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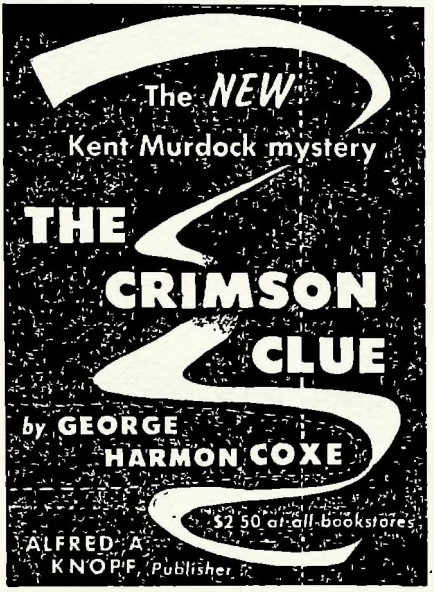

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Yes, in these confused and troubled times, there are things which have to be done. . . .

THE LION'S MANE

by THOMAS FLANAGAN

THE CASKET RESTED ON WARM, upturned earth, and three soldiers stood on either side of it. It was a dark afternoon and clouds moved swiftly across a threatening sky. The cypresses and ash trees of the cemetery were heavy with the weight of late summer. Their dark green foliage stretched back beyond the open grave. The military and the civil officials who had been delegated to do honor to the dead man stood at rigid attention, their eyes fixed on a point just beyond that of the surpliced priest who was the only moving figure. He was swinging his censer lightly over the open casket.

"It is a touching tribute," the American consul whispered to Dr. Corton, who stood beside him. Corton nodded.

The priest lowered the censer to his side, where an acolyte received it, and for a moment there was no movement at all, the acrid incense filling the moist air. Then the brigadier who commanded the delegation swung his arm stiffly to salute and the other officers followed suit. The civilians held their soft black hats across their chests.

"There will be reports on this to Washington, and questions," the consul said softly.

"Right now there is an investigation in the capital," Corton said. "They have wasted no time here, either."

"Here," the consul shot back. "In this place. I will tell you something, Doctor."

But he did not, just then. The honor guard, at a sharp command, raised their rifles and fired deafeningly into the rain-heavy air. The sound shattered the intricate pattern

of silence and gesture, and the military delegation dropped the salute. The civilians, though they remained uncovered in the presence of death, shifted nervously. It was sickeningly hot, and the consul wished that he could wipe away the beads of sweat which had sprung out on his shoulder and neck.

"I will tell you something, Doctor," the consul said. "The investigation will prove nothing. There is something behind this. There is that terrible major of police. Tennente."

"Tennente is a responsible man," Corton said. "He would not kill without good reason."

The consul turned his head involuntarily. He was newly appointed to this position, and at first he had relied heavily on Corton, who had spent years in this country. But of late he had come to suspect that Corton had, as the consul would have phrased it, "gone native," adopted the deplorable morals and eating habits of this barbarous land. "He would kill," the consul said. "He has killed."

At that moment, Major Tennente, too, stood at attention, in the small examination room of the Hall of Justice. He stood before a cloth-covered table, behind which sat the four civilian judges, and a fifth man, an emissary from the palace, which is to say from the General who ruled the land. Above the green-clothed table, hanging in portrait from the whitewashed wall, the General's soft and benevolent face surveyed the action like an alert director.

"And you decided," the presiding judge said, "you decided on your initiative that the American, Rogers, was to be killed."

"The American, Rogers, was engaged in espionage," Tennente said.

"That seems likely now, does it?" the judge asked dryly. He was a short, freely perspiring man, who dabbed constantly at his forehead with a damp handkerchief.

"It did then," Tennente said.

"And because it did, you decided to kill him."

"Not exactly. To be specific, the decision was made by my chief, Colonel Morel."

"Colonel Morel, then," the presiding judge said, "decided on *his* initiative."

"That is so."

"And you acted on his orders."

"Of course."

"You feel no guilt, then, for what has occurred?"

"None whatever. Some generalized sorrow, perhaps." Tennente shrugged his broad, bare-boned shoulders.

The judge pulled his handkerchief nervously through his fingers. The emissary of the General leaned forward. He was a thin, almost clerical figure, precise and self-deprecating in manner, and when he spoke, which was always in a half-whisper, the court strained to hear him. "Perhaps, Major, it would be better if you told your story in sequence, without interruption." He glanced apologet-

ically at the judge, who wiped his cheek with sudden vehemence.

"Certainly," Tennente said. "I will begin with the nature of Colonel Morel's mind."

"We are not interested in the portraiture of character, Major," the presiding judge said.

Tennente looked through his heavy, half-veiled eyes at the emissary. "Interruptions?"

The emissary gestured reprovingly toward the judge, and Tennente smiled. He did not have an attractive smile, for it bared his long, discolored teeth. "You know the name which the people have given Colonel Morel," he said. "The Lion." The judge nodded with carefully concealed impatience. He was familiar with the face and reputation of Morel of the State Police, for Morel was a legend in the land, a heavy lion of a man, powerful though old, one of the heroes of the General's revolution. In his mind the judge could see the Lion, the massive shoulders, the arms matted with grizzled hair, the brutal and intelligent face. He could see, most clearly of all, the flowing, yellow-tawny hair which grew so thickly from the large skull.

"Colonel Morel's character," Tennente said, "is not the sort which encourages quarrels with his decisions. He informed me that he was in possession of information which showed that Dr. Wesley Rogers, a physician employed at Doctor Corton's American Clinic, was actually engaged in smuggling intelligence reports to the United States. Dr. Rogers had worked out a clever scheme. He would send to an American research foundation long lists of statistics, equations, and so forth, supposedly as part of a research experiment which he was conducting at the clinic. Actually, these statistics were armament reports."

"Colonel Morel was satisfied as to the truth of his suspicions?" the judge asked.

"He did not suspect," Tennente said, "he was convinced."

"He convinced you?"

"I carry out orders. It is not necessary that I be convinced."

The emissary from the palace leaned forward again. "I believe, Major, that it was Colonel Morel who replaced you as Chief of the State Police, following the General's victory?"

"You know that," Tennente said. "Why ask it?"

The emissary smiled thinly and nodded toward the busily scribbling secretary. "I like to have everything a matter of record. You naturally felt some resentment when Colonel Morel replaced you?"

Tennente paused a moment while the lids sank over his dark eyes. "I considered the Colonel a man better able to carry out the General's program."

The emissary coughed delicately into his hand. "Go on, Major. As a result of the Colonel's conviction —"

"He told me to have Dr. Rogers killed."

