."

"But what would he be doing at the Ehrenthals?"

"I have no idea." Paul frowned. "Poor Loki! I'll have to keep him on a chain now . . . And I'll have to pay for Mrs. Ehrenthal's carpet, to say nothing of your dress."

"Never mind my dress," answered Sybilla, cheerfully.

But Paul wasn't listening. He let out another high-pitched whistle. "Where is the fellow? Excuse me a minute . . ." He ran down the steps.

A breath of wind sighed and the shadows lengthened, as if the day were stretching and yawning as it turned toward night. "I must go," said Sybilla. Basil walked down the sandy path with her. As they came to her car, they saw Paul farther down the drive, facing a clump of bayberry. When he heard their steps, he called out in a tight voice, "Willing! Come here—quick!"

The big boxer lay on his side among the bushes, his eyes half open, filmed and dull. Above the

collar, his throat had been slashed. Arterial blood still flowed with a faint pulsation. There was no sign of a knife.

Paul Amory was not the type to show emotion easily. He was lean, wiry, and tough-looking. But now his face was as white as the sand.

"Loki . . ." He knelt beside the dying dog. The eyes opened a little wider—questioning, bewildered. The tail twitched in mute recognition.

"It's the same dog." Tears came into Sybilla's eyes . . .

At last Paul stood up. "You said that Eric Ehrenthal followed the dog out of the house. Did you see either of them again?"

"No."

"We all three saw something moving in the bushes just as you reached my house. Loki must have been killed then—while we sat talking. He couldn't bark. His throat was cut."

Sybilla protested. "I can't imagine Mrs. Ehrenthal or her son—"

"Can't you? I can." Paul's gray eyes were murderous. "If they dare to show their faces at the dance tonight, I shall have something to say to them."

The Village Hall embodied every decorative commonplace of its era—the picture window without a view, the panels of pine planks riddled with knotholes that previous generations discarded as unfit for building, and the machine-braided rug in strident green that screamed at the orange tone of the woodwork. A TV set and a built-in bar provided depressants for mind and body simultaneously. A smaller braided rug, behind the bar, muffled the bartenders footsteps, and, of course, there was a bar lamp with a driftwood base and a shade cut from an old chart of Nantucket Sound. It and the overhead lights were fluorescents that hesitated ponderously when they came on and then shed a glare that clung mercilessly to every wrinkle and blemish in every middle-aged face.

A long table was laden with casseroles of clam chowder and a handsome glazed ham with a bone-handled carving knife sharpened to a surgical edge, so that everyone could have at least one paper-thin slice. Paul, officiating behind the bar, offered Basil and Sybilla punch and said to Basil, "You know Jim Eggers, the real estate agent?"

"Who doesn't?" Basil smiled at a gaunt, colorless man waiting his turn at the bar.

Sybilla was looking toward the entrance at the other end of the room. "Here comes Fanny Ashley."

"The one who's trying to buy back the old Ashley place?"

Eggers turned pale eyes on Basil. "What gave you that idea? I made an offer, but I wasn't acting for the Ashleys, as everyone in the village seems to think. I was acting for a lawyer in New York and Heaven

only knows whom he was acting for. Funny anyone wanting that place."

"Why?"

"It's so big. There are few people today like the Ehrenthals, with enough money to keep it up. And nobody local would want it—because of the old story. It was ten years ago, before my time on the Cape, but I heard it all from Miss Ashley herself. When she got hard up, she couldn't sell the place at first, so she rented it to some fellow who turned out to be a crook —a French jewel thief known as Lucien Delorme. He worked Miami night spots in winter and spent his summers here. He was almost arrested in that house and I'm telling you, it rocked the village. He was so plausible that nobody had suspected him. When the police surrounded the house, he knifed one of them and escaped. They never did find the loot he was supposed to have lifted off the suckers in Miami. But the whole business gave the house a bad name."

"Maybe your New York lawyer is acting for the jewel thief who left some of his loot hidden in the house," suggested Basil.

Eggers grinned. "Could be, but what I don't know won't hurt me. Besides, Mrs. Ehrenthal will never sell. She's putting an oil burner in this fall, so she can spend most of the winter here. It's her son who misses New York, not she. Why, there are the Ehrenthals now."

Paul's hand shook as he ladled punch into another paper cup. "So they did come, after all."

"Let it ride for this evening," advised Basil. "You've no proof the boy killed your dog. You won't help anything by making a scene here."

Fanny Ashley paused beside the bar. Her plumpness was too well distributed to be called fat, but it filled the scant dress of pale raw silk solidly. Smoked glasses in a harlequin frame of shocking pink matched her lipstick, concealing her eyes like a Venetian half-mask.

"Sunglasses at night?" murmured Basil.

"Call them moonglasses," returned Sybilla. "The lenses are ground for astigmatism but they're smoked, so nobody will think she has to wear glasses because of her age."

Basil offered Sybilla a cigarette, but his eyes were on Mrs. Ehrenthal. Her sallow face had a sort of sad elegance that came from the nobly arched brows and the melancholy composure of her firm lips. It was the stricken look that widowhood leaves on some faces. Her hair was dark and she wore black linen, with a white bolero.

"Too much black and white," observed Sybilla, critically. "She needs a touch of red."

In the son, the sallowness was a warm olive, the brows seemed less skeptical, the lips firm without the cast of melancholy. An interesting

face. It was easy to see why Sybilla hadn't been able to find words for him. He must have bowled her over as something quite different from the crew-cut, mass-produced swains of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. She wouldn't have wanted to give herself away as she must have if she had tried to describe him.

Mrs. Ehrenthal sat down at the piano, which stood at the other end of the room close to the entrance. Her muscular fingers attacked the keyboard with a hard, brilliant touch that was almost masculine as she went smoothly and easily into the familiar opening chords of the *Appassionata.*

"What a pity to make her play *Turkey in the Straw* after that!" whispered Sybilla.

For a few moments the crowd listened; then whispers became murmurs and, in ten minutes, the music was being played against a sibilant obbligato of voices. Eric Ehrenthal stood beside the piano with Fanny Ashley and Eggers. Basil saw Fanny's lips move, but no sound of her voice came to him at such a distance. His eyes were still on the group at the piano when Paul Amory said, "How about more punch?"

At that moment the lights went out.

The sudden blinding darkness stilled every tongue. In the silence the chords from the piano faltered, then stopped.

"Music ceases," whispered Sybilla. "My favorite Shakespearean stage direction."

"What about: *Thunder and lightening. Enter Caesar in his nightgown?"*

There was a rustling in the darkness. A voice cried loudly, "It can't be a hurricane. Must be a blown fuse."

"Where's the fuse box?" Basil addressed darkness. Paul's voice answered, "Just outside the front door, over by the piano. If I can only find the gate to this bar . . ."

"Never mind. I'll check." Basil groped his way through the crowd. His sense of direction was clear for he had been looking toward the piano just before the lights went out. He lit a match and saw the fuse box on the wall, outside the entrance, to the left. His flame flickered in the wind and went out.

"You should use a lighter." Another flame flared. Eric Ehrenthal's striking face was modeled in high relief by the shadows. Basil pulled open the door of the fuse box. The main switch had been disconnected. Eric asked wryly, "Practical joke?"

"Not very funny." Basil snapped the switch back into contact. For a long moment nothing happened. Then the sluggish fluorescent lights stumbled into being.

A woman screamed. It was Fanny Ashley. The expression of her eyes was still masked by the ridiculous moonglasses, but the direction

of her gaze was unmistakable. She was looking toward Gertrude Ehrenthal, slumped forward on the keyboard of the piano. The bone handle of the carving knife from the supper table protruded from her left shoulder. A thin stream of fresh blood stained the white bolero. A touch of red . . .

In an hour the crowded room was almost emptied. Sybilla and Eric sat close together as if tragedy had forced the sympathy between them to a premature expression. Fanny had taken off her glasses, revealing narrow reddened eyes that made her look years older. Jim Eggers and Paul Amory stood looking curiously at a pair of white cotton work-gloves the police had found near the piano.

Lieutenant Copley of the State Police turned to Basil. "You and Miss Swayne and Mr. Amory are obviously in the clear. You were all at the bar at the other end of the room from the fuse box when the lights went out. But Miss Ashley, Mr. Eggers, and Mr. Ehrenthal were standing near the piano, which is close to the front door and the fuse box, while everyone else was clustered around the supper table in the center of the room. One of those three—Miss Ashley or Ehrenthal or Eggers—must have pulled the main switch and stabbed this woman in the darkness."

Basil turned to Eric. "Mr. Ehrenthal, why didn't your mother believe Miss Swayne when she said the dog at your house this afternoon was not hers?"

Eric answered in a voice still numb with shock. "My mother told me she had seen the dog once before, when she drove past Mr. Amory's cottage. Miss Swayne came to us on an errand from Mr. Amory and the dog seemed to have come with her. Naturally my mother assumed that the dog was hers and that she had been visiting Mr. Amory's cottage the day my mother saw it there."

"What happened when you followed the dog?"

"He outdistanced me. I didn't kill him."

Lieutenant Copley knew Basil by reputation. "Is it your theory that whoever killed Amory's dog later killed Mrs. Ehrenthal?"

"Yes," answered Basil, "Mr. Eggers, isn't it time you told us who has been trying to buy the old Ashley place from the Ehrenthals?"

"I have no idea. As I told you, I was approached by a lawyer from New York.

"The lawyer's name?"

Eggers hesitated, then he said, "Luke Anders."

"Did you know his practice was chiefly criminal?" Basil turned back to the lieutenant. "Was Lucien Delorme ever caught?"

"No. He's been hiding out for ten years."

"Then it's possible his loot may still be hidden in the Ehrenthal house. It's possible he stabbed Mrs.

Ehrenthal because she was going to occupy that house all the year round. She wouldn't sell it. That meant he couldn't gain access to it as long as she lived—that is, without assuming all the risks of burglary. Her son liked New York better than Cape Cod. He would probably sell, if she died, especially if she died by violence and the house acquired tragic associations for him. Mrs. Ehrenthal was putting in a new oil burner. That could mean digging in the cellar where the loot might be discovered. With her eliminated, Delorme could make a relatively small down payment on the house, recover his loot, and then disappear with a huge profit."

"But Lucien Delorme isn't here now!" protested the Lieutenant.

"Are you sure?" Basil's simple question charged the atmosphere explosively. "What did Delorme look like?"

"Medium height, about five feet seven. Stocky, about a hundred and eighty. Sandy hair. Pink skin. Gray eyes."

"Only the height and the color of the eyes need be the same," said Basil. "He could lose weight and color in ten years. His hair could have turned gray or have been dyed. His whole appearance could have changed."

Jim Eggers and Paul Amory looked at one another, each suddenly aware of the other's gray eyes and medium height.

"We never got his fingerprints," said the lieutenant.

"You don't need them now," answered Basil. "Let's assume Delorme returned to Ashley Point ten years later, when he thought enough time had elapsed so he wouldn't be recognized. He would assume cover—an apparent occupation that gave him access to everyone in the village, some role so functional that he was just a part of the landscape."

Copley gasped. "A real estate agent? Or a paid organizer for charity drives?"

"Are you nuts?" cried Paul. "I was behind the bar when the lights went out—nowhere near the fuse box."

"So you were." Basil opened the gate in the bar and stepped behind it. "And you were right here when the lights came on again."

"Whoever pulled that switch had to be standing beside the fuse box at the other end of the room when the lights failed," said Paul. "And that's where Jim Eggers—"

Once more the lights went out.

Fanny Ashley screamed, "Oh, no! Not again!"

Copley shouted, "Get to that fuse box, Rafferty! The rest of you, cover windows and door."

Flashlights moved in the dark. A voice called, "Fuse blown, lieutenant, but there are some extras. Just a moment."

The lights came on again. Basil was still behind the bar. He rolled

aside the small braided rug there, revealing the electric cord that ran under it to the bar lamp. The insulation had been scraped away. Lamplight glittered on two copper wires exposed for two inches, side by side.

"Two more questions, Miss Ashley: Was 703 the post office box number for your house when Delorme lived there? And did he keep a dog?"

"Why, it *was* 703 . . ." stammered Fanny Ashley. "And he had a little puppy. I think it was a boxer . . ."

"Amory used his foot on the rug that concealed the two exposed wires—to rub them together," Basil explained later. "Of course this caused a short circuit and blew a fuse. He knew Mrs. Ehrenthal would be at the piano near the fuse box. As organizer for the dance, he was familiar with every detail of the Village Hall, and in the dark her music gave him the direction. He snatched the carving knife from the table and stabbed her under cover of darkness while she was still playing. The fuse box was right beside the piano. He had plenty of time to replace the blown fuse with an extra one he had ready and then disconnect the main switch—so that all the evidence would indicate that the lights had been turned off by someone who had pulled the main switch and, therefore, by someone who was standing close to the fuse box at the very moment the lights went out.

"He was back behind the bar when I asked where the fuse box was and he took pains to suggest to me he had been behind the bar all that time by saying that he couldn't find the bar gate in the dark.

"He killed his own dog because it was giving him away. There's only one plausible reason why any dog would enter a strange house uninvited. It must be a house where the dog has lived before with his own master. I knew one case where a dog returned every few days to his old home to the annoyance of the new tenants. If Amory's Loki had started doing that someone was sure to suspect, sooner or later, that the dog had lived in that house before. And the only previous tenant—besides the Ashleys themselves—was Lucien Delorme, the French jewel thief, who kept a boxer puppy there ten years ago.

"Delorme risked bringing the dog back to this neighborhood because the dog's appearance had also changed. He was no longer a puppy and he was useful as a watchdog and bodyguard. No doubt Delorme was a dog lover in his own way, but he was also a ruthless criminal who didn't hesitate to use a knife on human being or animal if he thought he had to in order to save his own skin. He realized what the dog was doing to him the mo-

ment Sybilla told her story and, while she and I were still talking, he went down the drive and killed the dog. It was the dog's own passage through the bayberry bushes that made them quiver earlier that afternoon—not Ehrenthal or anyone else pursuing the dog."

"Then, if it hadn't been for the dog, you wouldn't have suspected . . . ?"

"Oh, yes, I should. I had begun to suspect Amory was Delorme long before I worked out the evidence of the dog. Though he spoke English entirely without a French accent, even under stress, he still used the word 'ignore' as the French use it. He said, 'I ignored Mrs. Ehrenthal's wealth.' What professional charity organizer would 'ignore' wealth in the English sense of the word? He meant: 'I didn't know about Mrs. Ehrenthal's wealth' and that use of the word 'ignore' is definitely French. Also, I asked myself: Why had he sent Mrs. Ehrenthal's notice of the dance to Box 703 instead of Box 610? Was 703 an old box number for that same house? Miss Ashley has confirmed my suspicion that it was the box number used by Delorme when he was living in the house. That box number was indelibly associated with that house in his subconscious memory and he must have longed nostalgically for the days when he lived there, secure and unsuspected—an unconscious wish that expressed itself in his typographical error. As I've so often said, the subconscious is the silent informer who betrays all our secrets, innocent and criminal alike.

"The ten-year-old box number and the French use of the word 'ignore' were a sentence in cipher that clearly read: 'I am a Frenchman and I lived in this house ten years ago.' After that, all I had to ask myself was: How could Amory make those lights go out when he was standing so far from the main switch?

a new story by

AUTHOR: **LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN**

TITLE: ***The Man Who Lost His Taste***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee

LOCALE: Northbank, United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *An interesting peek(o) into the aromatic world of tea-tasting—with that trio of modern investigators, Drs. Coffee and Mookerji, pathologists, and detective Ritter of the Northbank police . . .*

EDITORS' FILE CARD

DR. COFFEE HAD NEVER LAID eyes on Quentin Laird until the night of Laird's twenty-ninth—and last—birthday. Until that moment Laird had been a number on a rack of test tubes, a set of microscopic slides, an unusual case referred by the pathologist of Northbank's Veterans Hospital to Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee, pathologist at Pasteur Hospital.

At second hand, Dr. Coffee knew that Laird had been a young tea-taster when the draft boards began scraping the bottom of the barrel in the middle 1940s, that the Northbank draft board had not considered tea-tasting an essential occupation, and that Laird had fought his war with the C.B.I. Command in Assam, where he could duck into a nearby tea plantation when off duty. Some time after his return home and his honorable discharge, Laird had entered the Veterans Hospital with a malady which was diagnosed as pulmonary TB. It was a natural error because the symptoms and the x-ray pictures were characteristic. When the Army pathologist couldn't isolate any Koch's bacilli, however, he called on Dr. Coffee whose microscope picked up an oval yeast-like fungus cell known as monilia.

Learning Laird's civilian profession and the geography of his military service, Dr. Coffee made the diagnosis of Bronchomoniliasis—tea-taster's cough. After three months of radio therapy and heavy doses of potassium iodide, Laird left the hospital and—so the pathologist thought at the time—Dr. Coffee's life.

Dr. Coffee had completely forgotten about the tea-taster for more than a year, until the day his sister Ellen Laird walked into the pathology lab of Pasteur Hospital in a state bordering on nervous collapse. It was the day before Quentin's twenty-ninth birthday.

"You saved my brother once, Doctor," she said, "and you're going to have to save him again. Will you?"

"Relapse?" Dr. Coffee's long fingers brushed the unruly straw-colored hair back from his pensive brow.

"No. He's going to kill himself."

Dr. Coffee chuckled sympathetically as though to say, *This doesn't sound like a case for pathology, but I like your appealing brown eyes and your quick, wistful smile and the wavy brown hair that frames your fine young face. Regardless of your brother, I'd like to help you . . .*

"People who talk about committing suicide rarely do," he said.

"You don't know Quentin," the girl said. "He will. He's got a Japanese pistol he brought home from the Far East. You see, he can't work at his job any more. He was a tea-taster—and for ten days now he's lost his sense of taste. That's possible, isn't it?"

The pathologist nodded. "The medical term is ageusia. Everybody has a minor form of it when he gets a cold, or smokes too much."

"Quentin doesn't smoke."

"Or it could be an involvement of the ninth nerve, but that's rare. Why doesn't he go back to the hospital for a checkup?"

"He'd die first! Mr. Phelps—that's his boss at the Great Indo-Cathay Tea Company—told him to take a few weeks off and go away for a rest. But he just sits at home and mopes and reads Sanskrit. Quentin is . . . well, he's a . . ."

"A rather sensitive young man, I gather," said Dr. Coffee, who really meant: *He's a spoiled brat, certainly a neurotic, possibly psychotic, and probably in need of psychiatry rather than pathology.* He added, aloud, "Has your brother ever married, Miss Laird?"

"No. Quentin has lived with me ever since our parents were both killed in an auto accident."

So that's it, the pathologist thought; *no wonder the girl seems so upset. There's more emotional involvement here than mere sisterly concern. Perhaps there's some sort of latent Byronic attachment in the making.*

He said, "You're an extremely attractive young lady, Miss Laird, and yet you're not married either. Does your attitude toward your brother—your feeling of responsibility, I mean—have anything to do with the fact that you're still single?"

"Oh, no!" Ellen Laird blushed slightly. "Of course that's what Bill Albertson says, but it's not so. Not really."

"I take it Bill Albertson is in love with you and wants to marry you, but balks at marrying your brother, too. Right?"

"Please, Doctor!" The girl's eyes flashed. "I don't see that my personal affairs have anything to do—"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry. Just what do you want of me, Miss Laird?"

"I want you to talk to Quentin as a friend. Could you and Mrs. Coffee come over tomorrow night after dinner? It's Quentin's birthday. Do you play bridge?"

"My wife says not," Dan Coffee murmured. "However, Mrs. Coffee is in New York visiting her sister. I'll come."

"Oh, thank you!" Ellen Laird threw her arms impetuously around his neck and kissed him on the cheek.

When the girl had left, the pathologist strolled across the laboratory to the workbench at which Dr. Motilal Mookerji sat on a high stool, snipping off bits of spleen with a scissors and popping them into a jar of formalin. Dr. Mookerji, the resident pathologist at Pasteur Hospital, possessed degrees from Calcutta University, a vast knowledge of microbiology and biochemistry, a spheroidal silhouette, and a highly individualistic approach to the English language. He was not aware of Dr. Coffee's presence until the chief pathologist tugged playfully at the tail of his pink turban.

"With your tropical background, Doctor," Dan Coffee said, "you must be familiar with tea-taster's cough."

"Quite," said Dr. Mookerji. "Same is somewhat prevalent in northerly portions of native Bengal and Brahmaputra Valley, where causative fungus inhabits tea leaves."

"Have you ever heard of brain lesions or cranial nerve involvement in moniliasis?"

"Recollection is negative," said the Hindu resident. "Have never seen case of monilia fungus wandering in cranial bloodstream. What, please, are cerebral symptoms?"

"The patient seems to have lost his sense of taste. And since I made the original diagnosis, I'm going to follow through."

"Am wishing you seven-fold blessing of Ganesh, who is Vedantic god of good luck and learning," said Dr. Mookerji.

On his way home that night Dr.

Coffee stopped off at the public library for an armful of books destined to give him a theoretical background on tea and the tasting thereof. Before he fell asleep he learned the difference between fermented, semi-fermented, and green teas, between the Congous and the Darjeelings, the Oolongs and the Ceylons. He learned that ever since the Tea Inspection Act of 1897 no tea is admitted to the United States unless it passes the standards fixed by a board of Government Tea Examiners.

He did not learn from his books why the Northbank branch of the Great Indo-Cathay Tea Company, nearly a thousand miles from the point of importation, had to have its own tea-taster, but he got the answer next morning from Robert Phelps, the big, bluff, ruddy-faced manager of Indo-Cathay's blending and packing plant.

"Northbank is the center of an extensive hard-water region of the Middle West," Phelps explained. "We make a special blend here for the hard-water market—more Assam and other robust teas which will give the same standard Indo-Cathay flavor even when brewed with local water."

Laird? One of the best tea-tasters in the business.

"I'm worried about the boy," Phelps said. "He had one of the cleanest palates I ever encountered. What do you suppose is wrong with the lad, Doctor?"

"I'm trying to find out."

"Do you think it could be purely psychosomatic? I mean . . . well, I suppose you know about his situation at home?"

"Vaguely. Tell me more."

"I'm very fond of them all. You know Bill Albertson works here, too—head of our shipping department."

"That's the chap who's in love with Laird's sister?"

"Yes. Laird and Albertson used to be close friends, but they barely speak to each other now. Ellen has always mothered Quent and doesn't much like the idea of throwing him out after she marries Albertson, which is what Albertson insists on. So Laird sits tight and holds up the marriage and probably develops guilt feelings about it. Could a conflict like that produce symptoms like the loss of taste, Doctor?"

"Possibly. But we'd have to rule out physical causes first. Could I see where Laird works? I've never seen a tasting room before."

The temporarily deserted bailiwick of Quentin Laird was a small ground-floor room at the rear of Indo-Cathay's main building. In the center of the room stood a large circular table on which a dozen thin china bowls were arranged in pairs around the rim. A number of metal cannisters were stacked in the center of the table. Phelps touched the edge of the table and it revolved slowly—

so that the tea-taster sitting between a two-foot-tall gleaming chromium cuspidor and a stationary stand containing his standard teas for comparison could go quickly from one taste impression to another without getting up.

"Where did Laird keep his cheese?"

"Cheese?" Phelps stared.

"I read somewhere that when a tea-taster felt his palate getting tired, he would nibble cheese or nuts or something."

"Yes, some do. Laird used to take a sip of almond-and-barley water to freshen up his taste buds."

"And this fellow Albertson? Where's his office?"

"Just inside the warehouse, across the areaway there." Phelps pointed. "Want to speak to him?"

"Not now." The pathologist shook his head. "I'll probably be seeing him tonight."

Quentin Laird's birthday was a lugubrious affair, without even the melancholy gaiety of a wake. Dr. Coffee wished gloomily he had not come. Even the weather was foul—a stormy night full of rain and the sound and fury of wind-lashed trees—the perfect night to go to bed with Dumas Père's monumental cookbook and read of gastronomic delights, rather than worry over a tea-taster who could no longer taste.

Quentin Laird turned out to be the limp, undernourished, over-wrought, self-pitying young man that Dr. Coffee had imagined. He was self-consciously esthetic with pale blue eyes and scarcely any eyebrows. He was much more interesting, Dr. Coffee thought, when he had been merely a case history, a number in the laboratory; yet there was no denying the fact that the pallid young man was generating a heavily charged atmosphere as electric as a summer storm.

When the cut of the cards paired Quentin Laird and Bill Albertson as partners, Dr. Coffee could practically smell the ozone. Albertson was a thick-set, saturnine character with a bulldog jaw and sheep's eyes. The jaw was for Laird and the eyes were for Ellen. After Laird had made a jump bid with only a jack singleton trump support (down four at small slam doubled), the jaw was working overtime.

Ellen Laird was nervously playing the mother hen, trying desperately, with much clucking, to extend her protective wings over both chicks. She was not doing very well when the doorbell rang and Robert Phelps came in, accompanied by a gust of rain and a whine of wind.

Phelps had two bottles of champagne under one arm, a dripping umbrella under the other, and a vibrant Happy Birthday in his throat. He had started to sing *Happy Birthday To You* before the icy silence enveloped him and frost

began to form on his vocal cords. He handed the bottles to Ellen.