"Major," the judge said sharply.

He had lost his earlier frankness, and the word "killed" echoed painfully in his ear.

The emissary smiled. "You and I, Major, have less regard for the power of words than does the judge. But let us say that Morel suggested that it would be for the good of the country if Dr. Rogers ceased his practices. However, does it not seem more natural that he should have been deported, or arrested?"

"That is not for me to say. Colonel Morel was of the opinion that it was the General's wish that Dr. Rogers should be killed by an unknown party, for gain, or for a private reason, rather than to antagonize the American government."

"The General *himself* suggested this?" the judge asked.

"I am not in the General's confidence," Tennente said.

"Well," the judge said dubiously. "Go on."

"To a certain extent, the details were left to me. I chose the killer, or remover — a Lieutenant Ramar, an excellent shot. He was approved by Colonel Morel. Colonel Morel suggested that Dr. Rogers should be shot, or removed, or made to cease being a spy, when leaving the clinic some morning. You see, Dr. Rogers and Dr. Corton alternated the night duty. At the last moment I changed the plan and had Rogers shot at his home."

"This was in disobedience of Colonel Morel's orders," the judge said.

"No," Tennente said. "I never disobey orders. I improved upon a suggestion. Shot at the clinic, there was always the possibility of the killing being observed by Dr. Corton or one of the American nurses. This might have necessitated a second killing, and when these things are repeated, they never go well." He looked with what was for him engaging candor at the judge, who moved his chair away from the table.

"It was quite an improvement," the emissary said.

"On the twenty-fifth — that is, on Sunday — I arranged with Lieutenant Ramar that the following night he was to go to Dr. Rogers's home, which is a slight distance from the clinic but adjoining its grounds, and there fire to kill. He did so."

"Fire to kill," the judge said. He threw his handkerchief on the green baize cloth. His hand was shaking uncontrollably.

The emissary said in the soft half-whisper, "That was well told, Major. You are a good witness. You may step down for a few moments now, and let Lieutenant Ramar continue the story." He looked inquiringly at the judge. "Would it be an indiscretion on the part of a friend of the court to suggest this?"

The lid of the casket was closed upon the dead man and then the casket was lowered into the earth. As the dark clouds moved across the green — almost the black — of the foliage, the rifles thundered again and then

the priest dropped a few clumps of dirt upon the casket. The mourners broke rank and walked away slowly. The brigadier went to Mrs. Rogers who was dressed like a native of the country who had lost one loved — dressed in black, with a heavy, almost sight-denying veil. He placed his hand upon her elbow and led her to the car which was to return her to an empty house.

"I should speak to her," the consul said.

But Dr. Corton put a restraining hand upon the soft, expensive fabric of the consul's suit. The consul was a good man, but tactless. "Not now," he said, and the consul nodded, relieved.

They fell in with the knot of officers walking to the official cars, and condolences and thanks were exchanged, for in a strange land one assumes national as well as personal losses. A countryman dead, like a kinsman dead, demands the consolation of words spoken.

The brigadier, joining them, said, "It will be punished. Oh, how it will be punished."

The consul nodded and then walked with the doctor to the car which they were sharing. And now the line of cars moved from the cemetery. At the gate a ragged boy, sensing no impropriety, held up newspapers for sale, attracted by the crowd. But the cars moved past him and out onto the highway which led back to the city. It was a national cemetery, and the cars, as they moved down the road, passed a high white wall to which, shockingly, posters had been affixed. The omnipresent eye of the General followed the cortège, a silent but watchful mourner.

The consul sat discreetly erect, his young body — at least, young for this responsibility — held stiffly away from the backrest. But Corton leaned back negligently, his hands resting on the time-glistened knees of his suit. Where the General did not look on them from the wall, the Lion did. There was a special series of "Heroes of the Revolution" and of these, Colonel Morel was one of the chief. The pictures showed a man almost beyond time, the body heavy with the potency of youth, uniform cap pushed back from the splendid yellow hair. What the pictures could not show, Corton thought, were the heavy, seamed lines of the neck, the quick, rasping breath and the gray soft hair of the old.

The consul nodded toward the poster. "It is a cruel face, in its way."

"A cruel man," Corton said. "Once he came to my clinic and removed a man from it by force. The man died in Colonel Morel's car."

"Last month at the review," the consul said, "the General placed his arm about his shoulder, and the Colonel smiled down into the Plaza and tossed that wonderful yellow mane, and the crowd cried, 'The Lion! The Lion!' "

"One would be brave or insane to cross such a man," Corton said.

The consul leaned toward him.

"There is such a man. That Tennente. He had Morel's job once, and he wants it again."

Corton smiled. "He knows that he will never have it. He is one of the best soldiers in the land, but he will die a major."

"You know him?" the consul asked incredulously. "You know that wolf?"

"We are friends," Corton said. The consul looked closely at the doctor. Only a few years separated them, but Corton looked much older: His face had that closed, self-contained quality which the consul had found to be very common abroad. The consul preferred open, friendly faces, like (he sighed inwardly) Dr. Rogers'.

"But Tennente planned this," the consul said. "I am sure of it."

"Oh, yes," Corton said. "He planned the whole thing. Perhaps I had better tell you about it."

Lieutenant Ramar was a bone-thin young man, his skin stretched across his small-chinned face so that veins were visible beneath the pale, sickly yellow. The emissary looked at him with distaste. He was very frightened, and though he stood at attention, the tips of his fingers fumbled at the seams of his whipcord breeches. He was in the cavalry.

"Now," the presiding judge said. "How was it done?"

"The Major," Ramar said, as though the noun were at once explanation and excuse. "He called me to his office and explained the duty to me."

"You did not object?"

"To an order? The American was nothing to me. Spies are shot, and the manner of their being shot is chosen by my superiors." Despite the trembling fingers, he was holding himself in well, but Tennente, sitting on a hard bench behind him, kept his eyes on the fingers.

"Did you ever meet Dr. Rogers?" the emissary asked, the whispering voice sliding across the room.

"I did not meet him, sir, but I observed him one day, when the Major called him in for questioning."

The judge, startled, looked at Tennente, but both the major and the emissary were smiling, as though at separate jokes. The judge — and not for the first time that afternoon — had the feeling that he was impotently acting out a farce, that his words were part of an unrevealed conversation between Tennente and the emissary.

"And how would you describe Dr. Rogers, Lieutenant?" the emissary asked. "Did he seem like a spy to you?"

"Anyone may be a spy," the Lieutenant said, and then was shaken by the apparent insolence of his remark. "He looked as one might expect a doctor to look. A rather soft man, but not fat. Of a good height. A pale, soft face. Only a few wisps of hair."