"Just off the ice," he boomed jovially. "Pop the corks."

"The birthday boy can't taste anything," Albertson growled.

"I'll pop the corks," Laird snapped. "Glasses, Ellen."

"But Quent, you never drink champ—"

"Tonight I'm being dragged screaming into my thirtieth year," Laird interrupted. "Get the glasses, Ellen." He turned to Dr. Coffee. "I've been protecting my taste buds for years, and what's happened to them? Tonight I think I'll get stinko. Okay with you, Doctor?"

"Fine idea," Dr. Coffee said. "Happy Birthday."

Laird emptied three quick glasses while Dr. Coffee was sipping his first. Ellen put down her glass after drinking the birthday toast, disappeared into the kitchen, and came back with a cup of tea.

"I don't suppose anyone else wants tea," she said.

Laird put his arm around his sister, leaned over her shoulder, and sniffed the cup.

"Tea?" he gibed. "That's the Earl Grey I brought home last week. It's not tea—it's perfume."

He reached for the cup, touched it to his lips twice, then handed it back. A curious smile flickered across his face as he turned slowly to Phelps.

"Bob," he said gravely, "I think my taste is coming back."

"Congratulations. Then this *is* a happy birthday."

"Maybe I'll go to the plant tonight." Laird's peculiar smile returned to twist the corners of his lips. "I've got lots of back work to do."

"Plenty of time tomorrow, Quent." Phelps slapped the tea-taster heartily on the back. "Bright and early in the morning."

"Bright and early and hung over," Albertson remarked.

"Well, I just came by to wish you many happy returns," Phelps said. "I've got to run now. Good night all."

As soon as the front door had closed, Quentin Laird donned his raincoat.

"Quent, where are you going?" Ellen asked uneasily.

"I told you I had back work to do."

"But Mr. Phelps said tomorrow would—"

"Sorry Ellen brought you out here for nothing, Doctor," Laird broke in. "Thanks, anyhow. Good night, Bill. Night, Sis."

The door slammed behind him.

"Bill!" There was alarm in Ellen's voice. "Go after him!"

"Let him sit down at his revolving table again," Albertson said. "Good for him psychologically. Right, Doctor?"

"I'm afraid," said Dr. Coffee, "that this has gone beyond the province of pathology. I—" He stopped. Ellen Laird had turned

deathly pale. She rushed from the room. An instant later she was back, trembling.

"Bill! You must go after him. His gun is gone."

"His gun is in his desk at the plant," Albertson protested. "It's been there for at least ten days."

"All the more reason, Bill. Please!"

Albertson made an aspirin face. "Okay," he said grudgingly.

Dr. Coffee had raided the refrigerator, leafed through the current issue of the *Journal of Clinical Pathology,* and was just falling asleep when his phone rang. It was Max Ritter, lieutenant of detectives, Northbank police.

"Hi, Doc," said the detective. "You know that guy you phoned me about this morning? That tea-taster?"

"You mean Quentin Laird, Max?"

"That's him. Well, he did it. He just shot himself. Dead. I'm on my way. Do I pick you up, Doc?"

"I'll be waiting, Max," the pathologist said, reaching for his trousers.

It was still raining when Dr. Coffee and the lanky, sad-eyed police detective reached the Great Indo-Cathay Tea Company. Quentin Laird was lying face down in the rain-spattered areaway between the main building and the warehouse. The headlights of a squad car illuminated the scene. The wet pavement was reddened by a halo of blood from a wound in the tea-taster's right temple. A revolver lay near his right hand.

The coroner had not yet arrived, so while Ritter questioned the night watchman, Dr. Coffee conducted his own somewhat extra-legal examination of the body.

The watchman's story was simple. When he punched the clock at Station 37 in the far wing of the main building, he had noticed through the window that there was a light in the tasting room on the ground floor. When he reached Station 27, the light had gone out. An instant later he heard a shot—one shot. He had rushed down, found Laird lying in the areaway, and called the police.

No, he had seen no one about. Nor had he heard any cars driving up or away; but by then the rain was making an awful racket . . .

"Damn the rain," Max Ritter said as Dr. Coffee was covering the body with his own slicker. "Washes out the whole works. No footprints, no powder marks, no nothing. You think the guy bumped himself off, Doc?"

"I don't know, Max. He said tonight he'd got his taste back, but he was a funny bird. Even so, I can't see why he would come all the way out here to shoot himself, and then do it in the rain instead of in his office. Look, Max." The

pathologist lowered his voice. "Laird had a bottle in the inside pocket of his coat. It broke when he fell. Will you make sure the coroner doesn't mess up the fragments when he gets here? I may be able to analyze the residue. I wonder—? Hello, Mr. Phelps."

The manager of the Great Indo-Cathay Tea Company stepped from the tasting room and pushed through the rain-soaked group of policemen. He had apparently dressed in a hurry. His tie was askew and one shoe was untied. He carried a furled umbrella. His face was drawn with anxiety as he looked around in silence, the rain dripping from his hat, his wet shoulders glistening in the rays of the headlamps.

"They just called me," he said. "I never thought—Good God, he's done it after all!"

"Don't touch anything, Mr. Phelps," Ritter said. "Who called you?"

"The watchman. My wife didn't want to wake me but—"

"You think he shot himself, Mr. Phelps?"

"Well, he talked a lot about it these last few days but I never really believed him. Has anybody seen Albertson?"

"Last I saw of him he was setting out to follow Laird," Dr. Coffee said. "That must have been two hours ago."

"Curious," Phelps said. "Has anyone notified Ellen?"

"I'll take care of Miss Laird," Dr. Coffee said, "as soon as the coroner gets here."

When Dr. Mookerji waddled into the pathology lab at eight the next morning, he found Dr. Coffee surrounded by test tubes and gently hissing Bunsen burners.

"Salaam, Doctor Sahib," said the resident, pressing the tips of his fingers together. "Prominent subocular rings are indicating nocturnal sleeplessness. You had irksome night-time emergencies, Doctor?"

"We've got a rather complicated qualitative to run," Dr. Coffee said, "and not much material to work with. I think we're looking for an acid. But if you get stuck, don't use up the last drop. Save enough for x-ray diffraction."

"Shabash!" exclaimed Dr. Mookerji. "We are again stalking homicidal murderers for Leftenant Ritter?"

"Our ex-moniliasis case was shot to death last night. The coroner thinks it's suicide but he's agreed to an autopsy. Will you join me downstairs in an hour, Doctor?"

"With utmost lugubrious pleasure," said Dr. Mookerji.

Max Ritter was sitting on Dr. Coffee's desk when the pathologist and his Hindu resident returned to the laboratory, bearing Mason jars and white enamel pails.

"Hi, Doc," the detective said,

pushing his soft felt hat back from deep-set eyes. "Find anything?"

"Not to the naked eye, Max. No brain tumor. No necrosis of the ninth nerve. We'll have to wait a few days for the microscopic sections. What about you?"

"The Laird dame's still a total loss," Ritter replied. "The family doc pumped her full of sedatives."

"What about Albertson?"

"He sticks to his story. Says he started out after Laird and got a flat tire. It took him half an hour to dig up a service station that was open and another twenty minutes to get the tire changed. When he got to the tea plant everything was dark and he didn't see anybody around, so he went home."

"How does it check, Max?"

"He looked in at Laird's office, all right. We found his prints on the glass door. And the service station backs him on the flat. I also checked the watchman's clock. But Albertson's tire was fixed in plenty time for him to be at the plant when Laird was shot. He also had plenty of time to be there ten to fifteen minutes before the shooting. Maybe he did look around, didn't see Laird, and left. Maybe—Doc, when we first walked through that tasting room, did you notice an umbrella leaning against the round table?"

"No, I didn't. Have you sealed the warehouse, Max?"

"Tight as six ticks. This guy Phelps is yelling his head off because we're holding up tea shipments. So I let him yell. I also padlocked the tasting room."

"With that umbrella inside?"

"Well, no," said the detective. "Funny thing. When I put the padlock on last night, the umbrella was gone."

Quentin Laird was buried in a flag-draped casket with full military honors. An American Legion chaplain pronounced the eulogy. Legion buglers played Taps, and Legion riflemen fired the regulation three volleys over a grave banked high with flowers—most of them from the lush gardens and private greenhouse of Robert Phelps.

Ellen Laird, sobbing on the shoulder of Bill Albertson, was convinced her brother had taken his own life, as he had threatened to do. At least one of the mourners knew this was untrue. So did Dr. Coffee.

"It's homicide, Max," the pathologist had explained to Ritter just before the funeral. "But it won't be necessary to hold up the interment. I've got all the evidence here in my lab."

The evidence, as Dr. Coffee expanded further, consisted of microscopic sections of tissue that had surrounded Laird's fatal wound. Not only did the sections show no flame burns—proof that the gun muzzle was not within six inches—but there was no powder tattoo-

ing. The rain may have washed away superficial powder stains, but a gun fired at a distance of from twelve to sixteen inches would have blasted powder grains deep into the secondary layers of skin. The microscope had found none. Therefore the muzzle of the gun that killed Laird had been held more than sixteen inches from his head—an awkward, unusual, and practically impossible position for a man committing suicide.

"Okay, so it's murder," said Ritter. "Where do we go from here, Doc?"

"Dr. Mookerji and I have a theory. Tell him, Doctor."

"Quite," said the Hindu. "Have completed analysis of residual liquid in fragments of broken bottle from late tea-taster's pocket. Have identified traces of gymnemic acid."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Ritter with mock surprise. "And just what the hell are you talking about?"

"Gymnemic acid, Leftenant," said Dr. Mookerji, "is active principle permeating leaves of plant entitled gymnema sylvestre, which is close relative of milkweed family. Am remembering that in native Bengal—"

"What's this Jim Whosis got to do with tea?" Ritter demanded.

"That," said Dr. Coffee, "is what we've got to find out. I had the New York office of the Food and Drug Administration on the phone a while ago. The Chief U. S. Tea Examiner agreed to fly one of his best men out here tonight, if you will wire him an official request—you or the chief of police."

"I'm official enough to send the wire," Ritter said, "even if I'm not official enough to be filled in on your secret."

The pathologist chuckled. "I'll explain when I go to the airport with you to meet the tea man, Max. Meanwhile, you'd better get a badge and credentials to make him a *pro tem* member of the Northbank police force—under any name except Sebastian Oxford. That's his real name. I want him to prowl around the Indo-Cathay warehouse tomorrow—as a cop. And keep Albertson and Phelps away from him."

"Easy, Doc. Phelps goes to Cleveland for the day, and I'll keep Albertson busy at the police station till Oxford gets what he wants."

The phone rang and Dr. Coffee answered. "Oh, hello, Professor . . . You have? . . . Good. Tomorrow? Dr. Mookerji too? . . . Thanks a lot. I'll tell him."

When he had hung up, the pathologist explained: "That was Professor Street of the Botany Department at Northbank College. At my request, he's made a survey of asclepiadaceous plants in this region. He's located some very interesting specimens. I want you to go with him tomorrow, Dr. Mook-

erji, to help identify some of the more exotic species. He'll pick you up at eleven."

"Am most gratified, personally and botanically," the Hindu said.

Dr. Coffee was away most of the next day which was Saturday —a biopsy at a Boone Point hospital without a pathologist, and an autopsy for an insurance company at Lycoville. On his return he went into a huddle with Max Ritter, Dr. Mookerji, and Sebastian Oxford, the U. S. Tea Examiner.

The huddle was interrupted by a long and indignant phone call from Bill Albertson, protesting "police persecution" and threatening legal action if he and Ellen Laird were further molested. Dan Coffee's reply was an invitation to Sunday breakfast. He then called Robert Phelps and extended an invitation to him. After all, when the wife's away, the amateur chef will play . . .

The orange juice had been squeezed and the house was redolent with the fragrance of frying bacon when the guests began to arrive. Dr. Coffee was very proud of his buckwheat cakes, as well as the delicately smoked breakfast sausage that an ex-patient sent him regularly from Indiana. And once he had graced the table with the half gallon of scrambled eggs and the gallon of coffee (his own blend of Caracolillo, Puerto Rico, and Medellin), he kept the conversation on a high gastronomic plane. He even avoided introductions until the food had disappeared.

"I hope you like my coffee," he said. "I wouldn't dare serve tea to experts like Mr. Phelps, Mr. Albertson, and Mr. Oxford."

"Oxford?" Phelps said. "Not Sebastian Oxford, the tea examiner?"

Mr. Oxford bowed modestly. He was a moon-faced, well-fed man whom any television panel would have picked as a truck driver rather than a tea-taster.

"Mr. Oxford," the pathologist continued, "brings us the interesting news that several thousand chests of substandard tea which were illegally removed from a New York warehouse last month have mysteriously turned up in Northbank. Now—"

Bill Albertson half rose from his chair. "Are you implying," he shouted, "that the Indo-Cathay shipping department had something to do with smuggling substandard tea into this country?"

"Oh, no." Mr. Oxford smiled blandly. "I'm merely stating that a shipment of Java black tea was recently denied entrance to the United States because it was not only substandard but had also absorbed a slight taint from being stowed near a cargo of hides. Who bribed whom and how the tea was spirited out of the New York

warehouse, I can't say. That's a matter for the F.B.I. and Treasury Agents to determine. But I can say that this tainted tea is now in the Indo-Cathay warehouse in Northbank. The off-taste has been disguised by spraying the tea with oil of bergamot which has, in fact, produced a fairly good imitation Earl Grey tea. True Earl Grey is China black sprayed with bergamot, but we're not getting much tea from China these days, and the bergamot is a dominant fragrance."

"Should we assume," said Phelps, "that since Lieutenant Ritter is here this morning, the Earl Grey concerns poor Laird's suicide?"

"Murder," corrected Max Ritter.

Bill Albertson upset his coffee cup.

"The connection is obvious," explained Dr. Coffee as he reached over to hide the stain with a clean napkin. "To conceal the presence of the fraudulent shipment, Laird's palate had to be put out of commission. Since Laird was accustomed to refresh his taste buds with an infusion of almonds and barley water, it was simple enough to spike the bottle with another infusion, made with the leaves of a plant called gymnema sylvestre. These leaves partially paralyzed the taste buds so that the palate is no longer sensitive to the taste of bitter or sweet."

"Then my brother was . . . was . . ." Ellen Laird began. She stopped, looking fearfully from Phelps to Albertson.

"Professor Street informs me," Dr. Coffee continued, "that gymnema sylvestre belongs to the family of the asclepiadaceae, of which several dozen varieties exist in this region. Mr. Phelps, for instance, has some beautiful and colorful butterfly weed in his garden." Dr. Coffee took a deep breath, then added, "Mr. Phelps also grows gymnema sylvestre."

"Doctor, I resent your implication," Phelps exclaimed.

"Implication, my eye!" said Ritter. "That's a charge, Phelps—of murder. The D.A.'s fixing up the complaint right now."

"But Laird committed suicide," Phelps insisted.

"I'll prove in court that he didn't," said Dr. Coffee. "Miss Laird, you'll be deeply grieved to learn that unwittingly you helped cause your brother's death. During the few days he sat at home brooding, his palate recovered from its temporary paralysis. And when he took a sip of the Earl Grey tea you made on the night of his birthday, he found that his taste had returned, that he could recognize the deficiencies in the tea. Phelps was present and must have noted your brother's recovery because he left immediately. He preceded Laird to the office, took possession of the gun which Laird kept in his desk—"

"You have a magnificent imagination, Doctor," Phelps broke in.

"You forget I was present when Laird discovered his taste had returned," Dr. Coffee continued. "I noticed the strange expression on his face as he sipped the tea, but I couldn't have analyzed it then without the background I have now. You could and you did. You knew he wasn't going to the office to commit suicide, but to investigate the off-taste of the Earl Grey tea. You simply had to get there first.

"When Laird found you in his office, he must have accused you of skulduggery. You would deny it, of course, and he would naturally suggest that you both step over to the warehouse to look for the substandard tea his palate had told him was there. You knew he would find it, so you shot him while crossing the areaway. You also smashed the bottle he was carrying under his coat. Luckily there was enough residue for Dr. Mookerji to analyze."

"Doctor," Phelps asserted, "I was not inside the tasting room between the time I left Laird's house and the time I came to the plant and found him dead."

"I might believe that, despite the evidence of the gymnema sylvestre," said Dr. Coffee, "if it were not for your umbrella."

"Umbrella?"

"When Lieutenant Ritter and I first reached the plant, there was an umbrella standing in the corner of Laird's office—where you had forgotten it when you came to kill Laird. When you appeared after the call from the watchman, you came into the areaway through Laird's office—carrying a furled umbrella. The umbrella was gone from Laird's office when Ritter and I left."

"The umbrella I was carrying," Phelps declared, "I brought from home."

"If you had brought the umbrella from home," Dr. Coffee pursued, "the umbrella would have been wet and you would have been dry. But when you appeared in the areaway, the umbrella was furled and dry, and you were dripping wet. So it was obviously you who retrieved the umbrella from Laird's office. Or do you still insist you weren't there, Phelps?"

Phelps opened his mouth but no words came.

"Drink up, Phelps," said Max Ritter, pushing back his chair. "Maybe the tea and coffee they serve downtown where we're going won't be to your taste."

'Q'

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHORS:	**Frances & Richard LOCKRIDGE**
TITLE:	***Dead Boys Don't Remember***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Captain Heimrich
LOCALE:	Van Brunt, New York
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Captain Heimrich's professional concern was with murder. That's why he was called in on the kidnaping of a ten-year-old boy—because dead boys tell no tales . . .*

THE BUS STOPPED AT THE HEAD of Blueberry Lane and red warning lights blinked fore and aft. Behind it, two cars halted obediently, and then a third came round the bend of the state road and stopped, too. One car, with equal obedience, pulled up facing the blue and yellow school bus, and that was at 3:20 of a Friday afternoon in late May.

Rodney Burke got off the bus, carrying his schoolbooks. He was towheaded and sturdy and a few months more than ten years old. The boys and girls who remained in the bus made shrill sounds, as if something very exciting were happening.

There was nothing actually exciting under way—School Bus No. 3, of District No. 1, had made its scheduled stop at Blueberry Lane, so that Rodney Burke could get off and walk half a mile along a shaded, little-used road to the sprawling white house he lived in. It was the back way home; the conventional way was by the town road which paralleled the state road, and it was on the town road that the Franklin Burke house fronted—fronted distantly, as became so large a house, so deep in spreading lawns.

Several of the boys and girls yelled, " 'Bye, Rod!" as if he were going on a long journey from

which return was improbable. Rod waved and yelled back—yelled "'Bye, kids," as if this were indeed a parting. Then, bareheaded, the sun bright on his bright hair, he walked into the lane—walked out of the sun into the shade, into the flecked pattern of shadow and sunlight which moved gently on the road surface.

The road curved after a hundred yards or so and Rodney Burke—walking in the middle of the roadway, wearing a striped shirt and denim trousers and sneakers—went around the bend in the lane, out of sight from the state road. But the bus had pulled away by then.

It takes a boy of ten varying times to walk half a mile on a shady lane, depending on how much of a hurry he is in and, of course, on what shows up. If deer show up, for example, he stops to look at deer, partly because deer look so expectantly at people, partly because they are very pretty creatures, and when they finally decide to bound away the white of their tails is like froth on breaking waves.

But Rod was seldom a boy to dawdle: he was a boy of projects, most of which involved building something. Usually he came up the garage drive—sometimes running—within ten minutes after the bus stopped, and one could set clocks by the bus.

Janice Burke was working in her annual garden, partly because it needed weeding—as didn't it always?—and partly because it was an experience of infinite sweetness to see her son coming along the drive, with the afternoon sun bright on his hair. Janice was a little flushed—it was quite warm for May—and she was a little older than most mothers of boys of ten.

The Burkes had waited a dozen years before they had had a child, so that Rodney had seemed rather a miracle. He still did. They tried, of course, not to let him know it, nor make too much of an only child. "We mustn't fuss over him," they told each other, and usually managed not to.

Is it "fussing" over a boy to notice if he takes ten minutes longer than usual to walk half a mile through a lane in which there are no perils? There is no reason to be anxious if he is twenty minutes later than usual—probably the bus is late. But at twenty minutes of four, Janice Burke stood up in her garden and shielded her blue eyes with a grubby hand as she looked into the sun, since the boy would come out of the sun. And five minutes later she walked—to meet him, she told herself—along the garage drive and around the garage, where the field road ran down to Blueberry Lane. When she saw the field road empty, she began to hurry and then to call, "Rod, Rod?"

When she ran back from the

empty lane, her breath came shudderingly. In the house she went to the telephone and drew deep, but still shuddering, breaths as she dialed, and tried to make her voice steady as she spoke. But her voice still shook. Rod had left on the bus with the others; they were sure of that at the school. And the bus had been on time, and Rod had got off at the usual place. Harry Bigham, who drove the school bus and had just returned to the garage from his last trip, was sure of that.

Janice Burke was reaching toward the telephone again, but it rang under her hand and she snatched at it. She said, "Yes?" in a voice not like her own.

"Mrs. Burke?" a man's voice said, and she said, "Yes. Oh, *yes!*"

"We've got the boy," the man said. It was a voice like any voice. "We'll tell you what to do tomorrow. You hear what I'm saying?"

"Yes," she said. *"Yes! Rod is—"*

"He'll be all right if you do what we tell you," the man said. "If you pay what we tell you." And then his voice faded, as he turned from the telephone. But she could hear him say, "Bring the kid here."

Then she heard Rod's voice—oh, his voice, *his* voice. "Mama?" Rod said. *"Mama!* They—"

She heard a click and the telephone was dead. She called into it —called the boy's name. Then she fainted. Franklin Burke, coming home early from the city, walked into the living room in time to see his wife sway in the chair and fall from it.

Janice came quickly back to an ugly world and clung to her husband, shaking—and told him.

It was not a decision which many have to make; it is a decision to be reached in agony. Nothing one does is better than any other thing, surer than any other. Franklin Burke called the State Police, to whom country people turn most readily. The police told him, when they came—not noisily and as much as possible by back roads—that he had done the right thing, and hoped they were telling him the truth.

They told him, too, that it looked like the work of professionals, and that the chances were better if that was so. Professionals wanted money; they wouldn't panic; wouldn't—they didn't finish that, or need to, and again they hoped that they were right.

"I'll pay anything," Franklin Burke said, "anything I've got . . ."

"Only," the captain in charge of Troop K said at Hawthorne Barracks, "only, the kid's ten, isn't he? Old enough to remember faces. Remember places. He won't remember if he's dead."

"No," Captain Heimrich—Captain M. L. Heimrich, whose concern is with murder—said. "No, he

won't remember if he's dead. He may be already."

They did not, of course, say that to the Burkes—to the tall, gray-haired man with face set hard, to the white-faced woman, whose eyes stared in terror and disbelief, and who would not let a doctor give her sedatives. "I've got to be here," she said, and said it over and over and over, "be here when he comes back." But the Burkes knew without being told . . .

The polish of professional crime showed in several ways. On that the various police agencies agreed —and by Saturday morning everybody was in on it. The police of the villages and cities of Westchester and Putnam counties were in on it, and the sheriffs of the counties, and the New York City police and the F.B.I. And, of course, the New York State police, with whom it began. They all agreed the crime was professional, and probably the work of city professionals, since professionals are, for the most part, city men.

There was the deftness of the kidnaping itself. It was not by chance that a car had waited at just the right time, just the right distance along the lane, for Rodney Burke. (The car had pulled to the soft shoulder of the narrow lane and left tire tracks.) It was not by chance that the boy was the son, and the only son, of people with the money the Burkes had, or that their house, and the lane leading toward it, were isolated in the town of Van Brunt, near the Hudson.

It was not by chance that the letter which came in Saturday's mail was typed (new typewriter, almost without idiosyncrasies) on white paper one could buy anywhere, or that there were no fingerprints to guide, except those of postal clerks on the envelope. The letter had been mailed in midtown Manhattan. The letter read:

Price is $100,000. Raise it by Monday and you will be told what to do. It will be tough for the boy if you get new bills, or big ones.

All planned, the police thought —shrewdly planned, with no amateurs involved. Ruthlessly planned. They'll kill him, Captain Heimrich thought, one man in thousands hunting a stolen child—hunting with nothing much to go on, and nothing much to hope for, and haunted by the memory of a woman whose eyes looked and looked, and saw nothing. Probably dead already, Heimrich thought, on Saturday afternoon, as he followed a lead which would take him nowhere.

They had, after some thought, decided to let the newspapers have it. Professionals would know already that the police were in it; the outermost filaments of the web they lived in would have quivered that news to the center.

If enough people heard about it, somebody might see something, remember something. Many did, of course. Leads came from everywhere. Rodney Burke, age ten, fair hair, blue eyes, 84 pounds, was everywhere.

By Saturday afternoon he had been seen as far away as the West Coast. (The police doubted that. A car had been used, probably still was being used. But they checked everything, since anything was possible.)

A boy (surely Rod) had been seen running along a sidewalk in Mt. Kisco. They found the boy, who had been going to the grocery for his mother, and running because he wanted to run. (And who did not look at all like Rod.) The Virginia State Police closed in on a motel in Emporia because a boy was crying loudly in one of the rooms and sobbing out, "I want to go home." The boy was six. He was crying because he wanted to go home.

Heimrich, alone in an unmarked car—the police were spread thin to spread wide—drove down a long, rough driveway toward a house secluded in the woods. He drove down the drive because somebody had seen a car drive down it earlier, and somebody was quite sure the people who owned the house were in Europe. They were going on as little as that.

The house, when Heimrich came to it, was a rather large house —a house which had accumulated largeness over years. It was set in a green cup of lawn, with woods edging it. There was a car, with city license plates, parked where the drive widened. Heimrich stopped close behind the city car and got out, and as he got out a man came to the door of the house, and then onto the flagstones.

He was a young man in a polo shirt and slacks—a pleasant-looking young man, who smiled at Heimrich pleasantly. Heimrich told him about Rodney Burke and the smile vanished and the man swore. He said that kidnaping was the dirtiest business there was.

"Yes," Heimrich said. "This is your house, Mr.—?"

"Baxter," the man said. "No. Friends letting me use it. Only been here a couple of hours. Drove up from town and—" He stopped. His eyes narrowed. "Empty house," he said. "You think—?"

"Now, Mr. Baxter," Heimrich said. "We're looking everywhere, naturally. You've been through the house?"

"All this?" Baxter said, and motioned toward the sprawling house behind him. "Must be a dozen rooms. All we need is a couple of them." He paused. "Got friends coming up later," he said, and then, "You want to look? Come on."

He might as well, as long as he was there, Heimrich said. But it would be time wasted, as the morn-

ing had been time wasted, and now half the afternoon.

It was. They went together from room to room—looked into the attic and the basement, looked in bedrooms and kitchen and in three shining bathrooms. "Nice place," Baxter said, as they came into the living room, with the house searched and nothing found. "Lucky people. How about a drink?"

"No," Heimrich said. "I'll be getting on. Thanks for—" He stopped, as if listening. Baxter waited.

"Wish I could do more," Baxter said.

"Yes," Heimrich said, but not as if he were answering the pleasant young man in slacks and polo shirt. It was, instead, as if Baxter's voice had interrupted something, as if music were playing which Heimrich strained to hear.

"You hear water dripping anywhere?" Heimrich said. "Bathrooms? Kitchen?"

Baxter looked surprised, puzzled. Then he shook his head slowly, and listened, too. Listening carefully, he heard a faint sound which seemed to come from everywhere, and from nowhere—a kind of grating sound, rhythmical, with metallic pings marking the beat. The sound had just begun.

"I hear it now," Baxter said. "Just barely hear it. Something running in the house? Refrigerator, or—"

"Probably," Heimrich said. "Well, sorry to have bothered you, Mr. Baxter."

It might work that way. Heimrich went out onto the terrace, with Baxter in the living room, looking after him curiously. Heimrich looked around for what he wanted and found it. It was near the edge of the grass, a cube of cement blocks rising three feet above the lawn. It was capped by a heavy metal cover.

Heimrich started to walk toward it, and Baxter came out of the house and watched him. A pocket of Baxter's slacks bulged, heavily. So it wasn't going to be that way.

Heimrich whirled as Baxter reached toward the heavy pocket, and Heimrich was the quicker. "Now, Mr. Baxter," Heimrich said in his soft voice from behind a steady revolver, "we'll go have a look in the pump house. Good place to lock a small boy up in, wouldn't it be? Cover too heavy for a boy to lift and—*better drop it, Mr. Baxter.*"

The man who called himself Baxter dropped it. He wasn't pleasant-looking any more. He went ahead of Heimrich toward the concrete cube.

"Get the cover off," Heimrich told Baxter, and Baxter got the cover off. It was heavy enough—far too heavy to be moved by a boy who, to push against it, would have to balance himself on iron rungs set close to the inner wall of the pump house.

The boy balanced himself on the rungs now and started to come out —and saw Baxter and started to go down again.

"All right, son," Heimrich said. "All right, Rod. You can come out, now."

It was like hide-and-go-seek, and the game over, and everybody home safe. Rodney Burke came out, blue eyes wide. He shrank away a little from Baxter, who did not move, and looked at Heimrich and said, "Are you a policeman, sir?"

"Yes," Heimrich said. "How did you start up the pump?"

"Anybody knows that," Rodney told him, and was evidently surprised that everybody did not. "There's a faucet. So they can drain the tank to clean it. And when the water comes out, the pressure goes down and the pump starts and—"

"Of course," Heimrich said, gravely, and kept his revolver pointed at Baxter, who had never heard of this before.

"It's an old-style pump," Rod said. "Metal pipes. They use plastic now, mostly. Because with metal pipes the noise the pump makes telegrams—no, tele*graphs* through them and into the house—"

"Yes," Heimrich said. "See it now, Mr. Baxter? Water pumps don't start up until enough water's been run out of the pressure tank. And—*there wasn't any water running in the house, was there?*"

"I saw a car come up," Rodney said. "Through the little window. The venti—ventilator? And I thought I'd just try. Maybe somebody'd hear. Because when I yelled nobody could—"

He stopped. "Gee," he said. "I left the water running. Pump the well dry."

Before Heimrich could do anything, Rodney seemed to bounce to the top of the pump house. He went down into it. He came back out of it. "All right now," Rodney Burke, country boy, trained to country ways, said, and the sun was bright on his bright hair.

Baxter, city man, used to city ways, looked at Rodney Burke. He began to shake his head slowly. It had looked like a perfect setup—a perfect place to keep a boy in until he decided what to do with him. How was a city man to know?

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM**

TITLE: ***An Official Position***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: French Guiana

TIME: About 20 years ago

COMMENTS: *A grim tale of the French penal colony at St. Laurent de Maroni, and of a convict who, strangely enough, stood for law and order . . . with a terrifying climax.*

HE WAS A STURDY BROAD-SHOULDERED fellow, of the middle height; though his bones were well covered as became his age, which was fifty, he was not fat; he had a ruddy complexion which neither the heat of the sun nor the unwholesomeness of the climate had affected. It was good rich blood that ran through his veins. His hair was brown and thick, and only at the temples touched with gray; he was very proud of his fair, handsome mustache and he kept it carefully brushed. There was a pleasant twinkle in his blue eyes. You would have said that this was a man whom life had treated well. There was in his appearance an air of good nature and in his vigor a glow of health that gave you confidence. He reminded you of one of those well-fed, rubicund burghers in an old Dutch picture, with their pink-cheeked wives, who made money and enjoyed the good things with which their industry provided them. He was, however, a widower. His name was Louis Remire, and his number 68763. He was serving a twelve-year sentence at St. Laurent de Maroni, the great penal settlement of French Guiana, for killing his wife, but partly because he had served in the police force at Lyons, his native town, and partly on account of his good character, he had been given an of-

ficial position. He had been chosen among nearly two hundred applicants to be the public executioner.

That was why he was allowed to sport the handsome mustache of which he took so much care. He was the only convict who wore one. It was in a manner of speaking his badge of office. That also was why he was allowed to wear his own clothes. The convicts wear pajamas in pink and white stripes, round straw hats, and clumsy boots with wooden soles and leather tops. Louis Remire wore espadrilles on his bare feet, blue cotton trousers, and a khaki shirt the open neck of which exposed to view his hairy and virile chest. When you saw him strolling about the public garden, with a kindly eye looking at the children, black or half-caste, who played there, you would have taken him for a respectable shopkeeper who was enjoying an hour's leisure. He had his own house. That was not only one of the perquisites of his office, but it was a necessity, since if he had lodged in the prison camp the convicts would have made short work of him. One morning he would have been found with his belly ripped open. It was true that the house was small, it was just a wooden shack of one room, with a lean-to that served as a kitchen; but it was surrounded by a tiny garden, within a palisade, and in the garden grew bananas, papayas, and such vegetables as the climate allowed him to raise. The garden faced the sea and was surrounded by a coconut grove. The situation was charming. It was only a quarter of a mile from the prison, which was convenient for his rations. They were fetched by his assistant who lived with him. The assistant, a tall, gawky ungainly fellow, with deep-set, staring eyes and cavernous jaws, was serving a life sentence for rape and murder; he was not very intelligent, but in civil life he had been a cook and it was wonderful what, with the help of the vegetables they grew and such condiments as Louis Remire could afford to buy at the Chinese grocer's, he managed to do with the soup, potatoes, and cabbage, and eternal beef, beef for three hundred and sixty-five days of the year, which the prison kitchens provided. It was on this account that Louis Remire had pressed his claim on the commandant when it had been found necessary to get a new assistant. The last one's nerves had given way and, absurdly enough, thought Louis Remire with a good-natured laugh, he had developed scruples about capital punishment; now, suffering from neurasthenia, he was on the Ile St. Joseph, where the insane were confined.

His present assistant happened to be ill. He had high fever, and looked very much as if he were going to die. It had been necessary to send him to the hospital. Louis

Remire was sorry; he would not easily find so good a cook again. It was bad luck that this should have happened just now, for next day there was a job of work to be done. Six men were to be executed. Two were Algerians, one was a Pole, another a Spaniard from the mainland, and only two were French. They had escaped from prison in a band and gone up the river. For nearly twelve months, stealing and killing, they had spread terror through the colony. People scarcely dared move from their homesteads. Recaptured at last, they had all been sentenced to death, but the sentence had to be confirmed by the Minister of the Colonies, and the confirmation had only just arrived. Louis Remire could not manage without help, and besides there was a lot to arrange beforehand; it was particularly unfortunate that on this occasion of all others he should have to depend on an inexperienced man. The commandant had assigned to him one of the turnkeys. The turnkeys are convicts like the others, but they have been given their places for good behavior and they live in separate quarters. They are on the side of the authorities and so are disliked by the other prisoners. Louis Remire was a conscientious fellow, and he was anxious that everything next day should go without a hitch. He arranged that his temporary assistant should come that afternoon to the place where the guillotine was kept so that he might explain to him thoroughly how it worked and show him exactly what he would have to do.

The guillotine, when not in use, stood in a small room which was part of the prison building, but which was entered by a separate door from the outside. When he sauntered along there at the appointed hour he found the man already waiting. He was a large-limbed, coarse-faced fellow. He was dressed in the pink and white stripes of the prison garb, but as turnkey he wore a felt hat instead of the straw of common convicts.

"What are you here for?"

The man shrugged, "I killed a farmer and his wife."

"Hm. How long have you got?"

"Life."

He looked a brute, but you could never be sure of people. He had himself seen a warder, a big, powerful man, faint dead away at an execution. He did not want his assistant to have an attack of nerves at the wrong moment. He gave him a friendly smile, and with his thumb pointed to the closed door behind which stood the guillotine.

"This is another sort of job," he said. "There are six of them, you know. They're a bad lot. The sooner they're out of the way the better."

"Oh, that's all right. After what I've seen in this place I'm scared

of nothing. It means no more to me than cutting the head off a chicken."

Louis Remire unlocked the door and walked in. His assistant followed him. The guillotine in that small room, hardly larger than a cell, seemed to take up a great deal of space. It stood grim and sinister. Louis Remire heard a slight gasp and turning round saw that the turnkey was staring at the instrument with terrified eyes. His face was sallow and drawn from the fever and the hookworm from which all the convicts intermittently suffered, but now its pallor was ghastly. The executioner smiled good-naturedly.

"Gives you a turn, does it? Have you never seen it before?"

"Never."

Louis Remire gave a little throaty chuckle.

"If you had, I suppose you wouldn't have survived to tell the tale. How did you escape it?"

"I was starving when I did my job. I'd asked for something to eat and they set the dogs on me. I was condemned to death. My lawyer went to Paris and he got the President to reprieve me."

"It's better to be alive than dead, there's no denying that," said Louis Remire, with that agreeable twinkle in his eyes.

He always kept his guillotine in perfect order. The wood, a dark hard native wood somewhat like mahogany, was highly polished; but there was a certain amount of brass, and it was Louis Remire's pride that this should be as bright and clean as the brass-work on a yacht. The knife shone as though it had just come out of the workshop. It was necessary not only to see that everything functioned properly, but to show his assistant how it functioned. It was part of the assistant's duty to refix the rope when the knife had dropped, and to do this he had to climb a short ladder.

It was with the satisfaction of a competent workman who knows his job from A to Z that Remire entered upon the necessary explanations. It gave him a certain quiet pleasure to point out the ingenuity of the apparatus. The condemned man was strapped to the bascule, a sort of shelf, and this by a simple mechanism was precipitated down and forward so that the man's neck was conveniently under the knife. The conscientious fellow had brought with him a banana stem, about five feet long, and the turnkey had wondered why. He was now to learn. The stem was of about the same circumference and consistency as the human neck, so that it afforded a very good way, not only of showing a novice how the apparatus worked, but of making sure beforehand that it was in perfect order. Louis Remire placed the banana stem in position. He released the knife. It fell with incredible speed

and with a great bang. From the time the man was attached to the bascule to the time his head was off only thirty seconds elapsed. The head fell in the basket. The executioner took it up by the ears and exhibited it to those whose duty it was to watch the execution. He uttered the solemn words:

"Au nom du peuple français justice est faite. In the name of the French people justice is done."

Then he dropped the head back into the basket. Tomorrow, with six to be dispatched, the trunk would have to be unstrapped from the bascule and placed with the head on a stretcher, and the next man brought forward. They were taken in the order of their guilt. The least guilty, executed first were spared the horror of seeing the death of their mates.

"We shall have to be careful that the right head goes with the right body," said Louis Remire, in that rather jovial manner of his, "or there may be no end of confusion at the Resurrection."

He let down the knife two or three times in order to make quite sure that the assistant understood how to fix it, and then getting his cleaning materials from the shelf on which he kept them set him to work on the brass. Though it was spotless he thought that a final polish would do no harm. He leaned against the wall and idly smoked cigarettes.

Finally everything was in order and Louis Remire dismissed the assistant till midnight. At midnight they were moving the guillotine from the room in which it stood to the prison yard. It was always a bit of a job to set it up again, but it had to be in place an hour before dawn, at which time the execution took place. Louis Remire strolled slowly home to his shack. The afternoon was drawing to its close, and as he walked along he passed a working party who were returning to the prison. They spoke to one another in undertones and he guessed that they spoke of him; some looked down, two or three threw him a glance of hatred, and one spat on the ground. Louis Remire, the end of a cigarette sticking to his lip, looked at them with irony. He was indifferent to the loathing, mingled with fear, with which they regarded him. It did not matter to him that not one of them would speak to him, and it only amused him to think that there was hardly one who would not gladly have thrust a knife into his guts. He had a supreme contempt for them all. He could take care of himself. He could use a knife as well as any of them, and he had confidence in his strength. The convicts knew that men were to be executed next day, and as always before an execution they were depressed and nervous. They went about their work in sullen silence, and the warders had to be more alert than usual.

"They'll settle down when it's all over," said Louis Remire as he let himself into his little compound.

The dogs barked as he came along, and brave though he was, he listened to their uproar with satisfaction. With his own assistant ill, so that he was alone in the house, he was not sorry that he had the protection of those two savage mongrels. They prowled about the coconut grove outside his compound all night and they would give him good warning if anyone lurked there. They could be relied on to spring at the throat of any stranger who ventured too near. If his predecessor had had these dogs he wouldn't have come to his end.

The man who had been executioner before Louis Remire had only held the job a couple of years when one day he disappeared. The authorities thought he had run away; he was known to have a bit of money, and it was very probable that he had managed to make arrangements with the captain of a schooner to take him to Brazil. His nerves had given way. He had gone two or three times to the governor of the prison and told him that he feared for his life. He was convinced that the convicts were out to kill him. The governor felt pretty sure that his fears were groundless and paid no attention, but when the man was nowhere to be found he concluded that his terror had got the better of him and he had preferred to run the danger of escape, and the danger of being recaptured and put back into prison, rather than face the risk of an avenging convict's knife. About three weeks later the warder in charge of a working party in the jungle noticed a great flock of vultures clustered round a tree. These vultures, called urubus, are large black birds, of a horrible aspect, and they fly about the market place of St. Laurent, picking up the offal that is left there by the starving liberated convicts, and flit heavily from tree to tree in the neat, well-kept streets of the town. They fly in the prison yard to remind the convicts that if they attempt an escape into the jungle their end, ten to one, will be to have their bones picked clean by these loathsome creatures. They were fighting and screaming in such a mass round the tree that the warder thought there was something strange there. He reported it and the commandant sent a party to see. They found a man hanging by the neck from one of the branches, and when they cut him down discovered that he was the executioner. It was given out that he had committed suicide, but there was a knife-thrust in his back, and the convicts knew that he had been stabbed and then, still alive, taken to the jungle and hanged.

Louis Remire had no fear that anything of that sort would hap-

pen to him. He knew how his predecessor had been caught. The job had not been done by the convicts. By the French law, when a man is sentenced to hard labor for a certain number of years, he has at the expiration of his sentence to remain in the colony for the same number of years. He is free, but he may not stir from the spot that is assigned to him as a residence. In certain circumstances he can get a concession and if he works hard he manages to scrape a bare living from it, but after a long term of penal servitude, during which he has lost all power of initiative, what with the debilitating effect of fever and hookworm, he is unfit for heavy and continuous labor, and so most of the liberated men subsist on begging, larceny, smuggling tobacco or money to the prisoners, and loading and unloading cargoes when two or three times a month a steamer comes into the harbor. It was the wife of one of these freed men that had been the means of the undoing of Louis Remire's predecessor. She was young and pretty, with a neat little figure and mischievous eyes. The plot was well-considered. The executioner was a burly, sanguine man, of ardent passions. She had thrown herself in his way, and when she caught his approving glance, had cast him a saucy look. He saw her a day or two later in the public garden. He did not venture to speak to her (no one, man, woman or child, would be seen speaking to him), but when he winked at her she smiled. One evening he met her walking through the coconut grove that surrounded his compound. No one was about. He got into conversation with her. They only exchanged a few words, for she was evidently terrified of being seen with him. But she came again to the coconut grove. She played him carefully till his suspicions were allayed; she teased his desires; she made him give her little presents, and at last on the promise of what was for both of them quite a sum of money she agreed to come one dark night to the compound. A ship had just come in and her husband would be working till dawn. It was when he opened the door for her and she hesitated to come in as though at the last moment she could not make up her mind, that he stepped outside to draw her in, and fell to the ground with the violence of the knife-thrust in his back.

"The fool," muttered Louis Remire. "He only got what he deserved. He should have smelt a rat. The eternal vanity of man."

For his part he was through with women. It was on account of women that he found himself in the situation he was in now, at least on account of one woman; and besides, at his time of life, his passions were assuaged. There were other things in life and after

a certain age a man, if he was sensible, turned his attention to them. He had always been a great fisherman. In the old days, at home in France before he had had his misfortune, as soon as he came off duty he took his rod and line and went down to the Rhone. He got a lot of fishing now. Every morning, till the sun grew hot, he sat on his favorite rock and generally managed to get enough for the prison governor's table. The governor's wife knew the value of things and beat him down on the price he asked, but he did not blame her for that; she knew that he had to take what she was prepared to give and it would have been stupid of her to pay a penny more than she had to. In any case, it brought in a little money useful for tobacco and rum and other odds and ends. But this evening he was going to fish for himself. He got his bait from the lean-to, and his rod, and settled down on his rock. No fish was so good as the fish you caught yourself, and by now he knew which were those that were good to eat and which were so tough and flavorless that you could only throw them back into the sea. There was one sort that, fried in real olive oil, was as good as mullet. He had not been sitting there five minutes when his float gave a sudden jerk, and when he pulled up his line, there, like an answer to prayer, was one of those very fish wriggling on the hook. He took it off, banged its head on the rock, and putting it down, replaced his bait. Four of them would make a good supper, the best a man could have, and with a night's hard work before him he needed a hearty meal. He would not have time to fish tomorrow morning. First of all the scaffold would have to be taken down and the pieces brought back to the room in which it was kept, and there would be a lot of cleaning to do. It was a bloody business; last time he had had his pants so soaked that he had been able to do nothing with them and had had to throw them away. The brass would have to be polished, the knife would have to be honed. He was not a man to leave a job half finished, and by the time it was through he would be pretty peckish. It would be worthwhile to catch a few more fish and put them in a cool place so that he could have a substantial breakfast. A cup of coffee, a couple of eggs, and a bit of fried fish—he could do with that. Then he would have a good sleep; after a night on his feet, the anxiety of an inexperienced assistant, and the clearing away of all the mess, God knew he would deserve it.

In front of him was spread the bay in a noble sweep, and in the distance was a little island green with trees. The afternoon was exquisitely still. Peace descended on the fisherman's soul. He watched

his float idly. When you came to think of it, he reflected, he might be a great deal worse off; some of them—the convicts who swarmed in the prison a few hundred yards away from him—some of them had such a nostalgia for France that they went mad with melancholy; but he was a bit of a philosopher—so long as he could fish he was content; and did it really matter if he watched his float on the southern sea or in the Rhone? His thoughts wandered back to the past. His wife was an intolerable woman and he did not regret that he had killed her. He had never meant to marry her. She was a dressmaker, and he had taken a fancy to her because she was always neatly and smartly dressed. She seemed respectable and ladylike. He would not have been surprised if she had looked upon herself as a cut above a policeman. But he had a way with him. She soon gave him to understand that she was no snob, and when he made the customary advances he discovered to his relief, for he was not a man who considered that resistance added a flavor to conquest, that she was no prude. He liked to be seen with her when he took her out to dinner. She talked intelligently, and she was economical. She knew where they could dine well at the cheapest price. His situation was enviable. It added to his satisfaction that he could gratify the sexual desires natural to his healthy temperament at so moderate an expense. When she came to him and said she was going to have a baby it seemed natural enough that they should get married. He was earning good wages, and it was time that he should settle down. He often grew tired of eating, *en pension,* at a restaurant, and he looked forward to having his own home and home cooking. Well, it turned out that it had been a mistake about the baby, but Louis Remire was a good-natured fellow, and he didn't hold it against Adèle. But he found, as many men have found before, that the wife was a very different woman from the mistress. She was jealous and possessive. She seemed to think that on a Sunday afternoon he ought to take her for a walk instead of going out fishing, and she made it a grievance that, on coming off duty, he would go to the café. There was one café he frequented where other fishermen went and where he met men with whom he had a lot in common. He found it much pleasanter to spend his free evenings there over a glass or two of beer, whiling away the time with a game of cards, than to sit at home with his wife. She began to make scenes. Though sociable and jovial by nature he had a quick temper. There was a rough crowd at Lyons, and sometimes you could not manage them unless you were prepared to show a certain amount of

firmness. When his wife began to make a nuisance of herself it never occurred to him that there was any other way of dealing with her than that he adopted. He let her know the strength of his hand. If she had been a sensible woman she would have learned her lesson, but she was not a sensible woman. He found occasion more and more often to apply a necessary correction; she revenged herself by screaming the place down and by telling the neighbors—they lived in a two-room apartment on the fifth floor of a big house—what a brute he was. She told them that she was sure he would kill her one day. And yet never was there a more good-natured man than Louis Remire; she blamed him for the money he spent at the café, she accused him of wasting it on other women; well, in his position he had opportunities now and then, and as any man would, he took them, and he was easy with his money, he never minded paying a round of drinks for his friends, and when a girl who had been nice to him wanted a new hat or a pair of silk stockings he wasn't the man to say no. His wife looked upon money that he did not spend on her as money stolen from her; she tried to make him account for every penny he spent, and when in his jovial way he told her he had thrown it out of the window, she was infuriated. Her tongue grew bitter and her voice was rasping. She was in a sullen rage with him all the time. She could not speak without saying something disagreeable. They led a cat-and-dog life. Louis Remire used to tell his friends what a harridan she was, he used to tell them that he wished ten times a day that he had never married her, and sometimes he would add that if an epidemic of influenza did not carry her off he would really have to kill her.

It was these remarks, made merely in jest, and the fact that she had so often told the neighbors that she knew he would murder her, that had sent him to St. Laurent de Maroni with a twelve-year sentence. Otherwise he might very well have got off with three or four years in a French prison. The end had come one hot summer's day. He was, which was rare for him, in a bad temper. There was a strike in progress and the strikers had been violent. The police had had to make a good many arrests and the men had not submitted to this peaceably. Louis Remire had got a nasty blow on the jaw and he had had to make free use of his truncheon. To get the arrested men to the station had been a hot and tiring job. On coming off duty he had gone home to get out of his uniform and was intending to go to the café and have a glass of beer and a pleasant game of cards. His jaw was hurting him. His wife chose that moment to ask him

for money and when he told her that he had none to give her she made a scene. He had plenty of money to go to the café, but none for her to buy a scrap of food with, she could starve for all he cared. He told her to shut up, and then the row began. She got in front of the door and swore that he should not pass till he gave her money. He told her to get out of the way and took a step toward her. She whipped out his service revolver which he had taken off when he removed his uniform and threatened that she would shoot him if he moved a step. He was used to dealing with dangerous criminals, and the words were hardly out of her mouth before he had sprung upon her and snatched the revolver out of her hand. She screamed and hit him in the face. She hit him exactly where his jaw most hurt him. Blind with rage and mad with pain, he fired, he fired twice and she fell to the floor. For a moment he stood and stared at her. He was dazed. She looked as if she were dead. His first feeling was one of indescribable relief. He listened. No one seemed to have heard the sound of the shot. The neighbors must be out. That was a bit of luck, for it gave him time to do what he had to do in his own way. He changed back into his uniform, went out, locking the door behind him and putting the key in his pocket; he stopped for five minutes at his familiar café to have a glass of beer and then returned to the police station he had lately left. On account of the day's disturbances the chief inspector was still there. Louis Remire went to his room and told him what had happened. He spent the night in a cell adjoining those of the strikers he had so recently himself arrested. Even at that tragic moment he was struck by the irony of the situation.