"A good target?" the emissary asked, almost sympathetically.

"Any target is good," Tennente interrupted. His legs were thrust out stiffly, and his long, hard-boned face

was sunk between his shoulders.

"Go on, Lieutenant," the presiding judge said.

"On the night in which we are interested," the Lieutenant said, "I did nothing for which I had no orders. I parked to the east of the clinic, and walked across the field to Rogers's house. It was about 10 o'clock and there were no lights. I took a post overlooking the house, on a small hill some distance away. I carried an automatic rifle. Since there were no lights, I thought at first that Major Tennente had miscalculated and that this was one of Rogers's nights on duty. But about 11 the bedroom upstairs was lighted. I could see Rogers and Mrs. Rogers standing together by the window. I could have fired then."

"But you did not shoot then," the judge said. "Why not?"

"He was too close to Mrs. Rogers. I do not shoot at women or endanger them."

"Unless ordered," Tennente spoke again. The judge looked at him angrily, but the major had closed his eyes.

"A few moments later he walked alone to the window, to draw down the shade. I had only a few moments, but my chances were fine. At first I aimed at his head, but it was too distant and indistinct a target. He was wearing a scarlet dressing gown, so I quartered the gown and fired into the upper right quadrant. He fell at once."

The judge wiped his forehead.

"All right," the emissary said. "At least for a few moments, Lieutenant. You may step down." He looked toward the major, who had opened his eyes, and Tennente stood up, an awkward, ungainly man.

"Now, Major," the emissary said. "The judge was quite rightly surprised when he learned that you had called in Dr. Rogers for questioning. Was this at Colonel Morel's suggestion?"

"No," Tennente said. "At my own."

"But you said earlier that Colonel Morel's statement of Rogers's guilt was quite sufficient for you. Were you not checking on that by speaking to Rogers?"

"Not at all," Tennente said. "I wished to give Lieutenant Ramar a chance to observe him. You remember that we planned at first to have Rogers shot as he left the clinic, and I wished to be sure that there was no mistake."

"But what did you speak to the doctor about?"

"The most general of subjects. Foreigners are quite used to being taken into custody for the most absurd reasons. I mean no offense; I am merely indicating the bizarre nature of the foreign psychology." Tennente smiled again.

"And no offense taken, Major," the emissary said. "Now, Major," he reached down beside his seat and drew up an attaché-case. "You have supplied us with an excellent dossier on this affair. I am not sure that you

have not exceeded authority in doing so, but let us drop that. You have supplied us with all the memoranda which passed between Colonel Morel and you, and you have supplied us with a stenographic report of your conversation with Dr. Rogers. As a result of this dossier an examination of Colonel Morel's conduct has been granted. You now tell us that, quite accidentally, you came into information leading you to believe that the Colonel was mistaken in thinking Dr. Rogers a spy. Is that so?"

"Yes," Tennente said. "That is so."

"But why then did you carry out his instructions? Why did you not cancel the orders which you had given to Lieutenant Ramar?"

"I routed my dossier through the proper channels for action," Tennente said. "Until such action was taken, I was still under Colonel Morel's orders."

"Even if it meant the death of an innocent man?"

"Exactly."

The emissary unzipped his attaché-case and extracted a neat folder. He turned to the judge and said, "With your permission, I will here enter on record the relevant section of the conversation with Dr. Rogers." The judge, who had been following the discussion with a chill, growing into fear, nodded.

"You may stand at ease, Major, and you may smoke if you wish." Tennente shook his head. The emissary took a cigarette from a slim case and then slipped on a pair of heavy-rimmed scholar's glasses. As he read, he drew slightly on the cigarette.

TENNENTE: That is no reason for a doctor to dislike this country.

ROGERS: Perhaps one can have too many patients, Major. Perhaps when a doctor deals every day with rickets, with fevers, with the incalculable effects of malnutrition, when he must heal wounds into whose origins he must not inquire, perhaps then he comes to hate such a country.

TENNENTE: Those things are not a doctor's function. A doctor is not required to have a political conscience.

ROGERS: Not in this country. I am a surgeon, Major. I know only how to heal injured tissue, how to probe for bullets, how to take tumors from diseased flesh, and I have seen too much.

TENNENTE: Dr. Corton manages.

ROGERS: Dr. Corton is a brilliant man. He is a theoretician of medicine. He looks, he examines, he formulates certain ideas to explain the causes of disease. I cannot have so abstract an idea of medicine; I am not trained for it, it does not appeal to me.

TENNENTE: I have never before heard of a doctor having too many patients.

ROGERS: Then I will be the first you have heard of. I have never known that you had any great love for what is happening here, either.

The emissary put down the papers, the almost sympathetic smile playing about his lips. "Your reply to this shocking statement seems to have been smudged out, Major."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. You continue to exchange this rather bewildering barrage of moral broodings for some time. Then Dr. Rogers is released. But you call to him when he reaches the door, and you ask if he is aware that his mail is under careful surveillance. He says that he is aware of it."

The judge again threw down his handkerchief. Tennente looked at it; he was interested in the small gestures by which men reveal themselves. "You warned him?" the judge asked.

"Oh," the emissary said, rubbing his cigarette out. "That is only an infraction of rules." He looked at Tennente. "It is interesting evidence, Major. Not conclusive in itself, but taken with the rest —"

The judge cleared his throat. He was plainly bewildered, and the associate judges, who shared his ignorance, smiled at each other foolishly. "I am afraid," he said, "that I don't understand the import of this evidence."

The emissary nodded, not unkindly, as though he expected and perhaps condoned, the stupidity of judges. "You see, Major Tennente guessed that Rogers was innocent of espionage. A lesser man would have voiced his fears to his colonel, but Major Tennente is not a small man. He saw to it that his report went to my office through a channel which, like all bureaucratic routes, is devious; so that, by the time I received it, Lieutenant Ramar had fired his shot. In this way, Major Tennente reasoned, he would make it impossible for Colonel Morel to throw off the blame on him, and he would also have presented my office with a tight case against the Colonel. But it did not work out that way, did it, Major?"

"But the testimony of the conversation," the judge said. "I don't follow that."

Halfway back to the capital, along the road sparsely lined with poplars, the storm burst. The rain fell heavily against the line of moving cars, and obscured the road, so that the drivers had to snap on their lights. But the consul felt that the storm was within his own car. He listened, almost dazed, to Corton's matter-of-fact voice. Every few minutes he would glance up quickly, as if to reassure himself that the window separating them from the driver was securely closed.

"You see," Corton repeated patiently, "if Tennente has guessed right, the government will do nothing. When he became aware of what he thought was Morel's error, he filed a patient, devious report, and meanwhile carried out Morel's orders."

"Didn't it matter to him that that must have meant killing a man?"

The consul's questions were so straightforward. Corton had been like that once, and he could guess at how shocked the consul must be. But that quality of honest directness was one which had gradually become meaningless to Corton. He had lived so long in the General's country that the consul seemed to him a painfully naïve schoolboy. "It mattered to him a great deal," Corton said. "When he first suspected that Rogers was innocent he came to see me. We trust each other. As Tennente had guessed, Rogers did not smuggle out reports in the guise of research reports, because he did no research for us. So we set out to find out why Morel wanted Rogers killed. Did you ever meet Rogers?"

"Yes," the consul said. "Several times."

"He was a pale, rather dull man, but very hard-working and very honest. Mrs. Rogers wore a veil today, but as you know she is a lovely woman. Colonel Morel had a reputation — he was the Lion, with his enemies and with the ladies. The affair between him and Mrs. Rogers was conducted so discreetly that Rogers never guessed at it. And there it was. This country is so frightened of spies and of foreigners that any story about them will be believed. And the General had reason to accept the Lion's word, for the Lion was his old comrade-in-arms."

The rain hurled itself against the fastened window, hiding the road outside. The consul turned toward the rain and watched it pour in quick channels down the glass. "It is a shower," he said. "It will soon be over and it will break the heat."

The consul was giving Corton a chance to change the subject, but Corton continued. He wanted the consul to understand how things were managed in the General's country. "The Lion was a brutal man, but a clever one. He and Tennente have watched each other like hawks, each waiting for the other to betray himself. And now Tennente had him, for Morel had committed the only sin which the General recognizes. He had manipulated the police for personal reasons. But Tennente did not stop him. Tennente trapped him."

"But a killing," the consul said. "A man dead." He watched the knowledgeable grin spread across Corton's face.

"Tennente has killed before," Corton said. "You said that yourself." Then Corton saw his own face reflected in the rain-streaked window, and he thought: "What has changed me? I was once like him." The grin slowly faded and left his face blank and somewhat puzzled.

"What Rogers said had clear implications for a policeman," the emissary said to the judge. "Rogers was supposed to be using a research experiment as a cover, yet he told Tennente that he had no interest in research. Here is a man who knows his mail is being searched, and yet says that the theory of medicine, the prob-

ing into the causes of disease, are things for which he has not been trained. Obviously, then, he was mailing no such reports as Morel claimed." The emissary smiled. "If Rogers was a spy, then he was an incredibly stupid one to deny his own camouflage."

"Too incredible," Tennente said, volunteering an opinion for the first time.

The judge again looked at the two men who faced each other with the table between them. If I only knew what the General wanted, he thought. He looked a mute appeal at the emissary, but this time the man from the General's office was not sympathetic.

"Now," the judge said, "you have proved your case against the Lion, Major, but there is still the killing. The killing, and indeed the whole affair, will have to be explained in some way to the American consul." He leaned across the table and his voice, no longer a whisper, was sharp and high-pitched. "We are not fools in my office, Major. It is quite clear to us that you did this to Morel deliberately. Colonel Morel is no longer Chief of the State Police."

"A great pity," Tennente said, and then he smiled wolfishly, so that his hypocrisy might be made apparent.

"Yes, it is a pity, because a clever man might be able to suggest to us how we might explain the killing. So clever a man might be himself eligible for the post from which Morel has been removed."

Tennente laughed. "Me? You would never make me Chief. I merely performed a duty. I don't like the man who would arrange a murder so that he might continue to enjoy an adultery. There is no need to explain the killing. Let Morel's story stand. The killing was done by an unknown person, for private reasons."

The emissary's eye rested for a moment on Lieutenant Ramar. "A culprit would be better," he said reflectively, "much better." A convulsive shudder escaped Ramar, who had been sitting with his narrow shoulders hunched together.

"No," Tennente said sharply. "I stand by my orders, and it was I who gave the order to the Lieutenant. There will be no scapegoat."

"Perhaps," the emissary said, "perhaps you are right." He sighed. "As you wish, Major. You deserve some reward for your service, however irregularly you performed it." He smiled again, and his smile could match Tennente's in its bleakness. "Let Lieutenant Ramar come forward. For the record, I would like to have him complete the story."

He is a sadist, Tennente thought. That is the type, the prim clerical ones, and not the heavy bullies whom the innocent imagine to be the very type of cruelty. He feels balked, and now he is being cruel to this boy, who is surely no prize himself. A fine lot, Tennente thought. A fine lot. "We have the rest of the story," he said. "You won't need his testimony."

"You are still a witness. Major," the emissary said sharply. "Sit down, Lieutenant."

"Where shall I start, your Excellency?" Ramar asked. He looked for guidance to the major, but Tennente had seated himself. His eyes were once more closed, and his hands were rammed into the pockets of his disreputable uniform.

"Why, where you left off, Lieutenant."

The boy fixed his eyes mechanically on a spot just to the left of the General's eyes. "I lowered my rifle and then went quickly back to my car and drove to the city. I returned to quarters and was undressing when I was phoned by the police. I was asked to return to the Rogers house. I did so."

"Yes?"

"I was admitted at the door by uniformed police and escorted upstairs. There I was met by Major Tennente. He took me into the room and I —"

"Yes?"

Suddenly the Lieutenant buried his face in his hands and his sobs racked the quiet room.

"Yes?"

"No," Ramar said through his hands. "No."

Tennente stood up so quickly that the judge wondered how he had ever come to think of the major as ungainly. He walked forward and looked contemptuously at the emissary, and then at the boy. "All right, Lieutenant. You are not a man, but you think you are one. Then talk. Stand always by what you have done."

Ramar pulled his fingers away from his face and looked at Tennente.

"Talk," Tennente said, and then he walked back to his seat.

The boy said, "On the floor I found the dead body of Colonel Morel. He was wearing the scarlet dressing gown. I had shot the Lion."

"Treachery and blood," the consul said. They were driving now through the streets of the city and the rain, as swiftly as it had come, had vanished. The air was cool now, and the whitewashed buildings seemed so cool to the consul that he wished he might move his hands across them. He felt soiled.

"Yes," Corton said. "How else could you act in this country? Is it better to be pure and do nothing? Never mind Rogers for the moment. Morel was a cruel man, and the General's friend. How could he be stopped if someone did not kill him? He gave Tennente the chance and Tennente took it."