Louis Remire had on frequent occasions appeared as a police witness in criminal cases and he knew how eager are a man's companions to give any information that may damage him when he gets into trouble. It had caused him a certain grim amusement to realize how often it happened that a conviction was obtained only by the testimony of a prisoner's best friends. But notwithstanding his experience he was amazed, when his own case came up for trial, to listen to the evidence given by the proprietor of the little café he had so much frequented, and to that of the men who for years had fished with him, played cards with him, and drunk with him. They seemed to have treasured every careless word he had ever uttered, the complaints he had made about his wife and the joking threats he had from time to time made that he would get even with her. He knew that at the time they had taken them no more seriously than he meant them. If he was able to

do them a small service, and a man in the force often has it in his power to do one, he never hesitated. He had never been ungenerous with his money. You would have thought as you listened to them in the witness box that it gave them the most intense satisfaction to disclose every trivial detail that could damage him.

From what appeared at the trial you would have thought that he was a bad man, dissolute, of violent temper, extravagant, idle, and corrupt. He knew that he was nothing of the kind. He was just an ordinary, good-natured, easy-going fellow, who was willing to let you go your way if you would let him go his. It was true that he liked his game of cards and his glass of beer, it was true that he liked a pretty girl, but what of it? When he looked at the jury he wondered how many of them would come out of it any better than he if all their errors, all their rash words, all their follies, were thus laid bare. He did not resent the long term of penal servitude to which he was sentenced. He was an officer of the law; he had committed a crime and it was right that he should be punished. But he was not a criminal; he was the victim of an unfortunate accident.

At St. Laurent de Maroni, in the prison camp, wearing the pink and white stripe of the prison garb and the ugly straw hat, he remembered still that he had been a policeman and that the convicts with whom he must now consort had always been his natural enemies. He despised and disliked them. He had as little to do with them as he could. And he was not frightened of them. He knew them too well. Like all the rest he had a knife and he showed that he was prepared to use it. He did not want to interfere with anybody, but he was not going to allow anyone to interfere with him.

The chief of the Lyons police had liked him, his character while in the force had been exemplary, and the *fiche* which accompanied every prisoner spoke well of him. He knew that what officials like is a prisoner who gives no trouble, who accepts his position with cheerfulness, and who is willing. He got a soft job; very soon he got a cell of his own and so escaped the horrible promiscuity of the dormitories; he got on well with the warders, they were decent chaps, most of them, and knowing that he had formerly been in the police they treated him more as a comrade than as a convict. The commandant of the prison trusted him. Presently he got the job of servant to one of the prison officials. He slept in the prison, but otherwise enjoyed complete freedom. He took the children of his master to school every day and fetched them at the end of their school hours. He made toys for them. He accompanied his mis-

tress to market and carried back the provisions she bought. He spent long hours gossiping with her. The family liked him. They liked his chaffing manner and his good-natured smile. He was industrious and trustworthy. Life once more was tolerable.

But after three years his master was transferred to Cayenne. It was a blow. But it happened just then that the post of executioner fell free and he obtained it. Now once more he was in the service of the state. He was an official. However humble his residence it was his own. He need no longer wear the prison uniform. He could grow his hair and his mustache. He cared little if the convicts looked upon him with horror and contempt. That was how he looked upon them. Scum. When he took the bleeding head of an executed man from the basket and holding it by the ears pronounced those solemn words: *Au nom du peuple français justice est faite,* he felt that he did represent the republic. He stood for law and order. He was the protector of society against that vast horde of ruthless criminals.

He got a hundred francs for each execution. That and what the governor's wife paid him for his fish provided him with many a pleasant comfort and not a few luxuries. And now as he sat on his rock in the peace of eventide he considered what he would do with the money he would earn next day. Occasionally he got a bite, now and then a fish; he drew it out of the water, took it off the hook, and put on fresh bait; but he did this mechanically, and it did not disturb the current of his thoughts. Six hundred francs. It was a respectable sum. He scarcely knew what to do with it. He had everything he wanted in his little house—he had a good store of groceries and plenty of rum for one who was as little of a drinker as he was; he needed no fishing tackle; his clothes were good enough. The only thing was to put it aside. He already had a tidy little sum hidden in the ground at the root of a papaya tree. He chuckled when he thought how Adèle would have stared had she known that he was actually saving. It would have been balm to her avaricious soul. He was saving up gradually for when he was released. That was the difficult moment for the convicts. So long as they were in prison they had a roof over their heads and food to eat, but when they were released, with the obligation of staying for so many years more in the colony, they had to shift for themselves. They all said the same thing: it was at the expiration of their term that their real punishment began. They could not get work. Employers mistrusted them. Contractors would not engage them because the prison authorities hired out convict labor at a price that

defied competition. They slept in the open, in the market place, and for food were often glad to go to the Salvation Army. But the Salvation Army made them work hard for what they gave and besides forced them to listen to their services. Sometimes they committed a violent crime merely to get back to the safety of prison. Louis Remire was not going to take any risks. He meant to amass a sufficient capital to start in business. He ought to be able to get permission to settle in Cayenne, and there he might open a bar. People might hesitate to come at first because he had been the executioner, but if he provided good liquor they would get over their prejudice, and with his jovial manner, with his experience in keeping order, he ought to be able to make a go of it. Visitors came to Cayenne now and then and they would come out of curiosity. It would be something interesting to tell their friends when they got home that the best rum punch they had had in Cayenne was at the executioner's. But he had a good many years to go yet, and if there really was something he needed there was no reason why he shouldn't get it. He racked his brains. No, there wasn't a thing in the world he wanted. He was surprised. He allowed his eyes to wander from his float. The sea was wonderfully calm and now it was rich with all the color of the setting sun. In the sky already a solitary star twinkled. A thought came to him that filled him with an extraordinary sensation.

"But if there's nothing in the world you want, surely that's happiness." He stroked his handsome mustache and his blue eyes shone softly. "There are no two ways about it, I'm a happy man and till this moment I never knew it."

The notion was so unexpected that he did not know what to make of it. It was certainly a very odd one. But there it was, as obvious to anyone with a logical mind as a proposition of Euclid.

"Happy, that's what I am. How many men can say the same? In St. Laurent de Maroni of all places, and for the first time in my life."

The sun was setting. He had caught enough fish for his supper and enough for his breakfast. He drew in his line, gathered up his fish, and went back to his house. It stood but a few yards from the sea. It did not take him long to light his fire and in a little while he had four little fish cheerfully frizzling in a pan. He was always very particular about the oil he used. The best olive oil was expensive, but it was worth the money. The prison bread was good, and after he had fried his fish, he fried a couple of pieces of bread in the rest of the oil. He sniffed the savory smell with satisfaction. He lit a lamp, washed a lettuce grown in his own garden,

and mixed himself a salad. He had a notion that no one in the world could mix a salad better than he. He drank a glass of rum and ate his supper with appetite. He gave a few odds and ends to the two mongrel dogs who were lying at his feet, and then, having washed up, for he was by nature a tidy man and when he came in to breakfast next morning did not want to find things in a mess, let the dogs out of the compound to wander about the coconut grove. He took the lamp into the house, made himself comfortable in his deck chair, and smoking a cigar smuggled in from the neighboring Dutch Colony, settled down to read one of the French papers that had arrived by the last mail. Replete, his mind at ease, he could not but feel that life, with all its disadvantages, was good to live. He was still affected by the amused surprise that had overcome him when it suddenly occurred to him that he was a happy man. When you considered that men spent their lives seeking for happiness, it seemed hardly believable that he had found it. Yet the fact stared him in the face. A man who had everything he wants is happy; he had everything he wanted, therefore he was happy. He chuckled as a new thought crossed his mind.

"There's no denying it, I owe it to Adèle."

Old Adèle. What a foul woman!

Presently he decided that he had better have a nap. He set his alarm clock for a quarter to twelve and lying down on his bed, in a few minutes was fast asleep. He slept soundly and no dreams troubled him. He woke with a start when the alarm sounded, but in a moment remembered why he had set it. He yawned and stretched himself lazily.

"Ah, well, I suppose I must get to work. Every job has its inconveniences."

He slipped from under his mosquito net and relit his lamp. To freshen himself he washed his hands and face, and then as a protection against the night air drank a glass of rum. He thought for a moment of his inexperienced assistant and wondered whether it would be wise to take some rum in a flask with him.

"It would be a pretty business if his nerves went back on him."

It was unfortunate that so many as six men had to be executed. If there had been only one, it wouldn't have mattered so much his assistant being new to the game; but with five others waiting there, it would be awkward if there were a hitch. He shrugged—they would just have to do the best they could. He passed a comb through his tousled hair and carefully brushed his handsome mustache. He lit a cigarette. He walked through his compound, unlocked the door in the stout palisade that surrounded it, and locked it again behind him.

There was no moon. He whistled for his dogs. He was surprised that they did not come. He whistled again. The brutes. They'd probably caught a rat and were fighting over it. He'd give them a good hiding for that; he'd teach them to come when he whistled.

He set out to walk in the direction of the prison. It was dark under the coconut trees and he would just as soon have had the dogs with him. Still there were only fifty yards to go and then he would be out in the open. There were lights in the governor's house, and it gave him confidence to see them. He smiled, for he guessed what those lights at that late hour meant; the governor, with the execution before him at dawn, was finding it hard to sleep. The anxiety, the malaise, that affected convicts and ex-convicts alike on the eve of an execution, had got on his nerves. It was true that there was always the chance of an outbreak then, and the warders went around with their eyes skinned and their hands ready to draw their guns at a suspicious movement.

Louis Remire whistled for his dogs once more, but they did not come. He could not understand it. It was a trifle disquieting. He was a man who habitually walked slowly, strolling along with a sort of roll, but now he hastened his pace. He spat the cigarette out of his mouth. It had struck him that it was prudent not to betray his whereabouts by the light it gave. Suddenly he stumbled against something. He stopped dead. He was a brave man, with nerves of steel, but on a sudden he felt sick with terror. It was something soft and rather large that he had stumbled against, and he was pretty sure what it was. He wore espadrilles, and with one foot he cautiously felt the object on the ground before him. Yes, he was right. It was one of his dogs. It was dead.

He took a step backward and drew his knife. He knew it was no good to shout. The only house in the neighborhood was the prison governor's—it faced the clearing just beyond the coconut grove; but they would not hear him, or if they did would not stir. St. Laurent de Maroni was not a place where you went out in the dead of night when you heard a man calling for help. If next day one of the freed convicts was found lying dead, well, it was no great loss. Louis Remire saw in a flash what had happened.

He thought rapidly. They had killed his dogs while he was sleeping. They must have got them when he had put them out of his compound after supper. They must have thrown them some poisoned meat and the brutes had snatched at it. If the one he had stumbled over was near his house it was because it tried to crawl home to die. Louis Remire strained his eyes.

He could see nothing. The night was pitch-black. He could hardly see the trunks of the coconut trees a yard away from him. His first thought was to make a rush for his shack. If he got back to the safety of that he could wait till the prison people, wondering why he did not come, sent to fetch him.

But he knew he could never get back. He knew they were there in the darkness, the men who had killed his dogs; he would have to fumble with the key to find the lock and before he found it he would have a knife plunged in his back. He listened intently. There was not a sound. And yet he felt that there were men there, lurking behind the trees, and they were there to kill him. They would kill him as they had killed his dogs. And he would die like a dog.

There was more than one certainly. He knew them, there were three or four of them at least, there might be more—convicts in service in private houses who were not obliged to get back to the camp till a late hour, or desperate and starving freed men who had nothing to lose. For a moment he hesitated what to do. He dared not make a run for it, they might easily have put a rope across the pathway that led from his house to the open, and if he tripped he was done for.

He stepped over the dead dog and plunged into the grove. He stood with his back to a tree to decide how he should proceed. The silence was terrifying. Suddenly he heard a whisper and the horror of it was frightful. Again a dead silence. He felt he must move on, but his feet seemed rooted to the ground. He felt that they were peering at him out of the darkness and it seemed to him that he was as visible to them as though he stood in the broad light of day.

Then from the other side was a little cough. It came as such a shock that Louis Remire nearly screamed. He was conscious now that they were all round him. He could expect no mercy from those robbers and murderers. He remembered the other executioner, his predecessor, whom they had carried still alive into the jungle, whose eyes they had gouged out, and whom they had left hanging for the vultures to devour.

His knees began to tremble. What a fool he had been to take on the job! There were soft jobs he could have found in which you ran no risk. It was too late to think of that. He pulled himself together. He had no chance of getting out of the coconut grove alive, he knew that; he wanted to be sure that he would be dead. He tightened his grip on his knife.

The awful part was that he could hear no one, he could see no one, and yet he knew that they were lurking there waiting to strike. For one moment he had a

mad idea—he would throw his knife away and shout out to them that he was unarmed and they could come and kill him in safety. But he knew them; they would never be satisfied merely to kill him. Rage seized him. He was not the man to surrender tamely to a pack of criminals. He was an honest man and an official of the state; it was his duty to defend himself. He could not stay there all night. It was better to get it over quickly. Yet that tree at his back seemed to offer a sort of security, he could not bring himself to move.

He stared at the trunk of a tree in front of him and suddenly it moved and he realized with horror that it was a man. That made up his mind for him and with a huge effort he stepped forward. He advanced slowly and cautiously. He could hear nothing, he could see nothing. But he knew that as he advanced they advanced too. It was as though he were accompanied by an invisible bodyguard. He thought he could hear the sound of their naked feet on the ground. His fear had left him. He walked on, keeping as close to the trees as he could, so that they should have less chance of attacking him from behind; a wild hope sprang up in his breast that they would be afraid to strike; they knew him, they all knew him, and whoever struck the first blow would be lucky if he escaped a knife in his own guts; he had only another thirty yards to go, and once in the open, able to see, he could make a fight for it. A few yards more and then he would run for his life.

Suddenly something happened that made him start out of his skin, and he stopped dead. A light was flashed and in that heavy darkness the sudden blare was terrifying. It was an electric torch. Instinctively, he sprang to a tree and stood with his back to it. He could not see who held the light. He was blinded by it. He did not speak. He held his knife low—he knew that when they struck it was in the belly—and if someone flung himself at him he was prepared to strike back. He was going to sell his life dearly. For half a minute perhaps the light shone on his face, but it seemed to him an eternity. He thought now that he discerned dimly the faces of men.

Then a word broke the horrible silence.

"Throw."

At the same instant a knife came flying through the air and struck him on the breastbone. He threw up his hands and as he did so, someone sprang at him and with a great sweep of the knife ripped up his belly. The light was switched off. Louis Remire sank to the ground with a groan, a terrible groan of pain. Five, six men

gathered out of the gloom and stood over him. With his fall the knife that had stuck in his breastbone was dislodged. It lay on the ground. A quick flash of the torch showed where it was. One of the men took it and with a single swift motion cut Remire's throat from ear to ear.

"Au nom du peuple français justice est faite," he said.

They vanished into the darkness and in the coconut grove was the immense silence of death.

The Penalty for Counterfeiting

David Wallis and David Wilson were convicted as counterfeiters and sentenced "to stand in the Pillory between the hours of Ten and Eleven, the Forenoon of the same day, and after that to be placed in a Cart, so as to be publickly seen, with Halters about their necks and Carted thro' the most publick Streets in this City; and then be brought to the Publick Whipping post and David Wallis on his bare back to receive 39 stripes and David Wilson 28 stripes." They were then taken to Flatbush, Jamaica and Westchester to be similarly whipped. "After which at the end of Kingsbridge they shall be delivered to the High Sheriff of the City of New York and from that time Wallis to remain in Prison Six Months and Wilson Three Months. And then each to be discharged, paying their Fees."

New York Gazette, December 4, 1727.

(Contributed by Rita Gottesman)

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **Q. PATRICK**

TITLE: ***Lioness vs. Panther***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Lieutenant Trant

LOCALE: Theatre on Broadway

COMMENTS: *Opening night . . . third act of a smash hit . . . an unexpected, unrehearsed climax . . . and Lieutenant Trant's specialty — an impromptu solution.*

LIEUTENANT TRANT OF THE NEW York Homicide Bureau had been dragged to the First Night by his fashionable sister. But now that he was there he was enjoying himself.

From the first two acts it was obvious that the Heller-Dent comedy *Lovelight* was going to be a smash hit. As the third act got under way, Trant sat contentedly in his orchestra seat, marveling at the play's world-famous co-stars — Clementina Coldwater, a tawny, majestic lioness, and Lottie Lamb, sleek and deadly as a panther.

Trant's sister had told him that the two women loathed each other in private life and, at that very moment, were bitter rivals for the lead role in an important TV show with many thousands of dollars at stake.

They were supposed to hate each other in *Lovelight*, too, in which they played a couple of Manhattan glamor girls struggling over a reluctant oil millionaire.

How much of the hate that sparked across the footlights, he wondered, was merely technique? He wouldn't have been surprised if at any minute they hurled themselves on each other, spitting, growling, tearing at cheeks and eyes with predatory talons.

Actresses, reflected Trant, whose frame of reference was strictly occupational, were almost as fascinating as murderesses.

During the first two acts, the three aisle seats in front of him had been empty. Now three people tiptoed into them, a large, round-faced man with spectacles, a very blond, arrogant-looking man, and a red-haired girl in an overcoat who carried a brief case.

Trant's sister nudged him and whispered in his ear, "That's Jake Fisher, the producer. He used to be

married to La Coldwater. The tall blond one's Stephen Heller. The girl must be Sheila Dent, his new fourth wife, the one who wrote the play with him. Before she met him, she wasn't anybody. But I guess by tomorrow she'll be a celebrity, too."

His sister's columnist complex always irritated Trant. He glanced at the group who had obviously come front to catch the end of their show. He now recognized Stephen Heller, the fabulous Danish-born wonder boy of Hollywood and Broadway who had been an OSS hero in World War II and who was both director and co-author of *Lovelight*. Trant glanced from him to his new fourth wife, "who wasn't anybody but would be a celebrity tomorrow."

From what he could see of her in the dim light, Sheila Dent looked pretty and nice. For a man like Heller, who traded in wives as if they were automobiles, she should make a charming 1958 family model. Clementina Coldwater's ex-husband, the producer, looked merely fat and anxious. All three of them, whispering together, were tense as kittens.

The last act was reaching its climax now. Both actresses had arrived at the millionaire's apartment, convinced they had hooked him, only to find him unaccountably absent.

All through the play there had been a running gag about the millionaire's stinginess with liquor. Now, with uneasy suspicion of the doublecross, the two glamor girls made a dive at the Scotch decanter.

The Panther reached it first. There was only enough liquor for one drink. She poured it into a glass and added ice. She was just about to gulp it when the Lioness snatched it from her. A skirmish followed which ended in a glacial stalemate, with the two of them, determined not to let the other touch it, leaving the drink on a central table and sitting down to wait for the millionaire, stabbing at each other with rapier chitchat.

When the tension had become almost unendurable, the millionaire's butler entered and announced that his master had just telephoned from the airport. He was sorry to disappoint the ladies, but he knew they would forgive him because he was flying back to Texas to marry his boyhood sweetheart.

The mood instantly changed. The rivals, both realizing they had been defeated and each trying to make it appear that the other was the harder hit, started with appalling sweetness to press the single drink on each other.

"*You*, darling!"

"No, you poor dear, *you* need it!"

Then, suddenly, they both made a lunge for the Scotch. But the mousy little butler was too quick for them. Daintily lifting the glass, he toasted the two frustrated felines with an unctuous smile and swallowed the drink as the curtain fell.

The first-night audience roared its applause. The curtain came up again. The entire company took the call. The butler, standing between the

Lioness and the Panther, still clutched the glass and stared unsmilingly in front of him with a curious dazed expression.

Trant heard Sheila Dent in front of him exclaim, "What on earth's got into Arthur?"

And Stephen Heller barked, "He must be out of his mind."

Both of them and the producer got up as the curtain was lowered and then raised again. This was obviously a solo call for the two stars. To Trant's intrigued surprise, the little actor who played the butler was still standing between them, ghastly pale and staring vacantly at nothing. Then, as Clementina Coldwater and Lottie Lamb went on bowing, the glass dropped from his fingers, and he swayed.

Jake Fisher, Stephen Heller, and Sheila Dent were hurrying down the aisle toward the stage. Just before the curtain reached the boards, Trant saw the butler's legs crumple and lurch sideways. Professionally agog, he muttered an apology to his sister and sped down the aisle after the producer and the authors.

He followed them through curtains, up a flight of stairs, and onto the stage. There, the Lioness and the Panther were standing as if turned to granite, staring down at the "butler" who lay sprawled on the floor between them.

The producer and Sheila Dent dashed forward and dropped at the actor's side. Sheila Dent cried, "Stephen, called a doctor!" As she was agitatedly loosening the butler's collar, Trant knelt down and studied the sinister stiffness of the little man's body and his twisted, bluish face.

Feeling faintly incredulous, he picked up the empty decanter which stood on the coffee table. He lifted its stopper and sniffed. The bitter almond odor trailing up to him confirmed his suspicions.

He looked up at the huddle of people around the body.

"Get away from him, all of you. He's dead. The drink was loaded with potassium cyanide. He's been murdered."

The producer's fat cheeks wabbled. "Murdered? But — who are you?"

"Homicide," said Trant.

Clementina Coldwater suddenly came to life. She started to scream.

Lottie Lamb, equally alive again, spat, "For pity's sake, Clementina, stop auditioning for Dracula. There's an audience out there."

But Clementina Coldwater spun around to Trant, her face scrawled with terror and fury. "It's *me!*" she shouted. "*I* was the one who was meant to drink the Scotch. It's *me* they tried to murder!"

They were all crowding around Trant, all talking at once, including a young stage manager in shirt sleeves. Finally the haughty, impressive Stephen Heller took over.

"Miss Coldwater's right, Lieutenant. As I directed it, she was meant to get the Scotch. What Arthur Russ — the stage butler — did wasn't in our script. I don't know what got into him. He stole the third-act curtain!

The nerve of it! An obscure little nobody whom we only hired out of kindness, a —"

But Clementina Coldwater's famous booming voice drowned out his indignation. She had flung herself toward Lottie Lamb and was screaming, "You did it! It's just your gutter level. How to land a TV show — kill off the competition!"

Lottie Lamb's answering laugh was a panther's roar. "Really, darling, what a charming idea! I haven't told you because I was saving it for a lovely surprise. But you aren't competition any longer. I signed that contract this afternoon."

"You signed . . ."

There was a hopeless confusion of struggling glamor. While Stephen Heller separated the two stars, and the producer hurried off to stall visitors from coming backstage, Trant unobtrusively talked with the stage manager.

He learned that the same decanter had been used throughout the play. Since drinks had been drunk from it in the first two acts, the poison could only have been put in the decanter during the second intermission.

"Soon as the curtain fell," said the stage manager, "I ran on stage and fixed the decanter for the last act, pouring out all but a little of the prop Scotch."

"Who went near the decanter after that?"

"Gee, I don't know. Mr. Heller sent me out to buy a Vogue magazine. You see, in the last act Miss Lamb picks up a Vogue from the table. It's got to be Vogue because she has a line about it and she holds it up for the audience to see. But, somehow, there was a mess-up. Mr. Heller noticed in the second intermission that we'd got Harper's Bazaar instead. I don't know how it happened. I could have sworn . . ."

Trant's pulses quickened. "What did you do with the copy of Harper's Bazaar?"

"I left it right there on the table with the Vogue."

Trant skirted the corpse and picked up the copy of Harper's Bazaar from a table. He leafed through it and then stopped abruptly at a page because, from a group of three *Portraits of Current Celebrities*, one photograph had been neatly cut out.

Everyone was swarming around him again, dominated by Clementina Coldwater who was intoning, "Lieutenant, I demand protection! If it wasn't Lottie who tried to murder me, it —"

"It was someone," put in Trant quietly, "who had access to potassium cyanide. Prussic acid isn't easy to get, you know. You can't just walk into a drug store and order it."

His gaze settled on Stephen Heller. "As I remember, Mr. Heller, you were quite a hero in the war. Didn't they drop you by parachute into occupied Denmark?"

The director-author gave a self-satisfied toss to his blond head. "I thought that was common knowledge."

"And, Mr. Heller, on dangerous missions like that in Europe, didn't they always give you a poison capsule — in case you were captured by the Gestapo?"

"Of course!" exclaimed Lottie Lamb. "Stephen's got that coat button with poison in it. It's his star souvenir."