"Rogers," the consul said. He felt almost too depressed to speak in sentences.

"They are holding Rogers on suspicion. They think that he may have shot his wife's lover. But he will be released. Tennente has promised me."

"You will trust that man once too often," the consul said. "He is like the rest of them — a wolf among wolves."

"When you are among wolves, is

it better to be a lamb?" Corton asked gently, because he liked the consul.

"It is their affair, at any rate," the consul said.

"Exactly," Corton said. "You don't know that I helped to have Morel killed."

The consul stared with concentration at the white frescoed fronts of the government buildings until he felt that he was in control of his voice. "You *helped* —"

"Of course," Corton said. "Why do you suppose I phoned Rogers that night, asking him to take the duty for me? Why do you suppose I called him so early that Mrs. Rogers would phone to her lover?"

"Before it happened?" the consul asked. "You knew this *before* it happened?"

"One night," Corton said, "the Lion came to my clinic to remove a patient. I told you about that. And I was struck by one fact. This old man, with gray, soft hair on his forearms, had bright yellow hair on his head. And I guessed then that he wore a wig. How else account for it? He was keeping bright the legend of the Lion. I mentioned it to Tennente, and he had the idea then. You see, even the vainest of men take off their wigs in bed. And so Tennente arranged that Rogers should be shot at home, and shot from some distance away, with a rifle. Rogers was almost bald, only a few wisps of hair. It was easy for Tennente's man to mistake Morel for Rogers. After all, whom would you *expect* to be in Rogers' bedroom, embracing Rogers' wife? Without his wig Morel was a man like Rogers, and he was shot as Rogers would have been shot."

As the car passed the Hall of Justice, the consul could see the board of examination leaving the building — a short perspiring man, and a thin one who looked like a clerk. The last man to leave the Hall was Tennente, and the consul examined him with a new interest. Tennente did not stand talking with the others, who were gathered at one side of the steps. He had pulled a cigar from a pocket of his tunic and now he spat the end onto the rain-polished marble. Then, with the cigar unlighted and his hands buried in the pockets of the half-unbuttoned tunic, he limped down the steps and out of the consul's sight.

Vincent Starrett was given the high honor of revising the Encyclopædia Britannica article on "Mystery Stories." In his excellent history of this literary form Mr. Starrett reminded us that "its origins are lost in the blackout of antiquity, its seeds are found in the folklore of the oldest nations." Mr. Starrett continued: "The emotion of fear has always bulked large [in mystery stories], and the oldest and strangest of man's fears is the fear of the unknown. Mystery, by definition, is that which is unknown. But tied in with the fear of the unknown is the emotion of curiosity concerning it; and out of that fear and curiosity perhaps was born the mystery story, at first a tale of wonder and terror . . ."

Yes, the mystery story is as old as time, and it has never died, or even faded away. Mr. Starrett is right in classifying the detective story as the chief modern subdivision of the mystery story — "its lustiest offspring," which has now achieved the status of "a separate and distinct division . . . a 'pure' form that demands individual consideration." And in Mr. Starrett's article in the EB, the section devoted to "Detective Stories" is twice as long as the one dealing with "Mystery Stories."

But there are mystery stories which are "pure" in form and yet do not fall into any of the three major groups which Mr. Starrett lists. We now bring you an example, by the famous author of LOST HORIZON *and* GOODBYE, MR. CHIPS, *which cannot properly be called a ghost story or a riddle-story or a detective story. And yet we are sure you will agree that James Hilton's tale is compounded of the very elements that characterize a true and authentic tale of mystery: it contains the emotion of fear, and especially the fear of the unknown; it has the emotion of man's curiosity — his passionate desire to see what lies behind the veil of the unknown; it is steeped in wonder and in terror; and for good measure, this modern mystery story traffics in eeriness, thrills, and suspense.*

THE KING OF THE BATS

by JAMES HILTON

I SUPPOSE THE CARLSBAD CAVERNS, in New Mexico, are the most interesting of their kind in the world. I had made the tour of them before and remembered the way the guide insisted on the party keeping together, and also the way we were all carefully counted before going down

the elevator. The authorities took no chances, and you can't blame them, because apart from the caverns that they show you there are miles and miles of side galleries, many of them still unexplored.

There was a local cowboy named Jim White who let himself down into these caverns 36 years ago by a lasso rope. You can say, in a sense, that he discovered them. He ventured a few miles with a lantern, unwinding cord as he went along, so that he shouldn't get lost on the way back. Today Jim White stands behind a counter in the main cavern selling his own book about them, and I daresay he sometimes feels it was more fun swinging down on a lasso rope than watching dollars click into a cash register.

Anyhow, I was in Carlsbad again with nothing much to do and I thought I'd pay a second visit. But one thing I did see for the first time — and that was the evening flight of the bats. Toward dusk in summertime there's a sound like the drone of airplanes at the cavern mouth, and suddenly the bats appear — millions of them, it seems — wheeling around in blind circles and suddenly streaming across the sky like a smoke cloud. They fly for miles in search of food, and return to the caverns by dawn.

That was worth seeing; but, after all, lots of people have seen it, which to a journalist lowers the temperature. You have to be pretty smart to concoct anything readable out of something that's been guide-booked and picture-postcarded to the *n*th degree; which is why, when I paid my $2 at the top of the elevator shaft, I carried in my pocket a flashlight and four balls of cord. I figured that if I could slip out of the way of the touring party I might have some fun on my own.

They take you through very slowly, making a two-hour job of it, because some of the old folks get tired; and as you plod along an official switches on the lights ahead and another official switches them off behind you when you've passed by. It wasn't difficult to hang back to the rear of the party, but it was taking a chance to hide behind a big rock and trust that the rear guard wouldn't stop me. However, he didn't; and presently he switched the lights off and I could see nothing but the distant glow where the party was entering the next section. Rather an eerie feeling, to be left alone while the lights and the voices disappeared. I waited about ten minutes, till there was silence and complete darkness; then I switched on my flashlight and pulled out the first ball of cord.

You understand that I just wanted a thrill, that's all. I wanted to feel, in a counterfeit, second-hand sort of way, something of what Jim White felt 37 years ago. And I reckoned I had more than an hour to explore in before anyone would find I was missing. I didn't want that to happen. The cavern people looked the kind that wouldn't sympathize.