"A button!" Trant turned to the stage manager. "Do you keep a sewing kit in case the actors need repairs during the performance?"

"Why, sure."

The stage manager scurried off and returned with an old, beat-up round tin. He took off the lid, revealing a jumble of buttons of various sizes, needles and spools of thread.

Stephen Heller glared at it, gave a grunt, and picked up one of the buttons — a large, brown one which might have come from a raincoat. He turned it over and, flicking a tiny lever, made its back spring open.

"This is my button! But how did you know it was in that box?"

"The murderer had to hide it in a hurry."

Trant took the button and sniffed the hollow interior. Once again the tell-tale almond odor trailed up to him. "It wasn't difficult to figure out that the safest place to hide a button is with other buttons. When did you last see it, Mr. Heller?"

"This afternoon. It was at the house when we stopped by for a drink."

"Who is — we?"

"All of us. My wife and I, Clementina, Lottie, and Jake Fisher."

"Jake!" Clementina Coldwater, on the warpath again, swung around to her producer ex-husband. "So! You got tired of paying alimony, did you?"

"Please, Miss Coldwater," broke in Trant. "The man who died was the man who was meant to die — Russ."

"But how can that be?" Sheila Dent's pretty eyes were puzzled. "The scene was written and directed for Clementina to drink the Scotch. Arthur must have had just a sudden scene-stealing impulse."

"I don't think so," said Trant. "Arthur Russ snatched the glass because he'd been told to by someone whose word he would obey — by the author or the producer."

His eyes, ominously calm, shifted over the whole group. "By the person, in fact, who knew Arthur Russ had to be killed tonight, who brought the cyanide button here, and who —" he gestured with the magazine which he still held in his hand — "replaced the Vogue, which the stage manager had correctly put on the table, by this Harper's Bazaar, so that he'd be out buying a new Vogue while the decanter was poisoned."

Dramatically he opened the copy of Harper's Bazaar, exposing the page from which the picture had been cut out. "Does anyone recognize this?"

"Why, it's my copy!" blurted Stephen Heller. "There was a photograph of my wife. I cut it out at home yesterday. I —"

"Of your wife!" Trant felt that odd, fizzy sensation of approaching triumph. "And it was your wife, per-

haps, who in the second-act intermission drew your attention to the fact that the magazine was wrong?"

"Why, yes, it was, but —"

"It's easy enough," continued Trant, "to hide a button, but it isn't so easy to hide a magazine."

He leaned toward Sheila Dent and flipped the brief case out of her hand. As she gave a startled gasp, he tugged open the zipper and withdrew a copy of Vogue.

"Congratulations, Miss Dent, on a nice try. The stage is one place where someone has to go on drinking a drink, whatever it tastes like, and once you'd told Arthur Russ in private to try the new ending, the whole thing would have looked like an attempt on Miss Coldwater.

"I wonder why you had to murder a little actor who was hired out of kindness. Was it, maybe, through *your* kindness he was hired? Because you *had* to hire him? Because he had some hold over you? An unknown girl who's married Hollywood's and Broadway's biggest catch, an unknown girl who's written a play with him, who's on the fringe of great success — that sort of girl, Miss Dent, is apt to be vulnerable, if . . ."

He broke off, his face oddly pensive. "I wonder why it was *you* who dashed to help Arthur Russ, why it was you who loosened his collar. With that overcoat of yours, it would have been easy to transfer something from his jacket to — "

While the others stood in total silence, he crossed to the stunned Sheila Dent and felt through the pockets of her coat.

"Ah!" He produced a paper and and studied it. "A marriage license, dated 1949, made out to Arthur Russ and Sheila Dent.

"So that was it. When Mr. Heller proposed to you, it was too good a deal to let slip, wasn't it? No time for a divorce from that obscure little husband. But the obscure husband showed up. He had to be paid off with a part in the play. But that wasn't enough. He gave you until tonight, didn't he? If you didn't promise to cut him in on your newly found bonanza, he'd threatened to show Mr. Heller the license after the show. The scandal . . ."

But there was no need to go on. The girl who was nobody but who would be a celebrity tomorrow had slumped to the floor, and Stephen Heller was gazing down at her with as much emotion as might be expected from a man who, having lost three wives, was now losing a fourth.

Trant looked down, too, almost sadly. Well, his sister's prophecy had, in a way, come true. Sheila Dent would hit the headlines tomorrow.

His eyes moved back to the others. An extraordinary change had come over Clementina Coldwater and Lottie Lamb. Both were beaming.

"Think of it!" said Clementina Coldwater. "The author a murderess! An actor poisoned on stage! We'll run for years."

"For years and years," said Lottie.

"Darling!" purred the Lioness.

"*Dar*ling!" purred the Panther.

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

This is a month of welcomes in the field of murder, with a resounding "Welcome back!" to three Old Pros who have been far too long absent, and an eager "Welcome, stranger!" to two gifted beginners.

★★★★ **THE STOPPED CLOCK, *by Joel Townsley Rogers*** (Simon & Schuster, $3.50)
Like all Rogers, wholly indescribable. To attempt the impossible: It's wild, fantastic, endless, almost absurd, and completely wonderful—nearly as exciting as THE RED HAND (1945)[1].

★★★★ **THE HUSBAND, *by Vera Caspary*** (Harper, $3.50)
Distinguished analysis of human relations leading inevitably to murder—a "woman's novel" which men will read as eagerly as they did LAURA (1943)[1].

★★★ **THE LOST ONE, *by Dana Lyon*** (Harper, $2.95)
First book in eight years by a master of everyday terror tells the story of a moronic baby-stealing with almost unbearable tension.

★★★ **FINAL EXPOSURE, *by Paul H. Mansfield*** (Macmillan, $3)
New novelist from British West Indies offers a model of the formal detective story with novelistic substance—plus a fine white-and-colored team of detectives.

★★★ **NOW, WILL YOU TRY FOR MURDER?, *by Harry Olesker*** (Simon & Schuster, $2.95)
Authentic picture of TV quiz program, plot neatly tailored to setting, good puzzle, lively narration—all add up to the brightest American "first" in years.

[1] Now available in the Dell Great Mystery Library (35¢ each). And among other revivals, do not miss FOUR FIVE AND SIX BY TEY (Macmillan, $4.50), containing Josephine Tey's A SHILLING FOR CANDLES (1936), THE DAUGHTER OF TIME (1951) [probably the greatest of all tales of armchair detection] and THE SINGING SANDS (1952); or H. F. Heard's small classic A TASTE FOR HONEY (1941), retitled A TASTE FOR MURDER (Avon, 25¢).

a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **FREDERICK NEBEL**

[illegible]: ***Wanted: An Accomplice***

[illegible]: Crime Story

LOCALES: Boston and Maine

[illegible]: The Present

COMMENTS: *Stockwell had it planned perfectly—as neat a bank robbery as was ever pulled and just as neat a disappearing act. Nothing could possibly go wrong—that is, nothing foreseeable . . .*

ONCE HE HAD MADE UP HIS mind to steal the money, Stockwell took his paint box and easel and drove to Maine the first weekend in July. He worked in a bank in Boston and it was the combination of business and hobby that would make the theft possible. But he needed an unwitting accomplice in his scheme to disappear. In Maine, driving leisurely from one small town to another, he made inquiries about guides.

Since it was out of the question to put into words the kind of man he sought, he played the part of a receptive listener. He hung around places where men gossiped, his ears open for any morsel of fact or rumor indicating a likely prospect.

It took time. It took a month of weekends. In Moose Center, the last Sunday in July, he heard about Tom Branch. Stockwell had dropped into the Sportsmen's Exchange and in the conversation about guides Branch's name cropped up. But there was some doubt concerning his availability. Stockwell asked why, was told, and learned a lot more besides. Well, he said, he'd give it a try, anyhow.

Driving out to the Branch place he caught a glimpse of the abandoned quarry into which the State, two years before, tried to prove Tom Branch had hurled his wife Wilma and killed her. The defense held that she was drunk at the

time and could have fallen in the dark. The local gossip was that she could have fallen, all right, or been smacked down by any one of all the men she'd teased and carried on with. Nothing was ever proved, one way or the other, and Tom Branch went free. But the long trial had been costly and he was still up to his neck in debt. Besides, there were two small children to take care of, which made it difficult for him to go off guiding.

But for Stockwell's purpose it was worth trying—so much so that when he reached the Branch place he found himself tense and nervous with excitement. Years ago he would have nibbled at his fingernails but he had learned to deflect that habit into others less noticeable.

"Handsome children," he said, tousling the heads of two little girls standing between him and a man varnishing an old station wagon. "Are you Tom Branch?"

The young man's dark, deep-set eyes twinkled at the children as he nodded, and some of the twinkle remained when Stockwell put out his hand and introduced himself. He explained, removing his wrist watch and putting it right back on again, that he wanted to do some painting in the big woods—remote lakes, streams, waterfalls. He named a fee which he knew to be considerably higher than the local rate.

Branch massaged the back of his neck, head down, while his dark eyes kept straying toward the little girls. He kicked at a stone. He lifted one lean hip and dropped the other. He said, well, he didn't know, it might take a few days to get in a woman for the kids.

"There's ample time," Stockwell said, and wrote his address on a personal card. "The second weekend in August and then the long Labor Day weekend. Write me as soon as you've made arrangements."

Branch said he'd do that inside of a week and then asked Stockwell into the cottage for a cup of tea. Although he did not intend at any time to reveal that he knew about Branch's trouble, Stockwell turned his knowledge to good purpose before he left.

"And now back home," he said as Branch saw him to his car. He sighed and shook his head. "Some home I've got, my friend—some home life!"

As he drove off with a grin-and-bear-it look, he was sure he saw a glimmer of sympathetic understanding in the dark, deep-set eyes. Stockwell had never married. It was late when he reached his Boston apartment, a good address which he could not have afforded as a married man. His advancement at the bank had stopped a number of years before; and ever since, as others moved up past him, his disappointment had turned

gradually into a fixed and self-consuming resentment. Back in June, when the president suggested that he do some paintings for next year's calendar, Stockwell, was on the point of refusing when all at once he saw his golden opportunity.

Tom Branch's letter arrived the middle of the week—everything was set—and Stockwell saw his plan to steal the money dovetail nicely with his scheme to disappear. He discussed with the president of the bank various ideas for the paintings he would do, and thought he ought to begin about the middle of August. He would paint, of course, after banking hours. He thought a picture of the vault, with the door open, would be very impressive, and the president nodded sagely.

When Stockwell drove up to the Branch place for the mid-month weekend, the station wagon was already packed with food and camping gear. "I almost thought I'd have to call it off," Stockwell said ruefully. "Maybe you're a lucky man, Tom, to have a woman in only when you need her. Sometimes, I don't know—" But then he rolled his shoulders, as if casting off an unpleasant experience. "Well, let's get going."

Branch gave him an odd, downcast glance, half embarrassed, but said nothing. Stockwell was opening and closing, opening and closing his gold penknife—another habit that had replaced his nail biting. But on the drive upcountry he was too busy concentrating on a road map and scribbling notations about towns, railway stations, and bus stops. Finally they left the last blacktop, drove a few miles on dusty gravel, and then bumped along deep into the woods on an old logging road. The camp site was by a waterfall, in a remote wilderness of lakes, streams, and ravines.

"Just the place—perfect!" Stockwell exclaimed. He paused to make sure Branch was listening, then added, "I'd certainly hate to get lost up here."

"Man could," Tom Branch said. "They have. And for keeps."

During the week end, while he worked on a painting of the waterfall, Stockwell pretended to be alternately gay and moody. But it wasn't until they returned to Moose Center late Sunday afternoon that he said, "Been things on my mind, Tom. And about Labor Day—hell knows, maybe I can't make it. But I'll pay you now, anyhow, in advance. No," he said, when Branch protested, "if it's all paid for, maybe I'll have a better argument if the wife throws a tantrum. Tom," he said bleakly, "never marry a drinking woman."

Back in Boston, he checked the notations on the road map against a bus timetable he'd picked up. He also studied train and plane schedules. He owned several paint boxes

and the one he carried to work Monday morning was quite large —natural hardwood, varnished, with a strong handle. He began the first in the series of indoor paintings on that Monday, after hours. He began the last, showing the vault ajar, the Friday before Labor Day. When he was sure everyone had left, he removed all the paraphernalia from the paint box and packed it with currency, none of it traceable. He walked out with more than a hundred thousand dollars, leaving the paraphernalia in the locked vault. He wired Tom Branch to meet the 10:40 next morning, then sold his car for a spot-cash thousand.

When he got off the train at the Moose Center depot he said, "Sorry, Tom. The wife took the car and went off on a trip. Let's go on up to that waterfall, so I can finish painting it."

He put the paint box and a small overnight bag in the station wagon, squeezed his eyes with his knuckles, and complained about lack of sleep. As they drove off, Branch waved to the station agent and the sheriff. His hand accidentally touched Stockwell's shoulder, and as if on a warm impulse he pressed it and said, "You need some good camp food and good camp sleep."

Stockwell removed his wrist watch, snapped the gold band, and slipped the watch back on again. He felt all knotted up inside, for now he was faced with a schedule that had to click all the way along. In Boston he had bought a coach ticket to Chicago in order to check through a suitcase that now contained the money and a few clothes. The claim check was in his pocket. He had to catch a 2:30 bus at the town near the end of the blacktop, make a night train out of Albany, pick up the suitcase in Chicago, and then take a plane to California.

He was fidgety, and as they raised dust on the graveled road beyond the blacktop he was shocked to find himself reverting unconsciously to his old habit of biting his nails. He took out his penknife and was paring away the ragged edges when the station wagon suddenly hit the first bump in the old logging road. Stockwell cut his finger wide open and shook it with pain. Branch braked to a stop, saying, "We don't want you getting blood poison," and got iodine and gauze from a metal first-aid kit. When they reached the camp site, Stockwell was white and jittery.

He stood peering blindly at the waterfall. "Tom," he said, "it's no go. I can't take it at home any longer." He turned around. "Tom, you said last time that men have been lost up here for keeps. Tom, you just can't imagine what it's like to have a drunken wife."

Branch closed the station-wagon door. His lips tightened in a bit-

ter line but he said nothing; he was close-mouthed, but there was a momentary glitter in his eyes.

Stockwell moved up close to him. "Help me, Tom. Say I got lost. Say I wandered off and you hunted all over—today, tomorrow; and then Monday, late afternoon, report me missing." He held up his hand. "Tom, here's a thousand dollars for you and the kids. I'll leave my bag and paint box. All you have to do is drive me back to the graveled road, then come back in here again."

"Gosh, Mr. Stockwell—" Tom Branch tried not to look at the money quivering in Stockwell's hand. He shook his head. "If only—"

"If only what? "Stockwell choked.

"Look, Mr. Stockwell, I'd like to help you—I really would. But I've been through the mill with the police and I don't want to go through it again."

Stockwell's voice broke: "It's no crime to lose a man. What in God's name can they prove?"

"A lot, with the experts they have," Branch said, opening the station-wagon door. "They could prove that the blood soaked in the seat there ain't mine, like once they tried to prove some dried blood under my fingernails was my wife's." He shook his head regretfully, but his low voice was grim, resolute: "The sheriff in Moose Center saw me get you off the train and he's going to see me put you on again."

Sheila Kaye-Smith, described as slight in build, slender, and with the most serious of gray eyes, started writing as a child and had her first book published at the age of twenty. She wrote a great deal after that auspicious beginning — novels, short stories, plays, poetry — and very often in beautiful and sometimes in masterly prose. Here is one of Sheila Kaye-Smith's short stories — a character study of Mrs. Adis, a "frail-looking woman, with a brown, hard face on which the skin had dried in innumerable small, hair-like wrinkles."

You will find this a grim, tight-lipped story that culminates in a strange mixture of pathos and horror. It is one of the author's tales of Sussex — a region which, in a literary sense, belonged as completely to Sheila Kaye-Smith as Wessex belonged to Thomas Hardy.

FOR TOM'S SAKE

by SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

IN NORTH-EAST SUSSEX A GREAT tongue of land runs into Kent by Scotney Castle. It is a land of woods — the old hammer woods of the Sussex iron industry — and among the woods gleam the hammer-ponds, holding in their mirrors the sunsets and sunrises. Owing to the thickness of the woods — great masses of oak and beech in a dense undergrowth of hazel and chestnut and frail sallow — the road that passes Mrs. Adis's cottage is dark before the twilight has crept away from the fields beyond. That night there was no twilight and no moon, only a few pricks of fire in the black sky above the trees. But what the darkness hid the silence revealed. In the absolute stillness of the night, windless and clear with the first frost of October, every sound was distinct, intensified. The distant bark of a dog at Delmonden sounded close at hand, and the man who walked on the road could hear the echo of his own footsteps following him like a knell.

Every now and then he made an effort to go more quietly, but the roadside was a mass of brambles, and their crackling and rustling was nearly as loud as the thud of his feet on the marl. Besides, they made him go slowly, and he had no time for that.

When he came to Mrs. Adis's cottage he paused a moment. Only a small patch of grass lay between the cottage and the road; he went stealthily across and looked in at the lighted, uncurtained window. He could see

Mrs. Adis stooping over the fire, taking some pot or kettle off it. He hesitated and seemed to wonder. He was a big, hulking man, with reddish hair and freckled face, evidently of the laboring class, but not successful, judging by the vague grime and poverty of his appearance. For a moment he made as if he would open the window, then he changed his mind and went to the door instead.

He did not knock, but walked straight in. The woman at the fire turned quickly round.

"What, you, Peter Crouch?" she said. "I didn't hear you knock."

"I didn't knock, ma'am. I didn't want anybody to hear."

"How's that?"

"I'm in trouble." His hands were shaking a little.

"What you done?"

"I shot a man, Mrs. Adis."

"You?"

"Yes, I shot him."

"You killed him?"

"I dunno."

For a moment there was silence in the small, stuffy kitchen. Then the kettle boiled over and Mrs. Adis sprang for it, mechanically putting it at the side of the fire.

She was a small, frail-looking woman, with a brown, hard face on which the skin had dried in innumerable small, hair-like wrinkles. She was probably not more than 42, but life treats some women hard in the agricultural district of Sussex, and Mrs. Adis's life had been harder than most.

"What do you want me to do for you, Peter Crouch?" she said, a little sourly.

"Let me stay here a bit. Is there nowhere you can put me till they've gone?"

"Who's they?"

"The keepers."

"Oh, you've had a shine with the keepers, have you?"

"Yes. I was down by Cinder-Wood seeing if I could pick up anything, and the keepers found me. There was four to one, so I used my gun. Then I ran for it. They're after me; reckon they aren't far off now."

Mrs. Adis did not speak for a moment.

Crouch looked at her searchingly, beseechingly.

"You might do it for Tom's sake," he said.

"You haven't been an over-good friend to Tom," snapped Mrs. Adis.

"But Tom's been an unaccountable good friend to me; reckon he would want you to stand by me tonight."

"Well, I won't say he wouldn't, seeing as Tom always thought better of you than you deserved. Maybe you can stay till he comes home tonight, then we can hear what he says about it."

"That'll serve my turn, I reckon. He'll be up in Ironlatch for an hour yet, and the coast will be clear by then. I can get away out of the country."

"Where'll you go?"

"I dunno. There's time to think of that."

"Well, you can think of it in here,"

she said, drily, opening a door which led from the kitchen into the small lean-to of the cottage. "They'll never guess you're there, 'specially if I tell them I ain't seen you tonight."

"You're a good woman, Mrs. Adis. I know I'm not worth your standing by me, but maybe I'd ha' been different if I'd had a mother like Tom's."

She did not speak, but shut the door, and he was in darkness save for a small ray of light that filtered through one of the cracks. By this light he could see her moving to and fro, preparing Tom's supper. In another hour Tom would be home from Ironlatch Farm, where he worked every day. Peter Crouch trusted Tom not to revoke his mother's kindness, for they had been friends when they went together to the National School at Lamberhurst, and since then the friendship had not been broken by their very different characters and careers.

Peter Crouch hunched down upon the sacks that filled one corner of the lean-to and gave himself up to the dreary and anxious game of waiting. A delicious smell of cooking began to filter through from the kitchen, and he hoped Mrs. Adis would not deny him a share of the supper when Tom came home, for he was very hungry and he had a long way to go.

He had fallen into a kind of helpless doze, haunted by the memories of the last two hours, recast in the form of dreams, when he was roused by the sound of footsteps on the road.

For a moment his heart nearly choked him with its beating. They were the keepers. They had guessed for a cert. where he was — with Mrs. Adis, his old pal's mother. He had been a fool to come to the cottage. Nearly losing his self-control, he shrank into the corner shivering, half sobbing. But the footsteps went by. They did not even hesitate at the door. He heard them ring away into the frosty stillness. The next minute Mrs. Adis stuck her head into the lean-to.

"That was them," she said, shortly; "a party from the castle. I saw them go by. They had lanterns, and I saw old Manders and the two Boormans. Maybe it 'ud be better if you slipped out now and went towards Cansiron. You'd miss them that way and get over to Kent. There's a London train comes from Tunbridge Wells at 10 tonight."

"That'd be a fine thing for me, ma'am, but I haven't the price of a ticket on me."

She went to one of the kitchen drawers. "Here's seven shillun'; it'll be your fare to London and a bit over."

For a moment he did not speak, then he said, "I don't know how to thank you, ma'am."

"Oh, you needn't thank me. I am doing it for Tom. I know how unaccountable set he is on you and always was."

"I hope you won't get into trouble because of this."

"There ain't much fear. No one's ever likely to know you've been in

this cottage. That's why I'd sooner you went before Tom came back, for maybe he'd bring a pal with him, and that'd make trouble. I won't say I shan't have it on my conscience for having helped you to escape the law, but shooting a keeper ain't the same as shooting an ordinary sort of man, as we all know, so I won't think no more about it."

She opened the door for him, but on the threshold they both stood still, for again footsteps could be heard approaching, this time from the far south.

"Maybe it's Tom," said Mrs. Adis.

"There's more than one man there, and I can hear voices."

"You'd better go back," she said. "Wait till they've passed, anyway."

With an unwilling shrug he went back into the little dusty lean-to, which he had come to hate, and she shut the door after him.

The footsteps drew nearer. They came more slowly and heavily this time. For a moment he thought they would pass also, but their momentary dulling was only the crossing of the strip of grass outside the door. The next minute there was a knock.

Trembling with anxiety and curiosity, Peter Crouch put his eye to one of the numerous cracks in the lean-to door and looked through into the kitchen. He saw Mrs. Adis go to the cottage door, but before she could open it a man came quickly in and shut it behind him.

Crouch recognized Vidler, one of the keepers of Scotney Castle, and he felt his hands and feet grow leaden cold. They knew where he was then. They had followed him. They had guessed that he had taken refuge with Mrs. Adis. It was all up. He was not really hidden; there was no place for him to hide. Directly they opened the inner door they would see him. Why couldn't he think of things better? Why wasn't he cleverer at looking after himself — like other men? His legs suddenly refused to support him, and he sat down on the pile of sacks.

The man in the kitchen seemed to have some difficulty in saying what he wanted to Mrs. Adis. He stood before her silently, nervously twisting his cap.

"Well, what is it?" she asked.

"I want to speak to you, ma'am."

Peter Crouch listened, straining his ears, for his thudding heart nearly drowned the voices in the next room. Oh, no, he was sure she would not give him away. If only for Tom's sake. . . . She was a game sort, Mrs. Adis.

"Well?" she said, sharply, as the man remained tongue-tied.

"I have brought you bad news, Mrs. Adis."

Her expression changed.

"What? It ain't Tom, is it?"

"He's outside," said the keeper.

"What do you mean?" said Mrs. Adis, and she moved toward the door.

"Don't, ma'am. Not till I've told you."

"Told me what? Oh, be quick, man, for mercy's sake," and she tried to push past him to the door.

"There's been a row," he said, "down by Cinder Wood. There was a chap there snaring rabbits, and Tom was walking with the Boormans and me and old Manders from the Castle. We heard a noise in the Eighteen-pounder Spinney, and there. . . . It was too dark to see who it was, and directly he saw us he made off — but we'd scared him first, and he let fly with his gun. . . ."

He stopped speaking and looked at her, as if beseeching her to fill in the gaps of his story. In his corner of the lean-to Peter Crouch was as a man of wood and sawdust.

"Tom —" said Mrs. Adis.

The keeper had forgotten his guard, and before he could prevent her she had flung open the door.

The men outside had evidently been waiting for the signal, and they came in, carrying something which they put down in the middle of the kitchen floor.

"Is he dead?" asked Mrs. Adis, without tears.

The men nodded. They could not find a dry voice like hers.

In the lean-to Peter Crouch had ceased to sweat and tremble. Strength had come with despair, for he knew he must despair now. Besides, he no longer wanted to escape from this thing that he had done. Oh, Tom! — and I was thinking it was one of them demmed keepers. Oh, Tom! and it was you that got it — got it from me! Reckon I don't want to live!

And yet life was sweet, for there was a woman at Ticehurst, a woman as staunch to him as Tom, who would go with him to the world's end even now. But he must not think of her. He had no right; his life was forfeit to Mrs. Adis.

She was sitting in the old basket armchair by the fire. One of the men had helped her into it. Another man with rough kindness had poured out something from a flask he carried in his pocket. "Here, ma'am, take a drop of this. It'll give you strength."

"We'll go round to Ironlatch Cottage and ask Mrs. Gain to come down to you."

"Reckon this is a turble thing to have come to you, but it's the will o' Providence, as some folks say; and as for the man who did it — we've a middling good guess who he is, and he shall swing."

"We didn't see his face, but we've got his gun. He threw it into an alder when he bolted, and I swear that gun belongs to Peter Crouch, who's been up to no good since the day when Mus' Scales sacked him for stealing his corn."

"Reckon, tho', he didn't know it was Tom when he did it — he and Tom always being better friends than he deserved."

Peter Crouch was standing upright now, looking through the crack of the door. He saw Mrs. Adis struggle to her feet and stand by the table looking down on the dead man's face. A whole eternity seemed to roll by as she stood there. He saw her put her hand into her apron pocket, where she had thrust the key of the lean-to.

"The Boormans have gone after Crouch," said Vidler, nervously breaking the silence. "They'd a notion as he'd broken through the woods Ironlatch way. There's no chance of his having been by here? You haven't seen him tonight, ma'am?"

There was a pause.

"No," said Mrs. Adis, "I haven't seen him. Not since Tuesday." She took her hand out of her apron pocket.

"Well, we'll be getting around and fetch Mrs. Gain. Reckon you'd be glad to have her." Mrs. Adis nodded.

"Will you carry him in there first?" and she pointed to the bedroom door.

The men picked up the body and carried it into the next room. Then silently each wrung the mother by the hand and went away.

She waited until they had shut the door, then she came toward the lean-to. Crouch once more fell a-shivering. He couldn't bear it. No, he'd rather swing than face Mrs. Adis. He heard the key turn, and he nearly screamed.

But she did not come in. She merely unlocked the door, then crossed the kitchen with a heavy dragging footstep and shut herself into the room where Tom was.

Peter Crouch knew what he must do — the only thing she wanted him to do, the only thing he could possibly do. He opened the door and silently went out.

NEXT MONTH . . .

RUFUS KING's	*Rendezvous With Death*
GEORGE HARMON COXE's	*Two Minute Alibi*
HAL ELLSON's	*Summer Idyll*
C. S. FORESTER's	*That Old Computer*
THOMAS WALSH's	*Terror in His Heart*

and other stories you won't want to miss!

a new story by

CLAYTON RAWSON

Nothing Is Impossible

EDITORS' FILE CARD

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: The Great Merlini

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: Today—or tomorrow

COMMENTS: *Flying saucers—queer markings burned in a wall—an impossible crime and a nude witness—and The Great Merlini in his first full-length short story in ten years!*

ALBERT NORTH HAD LOOKED FORward to retirement. An early pioneer in aviation design and the founder of Northair Corporation, he had promoted himself to Chairman of the Board and turned the active management of the company over to his son-in-law, Charles Kane.

A week later he was bored, irritable, and unhappy. He had been much too active for too long. He turned a small room off the study in his Fifth Avenue apartment into a workshop and, for a while, made airplane models. This was better than lying in the sun at Miami but it still didn't satisfy him.

Then he found a hobby that ran away with him. It was a curious hobby, and a magazine editor whom I queried agreed that there was a story in it. At first I intended to give it the light touch, but after listening to North talk for a couple of hours I wasn't so sure. I didn't know if he was pulling my leg or fooling himself, or if I had stumbled on the biggest story in the history of journalism.

I decided to get some expert professional advice. And I knew just where to go to find out if any deception was involved—a place that sold the very best grade in quantity lots. I walked into The Great

Merlini's Magic Shop just at closing time.

The proprietor was totaling the day's receipts and he was not in a good mood. He had covered several sheets of paper with mathematics and had failed to find out why he had $3.17 more cash on hand than the register total showed. In view of the fact that he designed, performed, and sold miracles, his annoyance at this situation was understandable.

"Obviously," he growled, giving the cash register a dark look, "that machine needs overhauling."

Since the shiny gadget he referred to was the latest IBM model, installed only the week before, I thought this conclusion somewhat unlikely. Not being an electronics engineer, however, I didn't say so.

"What," I asked instead, "do you know about flying saucers?" I didn't really expect to surprise him with that; he's a hard man to surprise. But I certainly didn't expect the answer I got.

"Would you like to see our de luxe model—the one with invisible, double-action suspension and guaranteed floating power?" His straight face and deadpan delivery didn't fool me; I'd met that technique before.

I shook my head. "I know. You sell rising cards and floating ladies, and the Levitation section of your catalogue offers a couple of dozen methods of defying gravity, but don't tell me—"

The Great Merlini pointed to the neatly lettered business slogan on the wall behind the counter: *Nothing Is Impossible.* "You should know by now, Mr. Harte," he said, "that anything can happen here. Come with me."

He led me into the back room that serves as workshop and shipping department. I threaded my way through a maze of milk cans (for escaping from), walked around a guillotine (guaranteed to be harmless), and saw Merlini pick up a tin pie plate from the workbench.

"This is just a test model," he said. "But it works."

He scaled the plate across the room. Instead of falling to the floor with a clatter, the spinning disk acted as if it had a built-in boomerang. Maintaining a constant five-foot altitude, it curved through a 180-degree turn and sailed back toward Merlini. He grinned, stepped aside, and let it go past. I ducked, it skimmed over my head outward-bound again, and continued to circle the room, spinning steadily and utterly ignoring everything Sir Isaac Newton had ever said about gravitation.

"There's nothing very new or original about this," Merlini explained as he reached out and caught it. "If you ever saw the Riding Hannefords in the circus ring, you saw Poodles Hanneford do exactly the same thing with his derby hat. The secret—"

"Don't tell me," I objected. "It's probably so simple I'd feel like a dope for not having seen it instantly. But who ordered a flying saucer? Are you doing a mail order business with Mars?"

"Television," Merlini said. "When a TV space opera script calls for something that baffles the combined efforts of the special effects department and the electronic cameras, then they call on me."

"I can see I came to the right place. You have just been appointed Chief Investigator for the Flying Saucer Division of the Ross Harte Research Laboratories, Inc."

Merlini placed the pie plate on thin air, gave it a quick spin, and left it there, whirling mysteriously on nothing. "And how," he asked, "did you get into that business?"

"Articles on the Great Flying Saucer Mystery sell magazines. I'm ghost-writing one. *Visitors From Space* by Albert North."

"He's solved the mystery?"

"That's what I want to know. He's set himself up as an unofficial clearing house for saucer information. Whenever someone reports mysterious lights in the sky, North looks into it. He's had to hire a full-time secretary to handle the mail and he has filled four large filling cabinets with reports. Did you know that since flying saucers first hit the headlines in 1947 there have been several thousand reported sightings?"

"A celestial traffic jam," the Great Merlini observed. "But I thought the Air Force issued a report which said that people had been seeing weather balloons, temperature inversion mirages, and spots before their eyes."

"Then you didn't read all of it," I replied. "They explained 80% that way, but they had to label the remaining 20% as 'Unknown.' That could add up to quite a lot of saucers. And just one bona-fide vehicle from outer space would be the biggest story since the invention of the wheel."

Merlini nodded. "I'll agree to that. And North thinks he has good solid evidence that will stand up in court?"

"He's convinced that where there's so much smoke there has to be a fire. He doesn't swallow everything he's told either. When some elderly lady in Bad Axe, Minnesota reports that a doughnut-shaped object landed in her back yard and a horde of small green men with purple spots trampled her zinnia bed, he files it under H for Hysteria. It's the sober detailed reports of sightings by university professors, airplane pilots, and such people that have North convinced—and me confused."

"Has North figured out why saucer pilots have been content for so many years to flit about among the clouds, mostly at night, merely viewing the scenery? Are they shy? Or not very curious? Or what?"

"If you mean why haven't they landed, North's reply is: 'How do we know they haven't?' What's more, he believes that someone, or something, is watching him. He says that twice within the last week he has been followed."

"From flying saucers," Merlini murmured, "to persecution complex. That figures."

"It would," I said, "except for one thing. I just came from North's apartment—and I was followed, too."

Merlini, who had started to light a cigarette, stopped, the match still burning in his fingers.

"Aliens from another world? Little green men with eyes on stalks, and tentacles coming out of them?"

"No, but it makes just about as much sense. There were two of them and I think I've seen one before. Down at Centre Street. Why would a couple of city dicks be tailing North and anyone who happens to be visiting him?"

That did it. Merlini's interest in flying saucer pilots was lukewarm, but an unexplained interest on the part of the Police Department aroused his curiosity. We had dinner together and he accompanied me uptown to continue my interview with North. No one, as far as we could see, tailed us.

A young man with broad shoulders, a crew cut, and an intense, somewhat worried look in his dark eyes let us in and introduced himself as Charles Kane, North's son-in-law.

"The old man's in the study with that well-stacked secretary of his. Dictating another batch of letters to his crackpot correspondents. At least, that was the official bulletin she released when she let me in a few minutes ago. All secretaries should be homely and flat-chested. It's much more efficient." He lifted the highball he held. "What can I get you to drink?"

As he filled our orders, Merlini said, "Apparently you and North disagree as to flying saucers."

Kane squirted soda water into our glasses. "That's putting it politely. We disagree about other things, too. Like the Chairman of the Board of Northair Corporation signing his name to magazine articles about flying saucers. This is *not* the kind of publicity that helps get new business."

"North," I said, "believes it will get him more saucer reports."

"Sure it will. An article in a national magazine about pixies would get him reports from people who'd swear they had gone to school with them."

"I'm told," Merlini said, "that North sifts his evidence pretty carefully."

Kane didn't actually snort, but he came close. "If he'd let me sift it for him I can assure you there wouldn't be enough left to write articles about. He's an enthusiast. Which is all right if you can con-

trol it. But every now and then he goes overboard. A few years ago he sank a couple of hundred thousand in an experimental aerofoil design that was to revolutionize aerodynamics. He thought it would prove that the Wright brothers started the whole science off on the wrong foot. Only it was a complete bust. Now he wants to find out what makes flying saucers fly. If he starts building saucer motors and if you own any Northair stock, you'd better sell quick."

Behind us a voice with a sharp cutting edge said, "My son-in-law is not a bad plant manager, but he lacks vision."

Albert North walked toward us from the study door—a short, stocky man with a pirate's face, a quarterdeck manner, and fire in his eye.

"Charles," he growled, "when you phoned this afternoon I told you I had an engagement with Mr. Harte this evening. Why are you here?"

Charles may have lacked vision, but he didn't seem to be afraid of talking back to the boss. He turned to the bar and added whiskey to his drink. "If you hadn't hung up in the middle of the call—as you do about half the time—you'd know why." Kane lifted a brief case that lay on the bar. "I need your signature on these government contract bids. They have to be in Washington tomorrow morning. If you'd give me the authority to sign . . ."

"And why," North growled, "weren't they ready yesterday? No, don't tell me now. Bring them into the study." He looked at me. "I'm sorry. This won't take long."

He turned abruptly and marched toward the study as a young lady who answered Kane's description quite accurately came through the door. As secretary in charge of flying saucers, she was quite a dish. I could see how her effect on the efficiency of a business office might not be all that a dedicated personnel manager could wish. And I suspect she knew it. In contrast to her face and figure, her voice was cool and impersonal, her manner brisk and businesslike. The tailored suit she wore tried hard to leave a similar impression but it definitely fought a losing battle.

"Will you need me for this?" she asked.

"No, Anne," North replied. "You may go now."

"Unless," Charles added, "you want to wait for *me*."

She gave him a smile and a fast no. "I've got a date with a man from Mars. He has two heads."

Albert North stopped and turned. "Are you making flying saucer jokes now, too?"

Anne shook her head. "No. But Charles is married to your daughter. I just wanted him to know that a two-headed date would be preferable."

North moved on. Kane followed, turning as he closed the door to eye Anne. "All that," he said, grinning, "and brains, too."

Miss O'Hara picked up a purse and gloves from a chair by the outer door. Then she saw our drinks. "Would there be any more of that?" she asked. "After today I could use a quick one."

She didn't have to ask twice; I was already at the bar.

"Tell me," Merlini asked, "do saucer pilots usually have two heads?"

She sat on the edge of an armchair. "They come in assorted sizes and shapes. So far, one head apiece seems to be standard equipment, but I wouldn't predict what might turn up in tomorrow's mail."

"You've seen all of North's evidence. Does any of it convince you that we are actually being visited by ships from space?"

Miss O'Hara sipped her drink first. "I wish I knew. Ninety-five per cent of the reports are from people who could use a good psychiatrist. But every now and then there's a witness who is awfully hard to doubt—a professor like Dr. Price, for instance. And lately I've been waking up at three A.M. in a cold sweat after a nightmare about nine-foot Martians. I'm beginning to think that typing business letters about shipments of coffee and tea might be a welcome change."

"Nine-footers?" I asked.

"That's the record catch—a report from Arizona last week. Four people swear they saw a green disk in the sky traveling at the usual 18,000 miles per hour, and shortly after, a woman claims she found a nine-foot-high man—or something similar—in her bedroom. When she screamed he walked out—right through the wall."

"And who," Merlini asked, "is Dr. Price?"

"Professor of Archeology at U.C.L.A. He'll be here tonight."

"What is his evidence?"

Anne frowned. "You'd better ask him that. Like Charles, he doesn't want publicity."

"North briefed me on Price," I said, "but I have to get the doctor's okay before using it. One of his graduate students was doing field work in the Navajo country last summer. A few days after a saucer sighting in the area, the boy found and photographed some very queer markings on the side of a cliff face. They seemed to have been burned into the rock. They look to me like something a beginning shorthand student might write after five Martinis. But they gave Doctor Price a jolt. He'd seen the same sort of script once before—in a Yucatan jungle."

"Don't tell me," Merlini said, "that the Martians are going to turn out to be Mayans."

"It's worse than that. Price

thinks this may be the clue to a major archeological mystery. Two years ago he was excavating a Mayan pyramid dating about 600 A.D. and found an inscription that had absolutely nothing in common with the Mayan hieroglyphs. When his student brought in another sample of the same thing—several symbols are identical—and when this new sample had a possible connection with saucers, Price remembered one phrase in the Mayan inscriptions found at the same site which he had thought was merely allegorical. Now he thinks the Mayans meant it literally. It was a reference to 'ships from the sky.'"

"And not long after," Anne added, "the Mayans, for some mysterious reason, completely abandoned all the cities of the Old Empire."

"Hmm," Merlini said. "That's certainly a Stop Press bulletin for the archeological journals. So Price brought his alien inscriptions to North?"

Anne nodded. "He'd read that North was collecting saucer information and he hoped more of the script might have turned up. He thinks that with enough of it he may be able to break it down and get a translation."

"Translation?" Merlini blinked. "The men who finally solved the Mayan writing succeeded only because they knew something of the Mayan culture. But Price is tackling a script of what he thinks is an extra-terrestial culture. What he needs is a new Rosetta stone."

"Which," I said, "is what he hopes to find if he can get funds to finish excavating that Mayan pyramid. He—"

I stopped short. Merlini got slowly to his feet. We all stared at the closed study door.

Anne said, "What was that?"

"It sounded," Merlini and I replied almost together, "like a shot."

I was nearest the door and reached it first. I turned the knob and pushed.

The door was locked.

I rapped on the door—hard. "North!" I called. "Kane!"

There was no answer.

Merlini asked, "Is there another way in?"

Anne's voice was a whisper. "No."

I knocked again and got the same result—nothing.

Magicians who can't open doors for friends without keys have to take a lot of ribbing and on this account Merlini always carries an assortment of lockpicks. He had the leather case that held them in his hands now.

"I'll go to work on the lock," he said, kneeling before the door. "You phone. We want a squad car and an ambulance."

I agreed completely. The silence beyond that door was much too ominous. I found the phone on a writing desk and dialed.

And at that moment the buzzer of the door to the hall buzzed.

I snapped the address to Headquarters, and added, "Get a squad car and a doctor up here—fast."

A quiet voice said, "You're calling the police?" Anne had opened the door and a thin, dapper little man stood just inside, his rimless glasses glinting in the light. "Why the police?"

Anne, not nearly as cool and collected now, told him, her voice trembling a bit. "It's Mr. North and Charles, Dr. Price. In the study. We heard a shot—and they don't answer."

In the hall outside I heard an elevator door open and the sound of voices.

Merlini said, "Come in and close that door. We don't want sightseers at this time."

But Price turned toward the hall. "There's a physician's office on the first floor. I think, under the circumstances . . ."

Merlini's voice suddenly took on an official tone. "We've ordered a doctor. And I may need you here. Come in and close that door!"

Price obviously wasn't used to taking orders. He took a step toward the hall. "It'll be quicker if I—"

Merlini cut in, "Ross, yank him in here. Hurry!"

I started for the professor on the double. Price scowled, hesitated, then decided not to argue the matter. He stepped inside again and closed the door. Then, stuffily, he asked, "Miss O'Hara, who are these men?"

Anne told him as I joined Merlini. He was probing the lock's interior with a slender blade of steel whose careful tentative movements were tantalizing in their slow deliberation.

There was still no sound from beyond the study door.

Then, at last, I heard a metallic click. Merlini stood up, turned the knob, and the door moved open.

Several framed enlargements of flying saucer photographs hung on the opposite wall. Below them, in a circle of light that dropped from the ceiling, was North's desk. He sat in the chair behind it, his body slumped forward, his head resting on the green blotter.

On the floor in front of the desk lay a man's coat.

The door opened wider. Against the left-hand wall was a secretary's desk and four filing cabinets. Close by the cabinets Kane's body lay face down on the floor, and near it, his overturned highball glass, a wet stain spreading out from it across the beige carpet.

"The rest of you stay put," Merlini commanded. He stepped inside, strode swiftly to the open workshop door on the right, and looked inside. Then he turned and eyed Kane, scowling. I was still trying to believe what I saw.

Kane's trousers and shoes were on the floor near his coat.

And Kane's body was completely nude.

Merlini moved to the desk and bent above North. As he did so, Kane moaned and his body moved. His eyes opened and he began, in slow motion, to push himself up off the floor.

Merlini moved toward him. "What," he demanded, "happened to you?"

Kane regarded him blankly, lowered his head, and rubbed the back of it with one hand. Then slowly, as if it hurt him to speak, he said, "Where the hell . . . are my . . . clothes?"

His eyes lifted as he spoke and he saw North at the desk.

"Is . . . is he . . . all right? What the—"

Merlini said, "North is dead. What happened in here?"

Kane stared a moment, then his eyes closed and his hand again massaged the back of his skull. "I gave North the papers. He sat at the desk, started to read them. I . . . I heard something move—behind me. I started to turn and something hit me on the back of the head . . . Will someone, for Pete's sake, get me some clothes?"

Anne, behind me, said, "Here." I took the bathrobe she had found in a bedroom, stepped forward and held it out as Kane got unsteadily to his feet and put it on. He lurched to an armchair beside the desk and sank heavily into it. "I've got one beaut of a headache."

He wasn't the only one. My head was beginning to spin. I took a quick glance into the workshop. It looked just as it had when I had seen it earlier—a workbench along one wall, tools neatly arranged above it on a pegboard, a stool, a small supply cabinet. The vise held a saucer-shaped disk of wood modeled after one of the photographs in the other room.

There was no place in either room where anyone could hide. Kane seemed to be having the same thought.

He asked Merlini, "You were in the living room out there all the time?"

Merlini nodded. "We were."

"Then you saw whoever it was that knocked me out. He'd have had to leave that way."

Dr. Price spoke suddenly, his voice not at all steady. "Anne, how long has that been there?"

He was pointing at the wall near the workshop door. About two feet from the floor several dark marks defaced the green-painted plaster—cursive, meaningless scrawls that a child might have made.

Anne's eyes were round—and frightened. "It wasn't there when I left the room."

I knew what it was; I had seen Price's photographs. He had wanted to find more of the alien script, but now he didn't seem happy about his unexpected success.

I crossed to the wall, stooped,

and ran a finger across the marks. They had been burned into the plaster.

Kane pulled himself from his chair and faced Merlini. "Who came out of this room? Who did you—"

It was Anne who answered. "Nobody, Charles. No one came out—no one at all."

Kane stared at her. "But someone *must* have—"

"Only nobody did," Merlini said. "And it's high time we had some brass around here. Ross, there's a phone on the desk. See if you can get Gavigan before the squad car boys arrive."

Outside the door buzzer sounded.

"There they are now," I said.

"Start dialing!" Merlini ordered and moved swiftly to the doorway in which Anne and Dr. Price still stood. "Anne, are the living room and study phones separate, or is one an extension?"

"Extension."

"Good. You answer the door. And tell the cops to listen in on the call we make." Quickly, before either could object, he slammed the door in their faces and locked us in.

Putting the three-way phone conversation that followed on paper is a job I'm going to dust off lightly. It was much too scrambled. Some of it occurred simultaneously and parts of it made no sense because two of the parties didn't know what the other was talking about.

I got through to Gavigan just as a heavy fist began pounding on the study door. Then, when the Inspector said, "Hello!" a cop at the living room phone bellowed, "Open that door! And be quick about it!" Gavigan said, "What door?" and the cop told him not to be funny.

At the same time I was trying to tell him, "Gavigan, it's Ross Harte." He said, "W-ho?" and the cop swore, and Merlini calmly advised me to tell Gavigan to tell the cop to shut up. This didn't work very well because the cop wasn't taking orders from just anyone on the phone who claimed to be an Inspector, and Gavigan wasn't very helpful because he had somehow got the idea that our end of the conversation was coming from a tavern.

"Merlini," I said, "you take it before Gavigan hangs up. And sound sober."

He had somewhat better luck, but it was involved. He got the cop to give his precinct number and asked Gavigan for the name of the Captain of that precinct. When Gavigan knew it, the cop became suddenly more cautious and less noisy.

Rapidly Merlini said, "Call his captain, Gavigan, and have him call this number and tell the cop who answers to relax until you get here."

Gavigan still didn't like it. "What number? Where am I going? Why—"

Merlini gave him the telephone number and the address, then added, "Ross and I are locked in a murder room with the victim. And I don't want any garden variety of cop traipsing around all over some of the damnedest clues you ever saw until you've seen them. Stop asking questions and get going!" And he hung up fast.

It worked. The phone rang a few moments later. I eavesdropped and heard the Captain telling our impetuous friend outside to stand pat. Remembering the language he'd just used to an Inspector I understood why his "Yessir!" sounded a bit hollow.

"Gavigan," I told Merlini, "seemed to think I was tight. When he gets here and discovers that we are looking for a refugee from a flying saucer . . ."

Merlini wasn't listening. He was on his knees on the floor examining Kane's clothes.

When Gavigan arrived with Lieutenant Doran of Homicide West and Doc Peabody from the M.E.'s office, he was not in a good mood. He barked at Merlini, "You've certainly got a high-handed way of taking over a homicide investigation. Start talking."

Merlini didn't look happy either. "I don't know whether to break it gently or tell you all at once."

Gavigan stood in front of the desk scowling down at North's body. "I don't care how I get it, but I want it fast!"

That's how he got it. "The victim," Merlini said, "seems to have been killed by some unknown means by something about two feet high that left by walking through the wall."

This was too much for anyone to digest all at once. Gavigan didn't try. "Unknown means?" he asked. "That girl outside says you heard a shot."

"We did. But I don't see any blood nor any bullet wound. I hope Doc Peabody will be able to tell us what killed him."

Peabody moved toward the body. "You don't sound very confident."

"I'm not," Merlini told him. "That's one thing I'm fresh out of—confidence."

Peabody went to work and Merlini gave the Inspector and Doran the whole story from the beginning. They listened without interrupting. Even after Merlini had finished neither of them spoke.

Gavigan shook his head as if to rid it of a bad dream. Then he asked, "This walking through the wall stuff. Why that?"

"Several reasons," Merlini said. "One: Miss O'Hara reports that some flying saucer pilots can do that. Two: while we waited for you I looked in all the places a two-foot-high something might

hide and didn't find a single possibility. Three: take a look at the very curious condition of Kane's clothes."

Doran knelt by the coat. "What's so curious?"

"Turn it over."

Doran did. Curious was the word, all right. Kane's shirt was inside the coat, neatly buttoned, the Countess Mara tie still in place, still tied in a neat Windsor knot.

"And his undershirt is inside the shirt," Merlini said. "His shorts are inside the trousers, his socks inside the shoes—everything still buttoned up, tied, and zipped. Kane says his clothes were removed while he was unconscious. They would appear to have passed *through* his body in the process."

Gavigan didn't explode as I expected, but it was a near thing "Why," he growled, "do you always have to pick the fanciest interpretation?" He turned and faced Kane. "It's about time you said something. Start with the clothes. After you took them off, you buttoned everything up again. Why? Are you setting up an insanity defense?"

Kane, staring at the clothing, didn't seem to hear. Then he looked up and shook his head slowly. "I'm sorry. I can't add a thing to what Merlini has told you. I came in here with North. I stood there in front of the filing cabinets. I—I heard a movement behind me. Something hit me a crack on the head. Hard. When I came out of it, North was dead. I was naked. And that's it. That's all I know. I can't add one solitary—"

Behind us Doc Peabody said suddenly, "If you'd like to see what killed this man . . ."