I tied the end of the cord to a jutting rock and began clambering over

rough surfaces toward an opening that looked to be a promising lead into a side gallery. It also looked as if I'd reach it in a couple of minutes, but you can't judge either distance or difficulties in a cavern. Actually, it took me a quarter of an hour and one and a half balls of cord to get to that opening; but when at last I did, I found I was lucky; the flashlight revealed a staggeringly beautiful vault tapering in the distance toward further enticements. I walked on, using up two more balls of cord, hoisting myself over sharp rocks and touching the cool stalagmites as I went by. (That was one of the things the guide had warned us against — we mustn't touch the stalagmites. But I guess Jim White had touched them.)

You can't describe the loveliness of those fluted walls and roofs, glimpsed in the fugitive rays of a flashlamp. I shan't try to, but the thrill was there, all right. Then all at once, through gazing up at them, I stumbled and fell; my right arm grazed a rock; there was a little tinkle of glass — and darkness. Too bad — and I hadn't even a box of matches. Well, there was the cord, anyhow; I had only to rewind it and I'd be back on the main track of the tourists. Not so bad, maybe. But without a light I knew I should have to hurry.

I tell you, it's pretty difficult to find your way over the rough floor of an unknown cavern in pitch darkness and with no guide but a trail of string. I reckon it took me a minute at least to walk a dozen steps, because I had to feel every step in advance, not only with feet but with hands as well, for some of those jutting stalagmites and stalactites would hurt you pretty badly if you ran against them. And I was, honestly, a little bit scared. I got hot and breathless, and once, when the cord wouldn't wind up, I had a second of real panic. But it was only caught round a rock.

Maybe it was half an hour I walked; but I still hadn't come to the knot where I'd joined the last two lengths of cord. I kept feeling for that knot, and when I didn't feel it I kept getting hotter and hotter and a bit more scared. Surely I couldn't have passed it without noticing? My hands grew clammy, and somehow the steps I was making didn't seem over the same ground that I'd passed on the way — which was absurd, because the cord couldn't lead me astray. But still, I wasn't enjoying myself so much, and then, as I stopped to get my breath, something happened that made me lose it, so to speak, before I could get it. That cord in my hand suddenly pulled tight and gave a twitch.

I think I just stood still for a whole minute, wondering if I could possibly have been mistaken. Then I felt sweat pouring down my face. Steady, steady, I told myself, actually speaking the words aloud, I think. I took a few cautious steps forward, trying to believe that nothing had really happened; but then two things happened simultaneously: my fingers came to the knot in the cord, and the cord twitched again.

So I was there where I was, a couple of thousand feet from the tourist track, half a mile or so of difficult walking in between, and also — perhaps — someone or something else in between. Probably one of the cavern officials, I reassured myself with ghastly self-control; somebody must have seen the end of the cord and begun to follow it along. But in that case, reason suggested, why wasn't he flashing a light to look for me? Surely a cavern official wouldn't grope about in the dark? And the answer was, it couldn't be a cavern official.

You think at first it's hard to meet danger; but when you know or think it's coming at you, it's really easier to meet it than to stand still and wait for it. Maybe that's why, when I heard a faint sound echoing from the vault ahead — a whisper of a few stones disturbed as by some stealthy footfall — I hurried ahead, winding the cord as fast as I could and giving it a few twitches myself. Let the other fellow have a fright, too, I thought.

We approached each other — myself and who or whatever it was that was coming; I half-decided to shout, but somehow the words wouldn't come. I certainly was — why not admit it? — as terrified as I have ever been in my life. I'd have climbed to one side and hidden myself but for the fear of losing the cord. That was the dreadful thing about it. I had to hold on to that cord, and it was that cord which was leading me direct to — what?

I walked on farther, my right hand ready for emergencies while I held the cord in my left. Every few seconds I stopped, wound in the slack length, and listened to those footfalls creeping nearer. At last, I judged them only a few yards away and I couldn't hang to myself any more — I rushed ahead and collided with something soft and squashy.

Queer what imagination will do, and how subservient it makes our senses. I couldn't see what it was I had run into; I could only feel it, and fear so dominated my sense of touch that it lost all power to recognize and identify. Not till I heard a voice did I cease to shudder. The voice said, "Well, who are you?" — and in a mad kind of way I thought to myself: Goodness, I know that voice. I've heard it somewhere before. I must recollect — I must — I *must*. . . . And, then, with the almighty effort that one can sometimes command in a crisis, the answer came: Why, it sounds like old Glasier, who used to lecture on Constitutional History at Yale. . . .

"I'm a tourist," I said, as calmly as I could. "I wandered off from the main party and here I am. I had a flash but I broke it. You don't have to be afraid of me. Who are *you*?"

"My name is Glasier," came the answer, surprisingly and yet not surprisingly; and then I suddenly remembered the way I had shuddered, that sense of contact with something soft and squashy.

"That's all right," I said, quite

cheerfully now. "I thought I recognized your voice — I used to attend your lectures. . . . But why the devil haven't you got any clothes on?"

A few minutes later we were resting for a moment on a ledge of rock. "I thought there might have been a small paragraph in the papers about it," he was saying, in the same half-apologetic manner he had always had.

"Maybe there was," I answered, "but I didn't see it. Or if I did I don't remember. After all, if it's as long ago as you say —"

I said that to humor him and he sensed it. "You don't believe me, do you?" he queried.

"Whether I believe you or not, I'll get you out all right," I said. "All we've got to do is wind up this cord for half a mile or so. No need to worry."

"It's funny to think I've been so near — all the time."

"You might have been nearer still and not found a way out of these caverns. They're honeycombed with passages and in pitch darkness like this. . . ." I wanted to put him at ease. I thought he'd been lost for perhaps a few days and had taken his clothes off because he'd gone a bit nutty. After all, it wouldn't be surprising.

Then he said: "Since you are kind enough to suggest helping me, might I first of all gather a few of my personal possessions together? They're only a few steps away. You see, I put them down in case you were going to attack me."

"That's how I felt about you," I replied, laughing, and added: "Yes, of course; pick up your things, and put your clothes on, too, while you're about it."

"I haven't any clothes," he answered. "Only shoes. Everything else wore out, and as it's quite warm down here . . . But there's my spectacles and pipe and money and a book and one or two other little things I brought with me. . . ."

"All right," I said, and then it occurred to me that I couldn't very well join the crowd arm in arm with a naked man. "Look here," I said, "you'd better put on this raincoat I'm wearing — button it up at the neck and maybe we'll get through the cordon all right. Fortunately, tourists rig themselves out in such weird costumes nowadays that we've got an outside chance." I wanted to get through because I realized I had a front-page story if only I could park the fellow in some hotel and give him time to come to his senses.

He put on my raincoat and we began to move along. He held on to me and I held on to the cord. I must say, though I judged him to be pretty well off his head, he behaved calmly and talked quite naturally about things. (Maybe that proved he *was* off his head.) "The first thing I must do," he said, "is to telegraph my wife in New Haven. She must have given me up for dead."