We turned to the desk. Peabody poked with a slender pair of tweezers at a small metallic object that lay on a sheet of letter paper.

"It was in his head," Peabody said. "And the point of entry wasn't easy to find because it went in through his right ear."

Gavigan bent over the object. "That," he said, "takes care of the little man from Mars. It's a common, ordinary .32 caliber slug."

"It's a relief," Merlini said, "just to hear words like common and ordinary. But I wonder why we haven't yet seen anything of a gun —a common, ordinary .32, for example."

"We'll find it," Doran said flatly. "And then Mr. Kane goes downtown and gets booked."

Gavigan told Peabody, "See that Ballistics gets the slug, and I want a quick report. Doran, get your boys in and take this place apart." He turned to Kane. "And you, take off that bathrobe."

Kane blinked. "But . . ."

"Take it off! I want you out of here and I'm going to be damned sure you don't take a gun out with you."

Kane stood up. "If it'll convince you that I don't have and never did have a gun I'll walk all the way down to headquarters in my skin." He slipped the robe off and handed it to Gavigan. The Inspector turned the pockets inside out and found nothing. Then he held the robe up and let it fall to the floor. If it had contained a gun we would have heard it. We didn't.

Kane put the robe on again and Gavigan walked with him to the door where he told a detective to find Kane some clothes and to keep an eye on him. "He's being held as a material witness."

Gavigan closed the door and came back. "The psychiatrists are going to have a field day with him. If he really thinks the New York Police Department is going to start tracking down a little green man from Mars . . ."

"But you aren't booking him?" Merlini asked.

"I will as soon as I have the gun. It didn't go out with him, and you say no one else left this room since you heard the shot. So it's here and we'll find it."

"I wish you luck," Merlini said gloomily. "But even if you do find it, don't book him too fast. You still may not be able to make it stick. When I searched the room I found something I haven't yet mentioned." He turned to face the filing cabinets. "Cleaning women sometimes neglect to dust surfaces that are above eye level . . ."

Gavigan yanked Miss O'Hara's chair away from her desk, stood on it, and looked down at the top of the cabinets.

He froze.

He was still speechless when I looked a moment later. The steel surface was covered with a thin, gray film of dust across which something had walked leaving three dark imprints.

They were the prints of naked feet.

The feet had only three toes.

And each print was not more than four inches in length.

The discussion that followed could have been engraved easily on the head of a pin. Gavigan obviously didn't want to think about the implications of those prints, and he avoided thinking by going into action. Assisted by Doran and two other detectives, he began a grimly determined and painstaking search for the gun. Merlini settled down in the armchair and appeared to fall asleep. I made a trip to the bar and poured myself a good stiff helping of Scotch. I am aware that this is not the recommended antidote for little men who leave three-toed footprints, but I needed it.

I have seen police searches before, but this one easily took the prize for thoroughness. Gavigan's final chore was to examine every one of some five hundred books on the shelves of one wall, looking for a hollowed-out recess that might contain a gun. He found no recess, and no gun.

Then he phoned Ballistics. I was quite prepared to hear them report that the slug which killed North was made of some unknown composition and probably fired from a .425 Intergalactic Special.

Gavigan listened a moment, then slammed the phone receiver down on the cradle. "It's a .32. Diameter of lands, grooves, and pitch of rifling indicate a Smith & Wesson. And they want to know when they can have the gun for comparison tests."

He looked at Merlini who was still in a state of suspended animation.

"Did you hear me?" Gavigan roared.

Merlini opened one eye. "I thought for a minute it was an air raid siren. Yes, I heard you."

"That gun," Gavigan said, still rumbling like a volcano on the edge of blowing its top, "is not here. You're in charge of the Miracle Department. What happened to it? I want an answer—fast!"

"So do I," Merlini said. "But we've got problems. For one thing, the usual police routine is quite inadequate. The evidence says the gun was taken from the scene of the crime by the murderer. But you can't set up road blocks to stop a flying saucer, license number unknown, which is capable of speeds around 18,000 miles per hour. And if you broadcast a pick-up order for a barefoot midget with three toes on each foot, sex, shape, and color unknown, people will think the teletype machines need repairing."

Gavigan glowered. "If you think any of this is funny . . ."

Merlini shook his head "It's anything but that. I was merely pointing out that the gun is not our only problem."

"You give me an answer on the

gun, then we'll worry about other problems. Do you have any idea on the subject, or are you completely up a tree?"

"One small idea," Merlini said, "but it's going to have to grow a lot."

"Let's hear it."

"If the vanishing gun is some extra-terrestrial hocus-pocus we'll never find it, but if it's the common garden-variety of trickery we at least have a starting point. An audience, watching magic, gets impossible answers because the magician so arranges things that the spectators ask themselves the wrong questions. That may be what we're doing. If we can figure out the right questions . . ."

As a progress report, this was not to the Inspector's liking. He muttered something that didn't sound printable, then stopped short as the door from the living room opened and Doran came in with Captain Healy of the Pickpocket and Confidence Squad.

"I think," Healy said, "I might have a lead for you, Inspector."

"This case," Gavigan grunted, "doesn't have leads. But let's hear it."

"Who is the dapper old boy outside with the glasses?"

"Dr. Price? He's an archeologist who believes that flying saucers landed in Central America six hundred years ago. Why?"

Healy blinked. "He believes what?"

"I refuse," Gavigan said flatly, "to say it again."

"Well, whatever he says, don't buy any of it. One of my boys spotted him on the street a few days ago and we've been keeping an eye on him, wondering if he might be up to something his parole officer wouldn't like. The report says he's visited this apartment several times, so when I heard you've got a homicide here —"

Gavigan broke in. "Who is he?"

"A con man," Healy replied. "One of the best. Most con men work the same old games, but not this character. Some of the swindles he has dreamed up—"

"Who," Gavigan asked again, "is he?"

"The Harvard Kid. He got that monicker because when he's not working he always has his nose in a book. Egghead-type stuff, too. In one oil well swindle he passed himself off on some pretty sharp businessmen as an expert geologist. And he once sold a trunkful of phony paintings for a quarter of a million dollars by posing as a Belgian art expert. Another time—"

"That," Merlini broke in, "explains why he tried to backtrack out of here the moment he discovered there had been a shooting. He's naturally cop shy."

"And his pitch this time," Gavigan said, "was to get North to put up the dough for an archeological expedition. Then, instead of leav-

ing for the jungles of Yucatan, The Kid would invest it in horses at Miami or the dice tables at Las Vegas. Let's hear what he says about that." Gavigan marched out into the living room followed by Doran and Healy.

"And the galactic script burned into the wall," Merlini said in a disappointed tone, "doesn't get translated after all. It's a great loss to science."

"We can also," I put in, "now forget all about flying saucers and invisible men."

"Can we?" Merlini asked. "I wonder. I have an uncomfortable feeling that our unfriendly refugee from the stars may pay us another visit."

But he didn't look uncomfortable; he was smiling faintly. So I didn't take him seriously. I said, "Oh, yeah," and went out to the bar for a refill. That was my mistake.

The living room, by now, was crawling with city officials. An Assistant D.A. and a police stenographer had set up shop in a bedroom and were getting a statement from Anne O'Hara. In the kitchen Gavigan and Healy were having a heart-to-heart talk with Dr. Orville Price. Doran took a photographer and a fingerprint man into the study and put them to work. Later, two men from the Morgue came for North's body.

As they were leaving I heard Merlini ask, "Lieutenant, I hope that search you made for the gun included the body?"

"It did," Doran answered. "If you think the gun is going out with him, the answer is no."

Ten minutes later it happened. From beyond the closed study door came the unmistakable sound of a shot.

Time, for a brief moment, stood still. Then a detective near the door sprang at it and pushed it open. I got there a second later and stared over his shoulder.

I saw Doran turn the knob of the workshop door and fail to open it. Then he banged on the door with his fist.

"Merlini!" he called. "Open up!"

There was no answer.

A heavy hand clamped on my shoulder and shoved me to one side. Gavigan went past in a hurry.

Then, suddenly Doran's gun was in his hand, aimed at the slowly opening workshop door.

Merlini's voice said, "Don't shoot, Lieutenant. It's me."

He came out and faced Gavigan. "Inspector," he said gravely, "I'd like to have you meet our elusive little man from Mars."

Gavigan, who was still moving toward him, stopped. Then, seeing the look on Doran's face as the latter stared at something inside the room, he rushed forward.

"He's not easy to see," Merlini added, "because he's invisible. But there, on the floor, in that sprin-

kling of sawdust below the vise . . ."

I couldn't see it from where I stood, but I did later.

It was another nice, neat, tiny, and incredible three-toed footprint.

"And," Merlini went on, "you can search this room until Doomsday—you won't find a gun."

"Good," Gavigan said. "So you've figured out how to make a gun vanish into thin air. Doran, give him yours. This I want to see."

"Would you like," Merlini asked, "to get a confession at the same time?"

"Do I need one? If you know what happened to that gun—"

"I know what happened, but the evidence we need isn't going to be easy to find. There's a chance that when our man sees his very cleverly conceived murder coming apart at the seams, he may crack. But we should hit him hard while he's still wondering what that shot he just heard means."

The Inspector scowled at the footprint on the floor, then turned to Doran. "Get Kane in here."

Merlini took an electric soldering iron from North's bench, carried it into the study, spoke for a moment with the fingerprint man, then sat down behind North's desk.

Charles Kane was placed in a chair opposite Merlini. There was tension in the room, quite a lot of it, but none of it seemed to come from Kane. He waited, relaxed and quiet.

After a moment Merlini said calmly, "We have discovered one or two things you may want to comment on. Earlier you said that flying saucers were nonsense. Is that still your opinion?"

Kane shrugged. "After what's happened, I think I'll reserve judgment."

"Perhaps this will help you make up your mind. We have found that Dr. Price is not an archeologist but a con man who was trying to swindle your father-in-law. This means that the flying saucer script he says was found in Arizona is meaningless and his photographs faked. Since the script on the wall here contains some of the same characters, it is also spurious." Merlini lifted the soldering iron. "And it could have been burned into the wall with this."

Kane nodded. "Makes sense. Does that cancel out the flying saucer pilot too?"

"Not quite," Merlini answered, "but this might. Were you living in Rochester, New York, in 1936?"

Kane stared at him blankly. We all did.

"The police can find out easily enough," Merlini added. "So you might as well answer."

Kane thought about it. Then he nodded slowly. "I was born there. But what has that to do with anything?"

"There's something on the floor

of the workshop that may answer that for you. Take a look."

Kane scowled, got slowly to his feet, and walked to the door. He stood there a moment looking in, then turned and came back. His face was blank, his voice flat. "Sorry. I don't get it."

"We found three more such prints," Merlini explained, "on top of the filing cabinets in this room. Under the present circumstances they would seem to have been made by a two-foot tall, three-toed something-or-other from another world. But similar prints have turned up before in a sprinkling of flour on the floor of a séance room. Those prints had the customary five toes, and the inference was that they were made by astral visitors summoned by the medium from the spirit world."

Merlini gazed thoughtfully at Kane, then continued: "The convincer was the fact that the prints seemed to be those of child spooks, all much too small to have been made by the medium. But in Rochester one night some skeptic smuggled in a flashlight and turned it on unexpectedly. The newspaper account of that séance has a special place in my files because it is the only mention of this particular dodge I've ever found."

Merlini took a sheet of notepaper from a drawer of the desk and nodded at the fingerprint man to whom he had spoken earlier. The latter stepped forward and placed a glass plate bearing a film of ink before the magician.

"The medium made the prints," Merlini said. "But not with her feet."

He made a fist of his right hand and then rolled the edge of the hand opposite the thumb across the inked plate. He repeated the action on the notepaper. The edge of his hand and the side of his curled little finger left an irregularly shaped impression whose conformation and creases bore an astonishing resemblance to those made by the sole of a bare foot. Then he added toeprints using a thumb and forefinger, and the similarity was complete.

"You can, of course, give the print as many or as few toes as you like."

Doran said, "And when we compare the toeprints we found with Kane's fingerprints—"

Merlini shook his head. "No. He knew those footprints would get a close examination. He moved his finger slightly on each impression so that the ridge markings are sufficiently smudged to prevent identification."

He looked at Kane as if waiting for confirmation. He didn't get it.

"You'll have to do better than that," Kane said. "Those prints may have been there for days. Anybody could have made them. Even if you could prove I made them it still wouldn't mean that I killed North."

"Perhaps not," Merlini said, "but it saves the Police Department having to track down a suspect through outer space. You didn't really expect them to swallow a two-foot high, three-toed Martian anyway. That was simply misdirection. As long as those footprints remained unexplained we had something to worry about that helped obscure the real problem. We thought we had to solve the mystery of a vanishing gun—a question whose answer is relatively unimportant because it is the wrong question."

"Now wait!" Gavigan exploded. "You said you knew what happened to the gun."

"No. I merely said I knew what happened. Suppose we start at the beginning." Merlini turned to Kane. "When you came in here with North, the first thing you did was knock him out. Most offices are equipped with an impromptu sandbag that leaves no marks—the telephone directory. Then you put the footprints on the filing cabinets, and burned the script in the wall with the soldering iron. Next, you undressed."

Kane grinned skeptically. "And rebuttoned my clothes so a crew of homicide detective would believe they had passed through some fourth dimensional hyperspace. Am I crazy?"

Merlini nodded. "Like a fox. Your real reason for stripping was to make it obvious immediately and beyond any doubt that there was no gun on your person. And you knew that when we failed to find one anywhere, no jury would convict you, and even your arrest was unlikely . . . Then you shot North."

"And what did happen to the gun?"

"As I said, that's the wrong question. The real problem is not how did a gun vanish into thin air, *but how did you shoot North —without using a gun!*"

For a long moment the silence was complete.

Merlini picked up the soldering iron. "You used this. The powder in a cartridge is usually exploded by percussion, but heat will do just as well. I tried it. I borrowed a cartridge from Doran, put it in the vise on North's workbench, and touched the base of the cartridge with the point of the hot iron. That was the shot you heard."

Doran scowled. "The slug that killed North had rifling marks on it. Made by a .32 Smith & Wesson."

Merlini nodded. "Of course. Kane had to supply rifling marks. Otherwise Ballistics would have known at once that a gun had not been used. But supplying rifling marks is not difficult."

"A slug that had been fired before," Gavigan said slowly. "And he refitted it with a new cartridge case and new powder load."

"I see," Kane said, "that I'm be-

ing framed by experts. And how do you answer this one? I'm no ballistics man, but I am an engineer. The function of a gun barrel is to contain the gases long enough for them to exert propelling force on the bullet and give it velocity and penetrating power. The firing method you've dreamed up wouldn't give the bullet enough punch to get it through a paper bag."

"That's right," Merlini admitted. "I had a little talk with Ballistics on the phone and got the same objection. But the slug that killed North was held close against him —it was fired into his ear. A barrel only an inch or so long would be ample."

Merlini got up, went into the workshop, and came back carrying a drawer from North's supply cabinet. "This contains odds and ends of hardware—nuts, bolts, washers, screws, angle irons, a hinge or two—and this."

He took from the drawer a two-inch length of brass pipe. "It's just the right size. A .32 cartridge fits into it neatly."

"Showing," Kane said a bit grimly, "how I might have killed North doesn't prove that's what I did. And you haven't one iota of concrete evidence that does."

"One is all we need," Merlini said. "A small one we haven't yet looked for—the cartridge case. Add that to the slug and the brass pipe and we have a complete weapon. The cartridge case will also show whether it was exploded by the hammer of a gun or with the soldering iron."

Kane said, "Perhaps you'd better start looking for it."

"You don't think we'll find it?"

"I didn't shoot North with a soldering iron and a piece of brass pipe, so there can't be any cartridge case that says I did."

"You could also be gambling on the fact that such a small object would, if carefully hidden, be hard to find. Now, however, we know just what we're looking for." Merlini stood up, walked around the desk and sat on its edge, facing Kane. "Have you any idea how thorough a competent police search can be? We'll take North's workshop apart piece by piece. His tools will be examined for hollow handles. We'll look inside cans of paint, tubes of glue. The workbench and woodwork will be gone over inch by inch in case you drilled a hole, inserted the case, and sealed it in with plastic wood.

"This room will get the same treatment. The upholstery on the furniture will be removed, the filing cabinets emptied. Miss O'Hara's typewriter will be taken apart. Even the telephone. Every single object larger than a cartridge case will be examined inside and out. We couldn't possibly miss it."

Kane's grin wasn't a happy one, but still he grinned. "Good. Apparently that's the only way I'll ever convince you you're wrong."

"And you'll be searched again," Merlini went on. "Including an x-ray examination because a cartridge case is small enough to swallow. The living room will also get the full treatment. Also Miss O'Hara and Dr. Price, in case you passed it to one of them."

I knew now what Merlini was trying to do. There is a mind reading effect in which the magician asks his audience to hide some small object, usually a pin, while he is out of the room. When the magician returns he finds it, apparently by mind reading, but actually because the spectators' attitudes, as they watch him hunt, tell him when he is hot or cold. They give him what the psychologist calls unconscious cues.

Since even persons who are not emotionally involved cannot repress such cues, Kane, if guilty, would certainly react if Merlini, listing the possible hiding places, hit upon the right one.

But it obviously wasn't working.

Kane was still relaxed, still smiling.

Merlini looked at Gavigan unhappily. "It'll have to be done, but I'm beginning to think you won't find it. Kane seems to be telling the truth."

Gavigan stared at him. "He's—what?"

"He knows," Merlini said, "that if we find it he's done for. And since he's so sure we won't find it here, apparently it's not here."

"I'll believe that," Gavigan growled, "after we've looked."

Slowly, talking to himself, Merlini added, "If it isn't here, then obviously it must be somewhere else."

"Sure," Gavigan said skeptically, "only it couldn't have left this room."

Suddenly Merlini smiled. "I'm not so sure." Then, watching Kane, he said, "Doran, phone the Morgue. I want to talk to Peabody."

That did it.

The smile was still on Kane's face, but it was suddenly forced—the self-confidence behind it had drained away. When Merlini spoke again, the smile collapsed.

"One thing was taken out of this apartment—North's body. On it somewhere, in his clothes or in something he carried . . ."

The search was almost unnecessary. The look on Kane's face was that of a man already convicted.

Then, explosively, he moved. Suddenly he was on his feet, lunging toward Merlini, snarling.

Doran moved equally fast. His foot shot out, hooked Kane's ankle, and the man fell, his arms still reaching out toward Merlini. He smashed solidly at full length against the floor, and then Doran was on him, his knee planted firmly in Kane's back.

Peabody found the cartridge case inside the cap of North's fountain pen.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MICHAEL GILBERT**

TITLE: ***Tea Shop Assassin***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Superintendent Hazlerigg

LOCALE: London

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Danger — menace — impending violence — all in a normally quiet little tea shop looking out over Westminster Bridge and the Houses of Parliament. One of Michael Gilbert's finest little tales . . .*

BEING CRIME REPORTER ON A DAILY newspaper I know quite a lot about the ins and outs of London; and I've learned enough in the last ten years to know that it isn't in the obvious places — Soho or Notting Hill or Limehouse — that all the exciting things happen.

There's excitement everywhere — if you keep your eyes open.

When I went into the tea shop — I expect you know the one I mean, it looks out over Westminster Bridge and the northern angle of the Houses of Parliament — I ran into former Inspector Hazlerigg. He caught my eye. I wasn't sure whether it had an invitation in it or not, but I naturally assumed that it had.

He's a Superintendent now, and, as I knew, was standing in for Butt (who was recovering from influenza) as temporary head of the Special Branch. I'd known Hazlerigg, off and on, for years; and I'd once been able to do him a small service — but that's another story.

As I walked to his table he stuck out his hand, then apparently changed his mind and sketched a sort of mixture between a wave and a salute.

"Pleased to see you, Superintendent," I said, affably.

"And I'm pleased to see you. No, take the other seat, if you don't mind."

I had been going to sit down in the empty chair on his right, which would

have put me with my back to the rest of the room.

"I particularly want you to be in a position to see everybody," he said. "Don't stare round. Behave quite naturally. Coffee?"

The waitress came across and I ordered a cup.

When she had gone Hazlerigg spoke again.

"Do you remember Engels?" he said.

I had to pause before I answered that one.

"It's a long time ago," I said, slowly. "More than fifteen — no, nearer twenty years. I saw him in the Dock, at the old Bailey. The charge was unlawful wounding. It had a political angle to it, I remember."

"That one had. He's a professional thug. He nearly killed one of Moseley's boys at a meeting."

"That's right. And I remember the Judge — it was old Arbuthnot, wasn't it? — saying 'I regard you as a very dangerous and very cold-blooded man. If you had made this assault for private gain I would have sent you to prison for a long time.'"

"That's him," said Hazlerigg. "A political killer of the most dangerous type. And he's somewhere in this room."

"What?" I said. And then, more sensibly, "Why?"

"Don't you ever read your own paper?" said Hazlerigg, irritably. "In approximately ten minutes time" — he looked at his watch — "Ramon Charles gets off his train at Victoria Station. You know whose right-hand man and ambassador extraordinary Ramon Charles is. Well, his drive to the Palace will take him within a few yards of this tea shop. The anti-Fascist brigade have sworn to get him. And it would suit their book very well to get him in this country."

Outside it was a lovely day. The autumn sun was warming the gray stone of the Mother of Parliaments and glittering and winking from her hundreds of windows. As I looked, a uniformed policeman walked slowly across that little patch of green turf which carpets the foot of her walls. He reached the corner, paused a moment, turned, and came slowly back. Round the buttress I saw the helmet of another, and across the path a third.

Indeed the place was alive with them! When I really began to use my eyes I could see a dozen between the corner of Parliament Square and the Bridge.

My profession has led me into one or two dangerous places, but I was conscious now that my mouth was dry and I jumped when the waitress set my coffee down beside me with a clatter.

"The precise route from Victoria was a secret, of course," said Hazlerigg bitterly. "And, of course, it got out. I got a tip-off only this morning that Engels was going to operate, and that he was coming here to this tea shop — either to meet an accomplice, or simply to keep out of the way until the last moment — that bit's a trifle obscure. But I'm morally certain of

one thing. He's in this room now."

Two parties of girls had left while he was talking. Only four tables remained occupied.

Hazlerigg pushed a newspaper at me.

"Pretend to be looking at this," he said. "Take your time. And keep your wits about you."

My coffee suddenly seemed to have gone tasteless. However, I finished stirring it, carefully laid the spoon in the saucer, and picked up the newspaper. Then I shifted very slightly in my chair, and surveyed the room.

Immediately in front of me was a biggish man, with a healthy, open-air face, and a shock of white hair. A sporting parson in mufti, perhaps. He was lighting a clerical-looking pipe. As I watched, he got it going and one hand stole up for a moment to his collar and fiddled with the stud.

Behind him, near the serving hatch, was a man with a beard. It seemed quite a genuine beard.

He was no mere coffee drinker. He had ordered a plate of spaghetti on toast and was tossing it back with gusto into the pink cavern of his mouth. Occasionally he broke off to sling down a mouthful of tea. There was something almost bestial about the way he ate. As his jaw moved I noticed that the skin above, and to the side of, his beard was whiter than the rest of his face.

Beyond him, with his back to the wall, was a thinnish man with closely cropped hair. I couldn't see a great deal of him because he was holding his newspaper stretched out — almost deliberately, I thought — to hide the bottom part of his face. His eyes came up once, flickered in our direction, and went back again. His paper was folded back, and having very good eyesight I was amused to find that I could read, in the piece which hung down, part of a news article on the political significance of Senor Ramon Charles's visit.

The fourth man was sitting just inside the street door. There was nothing remarkable about him except his enormous Air-Force style of mustache. He had a cigarette which he held, quite motionless, in one hand; but with the fingers of his free hand he tweaked at his mustache in a plucking gesture which reminded me of something that, for the moment, I was unable to place.

"Don't glare at them," said Hazlerigg. "Take your time. The man we're dealing with's no fool. Relax and blow your nose or light a cigarette or something."

There was no change in Hazlerigg's voice but I could sense the tension in the air. Something was going to happen, and it was going to happen soon.

I felt for my cigarettes and Hazlerigg produced a lighter. As he did so my mind suddenly recorded something that my eyes had told me some time earlier.

"You light it," I said. "I want to look over your shoulder without appearing to do so. Thank you."

I took a second quick glance. It was at the thin man by the wall.

Surely there was something wrong there . . . of course! If I could read the folded-back portion of his newspaper, it meant that the man himself must be reading it *upside down.*

Before I could speak an interruption occurred. A large cream-colored ambulance, its bell shrilling, shot past the entrance of the tea shop. By luck I kept my eyes, not on it, but on the occupants of the room, and was therefore able to note a curious fact. While the bearded man and the parson both looked up and followed the course of the ambulance with interest — indeed, the bearded man half rose in his seat — neither the thin man with the paper, nor the one with the handlebar mustache looked, even for a single instant, in any other direction than into the room.

"Narrows the field," agreed Hazlerigg, calmly.

"You've spotted him?"

"I think so, yes."