"Sure," I answered, "we'll phone

her tonight. . . . And I've got to get you some clothes, too — and I daresay you'll feel like a bite to eat. . . ."

"No," he answered. "I'm not very hungry. I had my usual meal."

"What d'you mean — your usual meal?"

"Oh, insects, you know — various kinds of insects. The bats bring them to me — every morning."

Of course I realized then that he was completely nuts. But nuttiness is a bit fascinating, in a way — you can't help encouraging people, somehow, to show how nutty they are. So I went on, pretending to take it all in: "The bats are friends of yours, are they?"

He replied, with a curious sort of dignity:

"They are my friends, yes. You have no idea how kind those little creatures are. They will miss me. They haven't intelligence enough to understand why I have gone, but they will miss me, I know. I've trained them to do my bidding — we've all got on so well together these past eight years. This is their kingdom, you see, and I — though it may seem a strange thing for a Yale professor to be proud of — I am the King of the Bats."

"I guess you are," I said, under my breath.

I let him talk on while I wound the cord up to the rock it was tied to; then I found the main track and we began the fairly easy walk to the crowd. It was still quite dark, but I knew I should soon be seeing the glow of light from the main cavern ahead, and I was eager to have my first look at Glasier. I was afraid if he looked as loony as he talked there'd be no getting him through the crowd. Presently we came to a spot where a faint dimness showed in the distance, and in that gray light I found — to my relief — that things weren't quite so bad as they might have been. The professor looked much the same as when I had known him ten years before — a little older, perhaps a little fatter; he had also grown a beard. He had never been exactly handsome, but there had been and still seemed to be a sort of nondescript benignity about him. Suddenly, however, as I began to take stock of him I noticed a strange thing: his eyes were staring into mine without meaning or life. "Can't you see anything?" I asked, as he clung to my arm. "Can't you see the light in the distance?"

He shook his head. "I thought as much," he replied, calmly. "I'm blind. After all that time in darkness I expected it."

Autosuggestion, I told myself, and added, without arguing: "Things are bound to be strange at first — just hold onto me and don't worry."

We reached the crowd in the main cavern and though a few people stared at us I guess we only looked the kind of freaks you see in most places where there are guides and turnstiles. The elevator man stared at us pretty closely too, and at first I thought he'd spotted us from the count. But, no — it seemed that the cavern people were

satisfied if as many people came up as went down. One extra they didn't expect and weren't looking for.

But it was in the elevator I got my second big shock. I noticed that the professor was carrying under his arm a book and a newspaper. The book was *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, and the newspaper, yellow and beginning to crumble at the edges, bore a name and a date that I could read by stooping — it was the New York *Times* for May 17, 1929.

All that evening in the hotel we sat talking things over, and the first result was that I begged him not to telephone his wife. It would be too much of a shock, I said; he had better let someone break the news gently — perhaps I could do it myself. He agreed that was a good idea.

His story hung together pretty well, though it was still, in any ordinary sense, incredible. In that spring of 1929, he said, he had been tramping alone in the Guadalupe Mountains, fussing about in some vaguely archeological way. He had wandered into one of the caves that belonged to the vast underground system of which the Carlsbad group is just a section. Lost, without food or light, he would have faced death from starvation — but for those bats. Somehow I couldn't believe in that item of the story, though if it weren't to be believed, how else? "And they didn't help everybody like that," he said, "because one day I found a skeleton — the skeleton of a child."

"Did you?" I said, thinking to myself that his story didn't really need the skeleton of a child added to it.

"Well," I added, "that's that. And we leave for New York tomorrow, so you'll soon be all right."

I had already decided not to break the story yet, partly because I wanted to verify it before making a possible fool of myself and partly because if Glasier's mind were as unhinged as I judged it to be, I thought he had a better chance of recovery without a horde of newspapermen worrying him. He was my own discovery, just as the caverns themselves had been Jim White's, and I intended to look after him with a nicely blended mixture of self-interest and altruism.

All the way to New York he talked quite sanely about his former life at Yale, his job, his wife, and so on. He seemed very fond of his wife. "She'll be overjoyed," he said. "We simply lived for each other — she must have been dreadfully lonely without me all these years."

He still couldn't see a thing, and I had to guide him in and out of trains. At Chicago we heard a public radio giving out stock-market figures. "Good heavens," Glasier exclaimed, "is Steel Common down to 100?"

"That's how *you* look at it," I answered. "To me it's *up* to 100."

"Tell me," he said, later on, "how is the cause of world disarmament prospering? I devoted a great deal of my time to it before I — er — disappeared."

What I told him didn't give him

much comfort. "Every nation," I said, "is arming to the teeth — arming for peace, so they say, but that's what they said before 1914."

By the time we reached New York he was obviously ill; he was breathing asthmatically; the novelty of the overground atmosphere evidently didn't agree with him. I took him to a hotel adjoining the station, engaged an apartment for the two of us, and made him as comfortable as I could. "And tomorrow," I said, "I'll run up to New Haven, find your wife, and bring her back with me. Meanwhile you stay here and look forward to seeing us." He agreed to the arrangement without argument.

But before taking the train I went to the library and searched the files of the *Times*. Sure enough, it was there — in the issue of May 20, 1929 — a short paragraph headed: *Yale Professor Disappears.* Similar paragraphs continued for about a fortnight, petering out into a final sentence: "All hope has now been abandoned in the search for Professor Glasier, of Yale University, believed to have lost his life while climbing in the lonely mountains of New Mexico."

It was noon when I reached the trim little house in New Haven. A rather nice, elderly woman opened the door and looked at me questioningly.

"Does Mrs. Glasier live here?" I asked.

She seemed startled. "I used to be Mrs. Glasier," she answered. "Now I am Mrs. Strong. My husband is Professor Strong."

So that was that. I didn't know what to say. Just then a heavily built man came out of an adjoining room into the hallway, evidently having heard the question and answer. He advanced toward me menacingly, motioning the woman away. "What is it you want?"

I took one look at him and replied: "Pardon me, sir, but I thought I could perhaps interest your wife in the latest and most economical type of electric refrigerator —"

"You can't," he snapped. "And if you had any sense you'd get your names and addresses out of a modern directory."

"Thank you, Professor Strong," I said, as he banged the door in my face.

I thought before leaving the town I'd call on a friend I knew there, a lawyer closely connected with the staff of the university, who might tell me something about the Glasier situation without my having to tell him how much I knew about it. I paid him what was apparently a casual call and artfully drew the talk in the right direction. "Oh, yes," he said, reminiscently. "It was very tragic. Poor Glasier." When people call you poor after you're dead it means they either think you were a fool or else they liked you or both.