"I *think* so, too," I said. "But I'm not sure."

"Then I'll give you a hint," said Hazlerigg. "The man's a professional killer. Concentrate on that. He uses a gun. And he spotted me almost as soon as I came in. Now do you know?"

The word "now," slightly emphasized, might have been a signal. Mr. Thin Man and Mr. Handlebar mustache both got to their feet and came towards us.

Hazlerigg said to me, "Just think back. Everyone else in this room has been using both hands freely. Not you. I gave you three chances to take your right hand out of your pocket. First I offered to shake hands. Then, when you were using one hand to stir your coffee, I pushed the newspaper at you. No go. You finished stirring, laid down the spoon, and used the same hand for the paper. I offered you my lighter while one of your hands was busy taking out a cigarette. You excused yourself and made me light it for you. When a man's as careful as all that to keep his right hand hidden, Engels, it doesn't need much guessing to know what's in it. All the same, it's three to one, so I should leave the gun alone if I were you."

Mr. Thin Man and Mr. Handlebar were right behind me now. Superintendent Hazlerigg was right. It would have been stupid to have started anything.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **BEN HECHT**

TITLE: ***Chicago Nights' Entertainments***

TYPE: Detective Stories

DETECTIVE: Sergeant Kuzick

LOCALE: Chicago

TIME: A generation ago

COMMENTS: *Henry Justin Smith called* A THOUSAND AND ONE AFTERNOONS IN CHICAGO, *from which these sketches were taken, "the first full release of Hecht's literary powers."*

"OFFHAND," SAID SERGEANT KUZICK of the first precinct, "offhand, I can't think of any stories for you. If you give me a little time, maybe I could think of one or two. What you want, I suppose, is some story as I know about from personal experience. Like the time, for instance, that the half-breed Indian busted out of the bridewell, where he was serving a six month's sentence, and snuck home and killed his wife and went back again to the bridewell, and they didn't find out who killed her until he got drunk a year later and told a bartender about it. That's the kind you want, ain't it?"

I said it was.

"Well," said Sergeant Kuzick, "I can't think of any offhand, like I said. There was a building over on West Monroe Street once where we found three bodies in the basement. They was all dead, but that wouldn't make a story hardly, because nobody ever found out who killed them. Let me think a while."

Sergeant Kuzick thought.

Then he inquired doubtfully. "Do you remember the Leggett mystery? I guess that was before your time. I was only a patrolman then. Old Leggett had a tobacco jar made out of a human skull, and that's how they found out he killed his wife. It was her skull. It come out one evening when he

brought his bride home. You know, he got married again after killin' the first one. And they was having a party and the new bride said she didn't want that skull around in her house. Old Leggett got mad and said he wouldn't part with that skull for love or money. So when he was to work one day she threw the skull into the ash can, and when old Leggett come home and saw the skull missing he swore like the devil and come down to the station to swear out a warrant for his wife's arrest, chargin' her with disorderly conduct. He carried on so that one of the boys got suspicious and went out to the house with him and they found the skull in the ash can, and old Leggett began to weep over it. So one of the boys asked him, naturally, whose skull it was. He said it wasn't a skull no more, but a tobacco jar. And they asked him, where he'd got it. And he begun to lie so hard that they tripped him up and finally he said it was his first wife's skull, and he was hung shortly afterward. You see, if you give me time I could remember something like that for a story.

"Offhand, though," sighed Sergeant Kuzick, "it's difficult. I ain't got it clear in my head what you want either. Of course I know it's got to be interestin' or the paper won't print it. But interestin' things is pretty hard to run into. I remember one night out to the old morgue. This was 'way back when I started on the force thirty years ago and more. And they was having trouble at the morgue owing to the stiffs vanishing and being mutilated. They thought maybe it was students carryin' them off to practice medicine on. But it wasn't, because they found old Pete—that was the colored janitor they had out there—he wasn't an African, but it turned out a Fiji Islander afterward. They found him dead in the morgue one day and it turned out he was a cannibal. Or, anyway, his folks had been cannibals in Fiji, and the old habit had come up in him so he couldn't help himself, and he was makin' a diet off the bodies in the morgue. But he struck one that was embalmed, and the poison in the body killed him. The papers didn't carry much of it on account of it not bein' very important, but I always thought it was kind of interestin' at that. That's about what you want, I suppose—some story or other like that. Well, let's see . . .

"It's hard," sighed Sergeant Kuzick, after a pause, "to put your finger on a yarn offhand. I remember a lot of things now, come to think of it, like the case I was on where a fella named Zianow killed his wife by pouring little pieces of hot lead into her ear, and he would have escaped, but he sold the body to the old county hospital for practicin' purposes, and while they was monkeying with the skull they heard something rattle and when

they investigated it was several pieces of lead inside rattling around. So they arrested Zianow and got him to confess the whole thing, and he was sent up for life, because it turned out his wife had stabbed him four times the week before he poured the lead into her while she slept, and frightened him so that he did it in self-defense, in a way.

"I understand in a general way what you want," murmured Sergeant Kuzick, "but so help me if I can think of a thing that you might call interestin'. Most of the things we have to deal with is chiefly murders and suicides and highway robberies, like the time old Alderman McGuire, who is dead now, was held up by two bandits while going home from a night session of the council, and he hypnotized one bandit. Yes, sir, you may wonder at that, but you didn't know McGuire. He was a wonderful hypnotist, and he hypnotized the bandit, and just as the other one, who wasn't hypnotized, was searching his pockets McGuire said to the hypnotized bandit, 'You're a policeman, shoot this highwayman.' And the hypnotized one was the bandit who had the gun, and he turned around, as Alderman McGuire said, and shot the other, unhypnotized bandit and killed him. But when he reported the entire incident to the station—I was on duty that night—the captain wouldn't believe it, and tried to argue McGuire into saying it was a accident and that the gun had gone off accidentally and killed the unhypnotized bandit. But the alderman stuck to his story, and it was true, because the hypnotized bandit told me privately all about it when I took him down to Joliet.

"I will try," said Sergeant Kuzick, "to think of something for you in about a week. I begin to get a pretty definite idea what you want, and I'll talk it over with old Jim, who used to travel beat with me. He's a great one for stories, old Jim is. A man can hardly think of them offhand like. You give me a week."

And the old sergeant sank into his wooden chair and gazed out of the dusty station window with a perplexed and baffled eye.

a new story by

AUTHOR: **NEDRA TYRE**

TITLE: ***Carnival Day***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A beautifully written story, full of tenderness and sensitivity, and very, very real. What terrifying insights into the secret world of a twelve-year-old little girl!*

EDITORS' FILE CARD

BETTY WANTED TO LIE IN BED A little longer and look at the lowered shade that held out the sunlight except for a bright streak of it nosing through at the bottom. Then she could think about the nice things that might happen. Except that they might not.

Her mother was in the hall cleaning, doing the brisk morning work of Saturday. Betty listened to the rub of the mop, the whispering of the dust cloth. She pulled the Teddy bear from his crumpled position on the floor and placed him on the pillow beside her. His hanging button of a left eye seemed to leer; his fur was worn and in spots was missing, as if he had mange. She took his right paw that was jerked toward his forehead in a kind of salute and rubbed it against her face so that he caressed her.

Outside the mop made its way down the hall—the only sound in the house. Then the ringing of the telephone tore open the silence—first the ringing downstairs, then the echoing ring of the extension upstairs. Her mother would answer it, just outside Betty's door.

Betty knocked the Teddy bear so that he made a somersault and landed face down on the floor. She knew the telephone call would be the sign she had been waiting for to tell her what kind of day it would be, and she was not quite ready to learn. She grabbed her

pillow and burrowed beneath it, pressing the sides tight against her ears. The feathers, the ticking, the pillow case, nothing kept the noise out. She had heard the words before they were spoken, she had dreamed them all through the night.

Her father had said weeks ago—when the first signs were pasted on the billboards, the placards set up in the drug store windows, the shoe shop, the beauty parlors—that of course they must go to the carnival together. Hadn't they gone for years? But she couldn't really believe him because everything had been so different these last months. He understood her fear, her uncertainty, and weeks ago had given her five crisp dollar bills to hide away in her desk. The money was there for her to spend at the carnival, even if he didn't get to go with her.

Betty heard her mother's voice; if her mother had been at the North Pole her voice couldn't have been colder, and yet it was so nice, so distinct, every syllable of every word sounded.

"I tried to tell Betty not to count on you. She'll be hurt. But then you seem to take pleasure in hurting us."

It wasn't fair of her mother to talk to him like that; he'd left the money; he'd made his apologies, he'd said something might come up so that he couldn't take her; and now her mother talked to him as if he had broken a solemn promise.

Her mother didn't say goodbye but Betty heard the little latching click the telephone made as it slid back into place.

The autumn wind puffed the shade so that it slapped the sill. Betty reached down for the Teddy bear and threw him across the room.

Outside there were the sounds of her mother putting away the mop in the utility cabinet, then a knock on the door.

"Good morning," her mother said, and filled the room with her briskness. "It's time you were up."

Betty kicked the sheet and made a wad of it at the foot of the bed.

"Your father telephoned to say he can't go to the carnival after all. I know how disappointed you are. But you can go with some of the other children on the street." She stooped over the Teddy bear and picked him up, regimenting him so that his legs were straight and his arms were close to his sides. "It's silly the way you hang on to this old thing. You're nearly twelve—much too old for Teddy bears. He ought to be thrown in the trash."

She was picking up clothes, straightening shoes—her mother was always, always picking up, straightening up now; she didn't use to be that way.

"Here's your robe. Go on downstairs and eat your breakfast. You'll

find a glass of orange juice in the refrigerator. Take your milk from the bottle nearest the freezing unit. I'll be down in a minute to cook your egg."

"I don't want an egg," Betty said.

Betty tried to stamp as she walked down the stairs; she wanted to have the house filled with the jolting sounds of heavy footsteps and to have her mother tell her to stop, but the soft soles of her bedroom shoes sounded quieter than tiptoes.

She stood in the kitchen door looking at the neat rows of cabinets with everything stacked precisely in them, the white sink scrubbed spotless, the chairs lined up tight against the walls like shy children at a party. On the second shelf of the refrigerator she found the glass of orange juice. She held it in both hands and rubbed her nose against the film outside until she made a wobbly circle; then she started to drink the juice—but it wouldn't go down; it held back because this was the day of the carnival and her father wasn't going with her.

Her mother was coming downstairs. Betty heard her precise heels strike the steps. She wanted to gulp the orange juice but the first taste of it made her sick. Betty looked at the full glass in her hands; she couldn't listen to a lecture, not today, on the way thousands of children in foreign countries would give anything for this delicious orange juice. There just might be time to get rid of it. She ran to the sink and poured the juice down the drain.

"You must drink some milk now," her mother said, as she entered the kitchen and saw the empty glass in Betty's hand.

"I don't want any milk," Betty said, waiting for the threat to come, waiting for her mother to say she couldn't leave the house until she had drunk some milk.

"I suppose it won't hurt you to go without it this once. Anyway, you'll eat enough junk at the carnival to fill you up. Run on upstairs and bathe."

Her mother said the words but she wasn't paying attention even to herself; her mother's mind seemed to be deep inside her, digging away at other thoughts.

In the bathroom Betty played the lovely forbidden game. If her mother downstairs buzzing with the vacuum cleaner on the dining room rug knew, she'd be mad. Betty brushed her teeth and punched the brush hard on the back of her tongue so that she gagged and the little bit of orange juice that she had swallowed came up. Next she stood in the middle of the floor holding a glass of water in her hand and spit water into the basin, spitting like old man Robinson who could stand in a store door and hit the middle of the street, making a cascade over the sidewalk. She filled the tub

half full, then stuck only her toes in the water and rubbed herself hard with the towel as if she had taken a bath all over.

She dressed and was trying to sneak out of the house without last minute admonitions from her mother. But there was no need to try to sneak out. While Betty had dawdled over dressing, her father had left his office and come home. He and her mother were talking now, then shouting; the deadly barrage of their voices was wounding each other. Betty did not matter at such a time, not even on carnival day. She didn't belong to them when they were like that. She was alone. She wasn't even born.

She darted down the hall onto the porch and jumped across the front steps.

At the corner she heard a high scream and then a noise that she had never heard before, but she did not dare stop to listen to it.

Long before she got to the huge vacant lot across the railroad tracks, the sounds of the carnival came to her, the voices jabbering, pleading, cajoling, then the music all scrambled up so there was no tune, like children yelling at each other, nothing making sense. And then she was there. It felt good to walk in the sawdust, to have it slow her down like walking in water, to have it creep inside her shoes. She made the rounds to see what she wanted to do; she might do everything; first, though, she must look things over, be cautious, the way you were careful about a new child or a new teacher or a new book before you accepted them.

Betty thought she had remembered it all, yet she hadn't; her memory had changed the carnival, but now it all came back, like a movie she was seeing for the second time—all the small booths with shelves, almost like the vegetable stalls at the Farmers' Market, but instead of vegetables they were strewn with dolls and animals and blankets and lamps and clocks.

The shooting gallery was just ahead. She stopped, remembering last year her father had stood right there, shooting as hard as he could, yet all the ducks marched past ignoring him and his shots until he had popped off a tail. This was the first place they had gone; she closed her eyes trying to make her memory bring it all back, trying to recall what her father had worn, what she had worn; but nothing came—nothing except the emptiness of her father's absence. A man picked up a rifle and squinted, then shot, and Betty walked past him.

Above all the invitations to step this way folks, try your skill for valuable prizes, she heard someone say, "You, young lady with the pigtails, you look like someone who could win. Toss the ring on the numbered pegs and if they add up to an odd number you can pick out what you want." His smile

slashed his face and he waggled his hand at her. Betty pulled the envelope her father had given her out of her skirt pocket. The five new dollars made crackling sounds as she fingered them to be sure she gave the man only one.

The man's fingers reached greedily for the dollar; they lingered in his change box. "Naturally you want more than one chance," he said. "One for a quarter or three for fifty cents."

"One," Betty said firmly.

She bumped hard against the counter as she made her first throw. The twine ring fell to the ground before it reached the target. The next one flew past the target and thumped against the thin wall of the booth; the third one looped a peg from which dangled a little placard with 16 painted on it.

"Too bad," the man said. "Sixteen is not a lucky number. But you made a good try. I'm sure you could win the next time."

"No, thank you," Betty said.

The man's smile dwindled; he erased her from his consciousness, the way Miss Collins erased the arithmetic lesson in one swoop from the blackboard so that nothing was left, and was calling out, "You, young man in the corduroy jacket, come this way and try your luck at this interesting game of chance and skill."

"One, please," Betty said and tiptoed to shove her money through the mouse trap of an opening in a ticket booth before a tent splashed with signs reading *Thrill to the Death Defying Riders. Crashes. Spills.*

The roar of the motorcycles frightened her; she leaned down and watched them make rushing-spluttering circles; a man fell off, she screamed, wanting to grab her father, to dig her hands into his arms, the way she did when they had watched the riders in the years before. The helmeted men roared past, goggled men stooping, spread over the motorcycles like frogs.

Nothing was the same without her father; she had done all the things they did together. He wasn't there and it would serve him right if she saw things they hadn't seen together. He hadn't exactly steered her away from them; he had mentioned shows and rides he thought they might enjoy more. Now she walked up to the platform where the girls stood in their costumes, wearing robes, then one girl unloosened her robe and showed her costume. The men near Betty grinned; two whistled. The man on the platform winked and said, "Plenty more of the same on the inside."

Betty bought a ticket and sat down in a chair on the outer circle. The ground was uneven and her chair rocked back and forth. The lights went off; six girls came out on the stage and threw kisses

at the audience; then a man came out and said something; hoots followed what the man said. Next to Betty a man placed his hand on the knee of a woman sitting on his right and the man and woman smiled at each other. Hoots came again from the audience—hoots full of a special and secret knowledge, shutting out everyone who didn't understand and share the knowledge; Betty looked at the upturned faces of the men sitting near her, their eyes catching strange lights from the stage; and all around, the sun sprinkled through holes in the tent and sifted through in bright dots to the ground. A woman sang a song while some girls in back of her danced, none of them doing the steps quite like any other or at the same time; then the curtain slapped to in gigantic relief that the show was over. The men around Betty got up and reached for cigarettes and they all walked out into the sunlight.

After that Betty went to the Jungle of Snakes; she looked over the canvas sides of an enclosure down to the waving bodies, the snakes writhing-twisting-squirming like all the nightmares of her life, and in the middle of their weaving a woman sat caressing them, letting them climb around her body, small ones making bracelets around her arms and anklets around her ankles; one large one twisted three times around her waist; heads darted back and forth, back and forth, their tongues licking like flames in and out of their flattened heads; then the woman picked up one from the canvas floor and held it to her, fondling it as if it were a baby, kissing it as if it were sweet. To escape her the snake wiggled down, moving in the shape of an s, then lost himself among the other twists and whorls. Fear like fire swept over Betty and she rushed out of the tent.

She stood shivering and her teeth were clamped hard together as if she were playing in snow on the coldest morning in the year, though the midday sun felt like hot August heat on her shoulders. Twice she made the circuit of the booths and shows, trying to decide which one to see next. A sign beckoned to her. *Consult Dr. Vision the Visionary, the Mystic, the Clairvoyant. He Sees All. He Knows All. Come In and Discuss Your Problems.*

Her father didn't approve of fortunetellers; he said it was much nicer to wait and see what the future brought. But her father wasn't there. Betty stood half in and half out of the tent opening, the way she did in the dentist's reception room, waiting to push the buzzer to let the dentist's assistant know she had come. There was movement within a tent and a man said, "Do you wish to seek the advice of Dr. Vision?" He

wore a green satin suit, with a gold sash, and his head held up the huge burden of a turban from which a limp feather drooped like a coxcomb. His mustache was drawn on in a thin black line and his eyebrows almost filled his forehead.

She nodded. It was still like being at the dentist's, not able to deny having an appointment.

"You are speaking to Dr. Vision," the man said, pointing to a chair. She sat at a table across from him; his turbaned head seemed to sit on the crystal ball that separated them.

"The fee is one dollar," he said. Betty's hand rummaged in her pocket for money. Fifty cents bounced to the ground. Dr. Vision sat still with his hands pressed against his forehead and Betty fell to the ground hunting for the money, beating against a small rug that seemed to float on the grass and rubble beneath it. She found the money near Dr. Vision's feet and was surprised to see that he wore unlaced tennis shoes and no socks. She scrambled back to her chair and gave him an apologetic look, as if she had had to excuse herself from the table to be sick. He paid no attention and said in a voice that was a strange kind of whisper, "Do you have some special problem?"

She answered him in the same kind of whisper. "Yes, my mother—" And then she could go no further. What she was about to say had been betrayal, spreading the dark misery in her house before him, undressing her mother's hurt and her father's hurt before a stranger.

Dr. Vision looked into the crystal.

"I see," he said. "Your mother. Yes. She's been ill. She'll be all right. Don't worry about her. Is there anything else?"

Betty looked at her fingernails. There was one, just one that wasn't chewed; she had tried to leave at least one; one whole nail showed that she had some control; she held her hand tightly but the finger sprang to her mouth and she started biting the nail.

"Maybe your schoolwork is bothering you. Is that it?"

School. Miss Smith saying, until this year you did good work. What's the matter now? It's not that you aren't capable. Don't you like your teachers? Are you getting lazy? What is it?

She couldn't answer Dr. Vision any more than she could answer Miss Smith; the words stopped in her throat.

He smiled, his mustache curling around in his smile like a cat's whiskers. "It's a little early but maybe you want advice about love."

"No," she shouted. Her voice startled them both, so that she dropped it back to the whisper they were using and said, "No, no."

"Then there's just one thing left. A career. You want advice about your career. Well, finish school first, then decide what you want to do. I predict a successful career for you."

Betty stood up and the chair fell behind her. She expected a banging, jolting noise but the grass caught the chair like a net and hushed the sound of its fall. She started to run.

"Just a minute," Dr. Vision said. "You are permitted to communicate with the Secret Powers of the Universe and ask a secret question or make a secret request. They will send you an answer, and only you will know their answer. Look closely into the crystal and repeat your request or your question to yourself three times." Betty walked toward the crystal and bent over it. She made her request silently, as reverently as she said her prayers, her hands folded and her eyes closed: *Let everything be like it was, let everything be like it was, let everything be like it was.*

There was no noise—the whole carnival seemed quiet and still. Then Dr. Vision said words that she didn't understand and all the time he made huge gestures in the air. His hand moved under the table and his thumb reached around his little finger and he held a paper there. "This is your answer. The Powers have spoken, he said and made a bow as if he were waiting for applause. Betty snatched the paper from him and ran, grabbing at the slit in the tent, feeling herself almost smothered by the curtain as she rushed out. She couldn't look at the paper—she didn't dare look; she had the feeling she had had one Christmas when she had been sure that she wouldn't get anything, when she hadn't dared go to the Christmas tree in the living room. Only this wasn't quite like that; this was more—this wasn't being frightened over not getting presents, this was asking for what had to be. The small piece of paper was her destiny and she wadded it in the desperate knot of her fist.

Ahead of her was the largest cluster of people she'd seen all day. Above them on a platform a man took off his coat and swept his brow; as he raised his hand a huge circle of sweat showed underneath his arm on the yellow silk of his shirt. He had the voice of all the men standing on platforms, a chant that came from the back of his nose. "Ladies and gentlemen, you have seen many remarkable things today but you have seen nothing to equal the phenomenon we are presenting. The half man, half woman. This phenomenon can be legally married in any state of our great and beloved America to either a man or woman. You will hear a scientific lecture, absolutely clean, explaining this sexual phenomenon. I urge you to buy your ticket at once. For this performance only

the cost is thirty-five cents, the usual price of admission is seventy-five cents, you will be paying less than half the usual charge. Only adults allowed. No one under sixteen admitted."

People moved against Betty, crushing her, pushing her toward the tall box where a man sold tickets. She tried to move away from them, but the man kept looking down at her and saying thirty-five cents please, thirty-five cents, and the ones behind her were saying go on, what's holding us up, and she was trying to tell the man she was only twelve.

The crowd pushed Betty, shoved her, thrust her closer to the man. She felt that she was being suffocated.

"No," she cried out. "No. I don't want to see." She threw back the rocks of their bodies and squirmed through.

She sobbed and plunged through the sawdust, her feet kicked up little storms of it; then her sorrow told her what she was searching for, longing for, what she loved most of all about the carnival. The merry-go-round. That was all she wanted now. She ran toward it and its piping tune embraced her and she saw the stiff ponies with their arched tails and prancing legs making their rounds far away. She dashed toward the merry-go-round, remembering how her father used to let her ride it for hours; how he rode a pony alongside her, and his long legs dangled, striking the floor when his pony descended; how sometimes he doubled up his legs in the stirrup so that he looked like a jockey; how sometimes they got off their ponies and sat together in a chariot. Her father would get tired at last and stand outside the merry-go-round's circle waving to her as she rode by; their waving lasted so long that one wave was not over before she was back again, passing him, waving to him again.

She reached for money to buy tickets and the paper with her destiny on it dropped to the ground. She did not even notice.

"Five," she shouted above the magic piping. "I want five tickets for the merry-go-round."

She folded the tickets and waited on the outside for the merry-go-round to slow down. Some boys leaped off before it stopped, and the younger children squatted down to jump flatfooted to the ground.

Betty found a red pony and climbed on it.

The music started, the merry-go-round began to revolve, while all the booths and shows were lined up outside, not able to touch the enchanted circle of the merry-go-round; voices were saying what they had been saying all day, but now the music blotted them out so that Betty had to strain to hear—hot dogs ten cents, hamburgers made of the finest beef twenty

cents, souvenirs you'll value the rest of your life, canary birds two dollars, pennants of your favorite college fifty cents, see the half man half woman, take a chance at this interesting game of skill . . . hurry, hurry, hurry.

And then she did not hear them at all; she would not let her ears hear and she closed her eyes; she was holding on to her pony and listening only to the music, safe from everything, safe from her mother's eternal cleaning and the sad things that went on at home, the harsh voices and the harsher silences.

The merry-go-round slowed and Betty opened her eyes.

He was there.

Her father was just outside the circle of parents waiting for their children. And Betty's day was saved. She should have known her father would not disappoint her.

He waved at her and she saw that he was not alone. It was funny. She knew the man he was with. It was Mr. Williams the policeman—everybody in town knew Mr. Williams. They must have met each other accidentally at the carnival. Maybe Mr. Williams was waiting for someone he knew to get off the merry-go-round. Her father seemed to be pleading with him, as if he were asking permission, and Mr. Williams finally nodded.

The music was beginning again, the merry-go-round started its slow turning, the children scrambled on and her father leaped on and came toward her. His arms grabbed for her and his mouth seemed to have words that could not be spoken. Then the man taking the tickets came round and Betty handed him two, one for herself and one for father. The merry-go-round was going faster and her pony started to rise; the lifting took her from her father's embrace, but his hand reached wildly for her hand and their grip was as strong as their love. The carnival around them was not yet the blur it would be when they went at full speed and Betty could still see Mr. Williams watching them, watching most of all her father, and the policeman's face was very sad.

—Continued from Back Cover

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