"Yes," I agreed; and then it occurred to me that Glasier's money, if he had left any, had now passed under the control of Professor Strong; and

somehow that seemed a pity. But the reply was, in that sense if no other, reassuring. "Poor Glasier — all he left was a lot of stocks carried on margin, and you know what happened to them in the fall of '29. He'd bought Steels at 200 and Montgomery Wards at 150 — that sort of thing — what idiots college professors can be in finance! A good thing he'd put the house in his wife's name or she'd have been properly cleaned up — I know, because I handled the estate. . . . Anyhow, she married again, so that was all right. Strong's a shrewd fellow — much better head for money than Glasier had."

I could believe that.

So I went back to New York in a rather troubled mood. Somehow, though it would be a front-page scoop, I hadn't the heart to let loose the story while Glasier looked so tired and weary of things. We went out to dinner, but he was too ill to enjoy anything; the change of diet didn't suit him, he said, and I left it at that. Then we went back to the hotel. "Tell me why you didn't come back with my wife," he asked, and I told him why, because, after all, he had to know sooner or later. He took it very well.

"I think she did a very sensible thing," he said.

We talked for a while about various aspects of his situation, and I told him that in my opinion the best thing he could do would be to let me splash the story in the papers for all it was worth and live as long as he could on the proceeds. "It'll be a hell of a story," I said. "That is — if you go easy on the bats. I don't see how anyone's going to believe much in *them*. . . . You ought to rake in a few thousand dollars, one way and another — I'll handle the whole thing for you if you'll let me. Then when the story's cold you can settle down in some quiet little place. . . ."

"Yes," he said at length, "I suppose that's all I can do."

We went to our rooms, but the next morning, when I got up to wake him, I found his bed empty. They told me at the desk that he had checked out very early, having asked a porter to help him.

It was easy enough to trace him. At the ticket office they told me where he had booked to, and when, three days later, I got there myself, I found that several people remembered his fumbling along the street late at night.

I guessed he might have gone to one or other of the chief hotels of the place, and at the second the manager quietly took me aside into his private office.

"It may have been your friend who arrived here yesterday," he said quietly. "But I'm afraid, if so, I have bad news for you. He was found dead in bed this morning. The doctor thinks it was heart failure, but of course he can't be sure. Perhaps you can help us with the identification?"

We climbed to the third floor, and there, lying fully clothed on a bed in the kind of room that hotels always

have, lay the body of the professor. Poor little man — there he was; and at last, at last he looked happy.

"Yes," I said, "that's my friend."

The manager eyed me curiously.

"A rather peculiar thing," he muttered, as if wondering whether he ought to tell me or not. "When we broke into his room, we found it full of bats. Flying about all over the place — he must have opened the windows and let up the screens. . . . Horrible creatures, bats. We had an awful job driving them out. They come from the caverns — you know the caverns near here? Several people say they saw a whole pack of them round the hotel last night — thousands and thousands. It's a very peculiar thing — please don't talk about it outside — it might do harm to my business: people are so superstitious. I only told you because I thought — well, do you think it possible that the bats scared him, or anything like that?"

I looked down at the tranquil, half-smiling face again and shook my head. No, they hadn't scared him. Far from it. He hadn't even seen them, but he had heard their wings — welcoming him home.

BLACKMAIL

by ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

THE WOMAN WAS BLONDE AND attractively thirtyish. Her suit, handbag, and hat matched, rather startlingly, in a pale shade of green. She appeared at midnight at the Fowler Street taxi stand.

"Where to, lady?" the cab dispatcher asked.

"4422 Heliotrope Drive."

The dispatcher scribbled on his call sheet: "4422 Heliotrope; 12:01 A.M." He said to the fare, "Sit down and wait, lady. Be a cab here in a minute."

Only a few cabs operated from the stand after midnight. Shortly one of them drew up. The dispatcher called, "Take the lady to 4422 Heliotrope, Ed."

The woman got in and was driven to the address. It was in a moderately fashionable district and the house, at this hour, was unlighted. The woman got out, paid and tipped the driver. "You needn't wait," she told him.

She took three steps up the lawn walk, then stopped to fumble in her bag, as though for a latchkey. This gave the cab time to drive away. When it was out of sight she turned and walked rapidly up the street, not stopping until she arrived at her own apartment, a mile away.

A night later, at the same hour, she again appeared at the Fowler Street taxi stand. Again she taxied to 4422 Heliotrope Drive. Again, once the cab was out of sight, she walked directly home.

She repeated the operation on thirteen successive nights.

But on the fourteenth night she arrived at the taxi stand five hours early. Twilight hadn't yet faded. Again she was driven to 4422 Heliotrope. This time, after getting out, she was awkward in passing the tip, and the coin dropped on the cab floor. Searching for it delayed the cabman's departure long enough for the woman to reach the house porch and ring the bell.

John Norman heard his front door chimes ring just as his living-room clock struck seven. He was alone in the house. His wife had been out of town for two weeks, but was due home tomorrow. They hadn't needed a servant since Judy, their teen-age daughter, had gone away to boarding school.

John went to the door, opened it, and confronted a woman he'd never seen before. She was slim and blonde and green-eyed.

"I'm afraid I'm lost." She spoke in a tone of embarrassed apology. "May I look up an address in your phone book? I'm late for a dinner party somewhere in this neighborhood. I thought it was in this block, but —"

"Help yourself," John Norman

broke in heartily. "The same thing happened to me once." He stood aside to let her come in. "The telephone's right in that alcove."

"Thank you so much." She went to the alcove, picked up the phone book, and began thumbing through it.

When she emerged she smiled gratefully. "I got the address from the book. It's not far. Thank you."

Then John Norman became aware that she was staring ruefully at smudges on her finger tips. It looked like garden mud. A similar smudge was on her handbag.

"Now, where," she exclaimed in dismay, "did I get that?"

He presumed she'd dropped the bag in crossing the lawn. Stooping to pick it up, she could have soiled her fingers.

"Which means I have to go clear back home." Her lips drooped in chagrin. "And I'm late already." She took a step toward the door, then turned to him appealingly: "Unless you'd let me scrub it off right here! Would you? It wouldn't take but a minute."

"Sure," John agreed cordially. "The powder-room's right there." He pointed to a door at the back of the hall.

"I'm sorry to be such a nuisance." She went back and disappeared into the powder-room.

John Norman heard the tap running and the faint sounds of scrubbing. In a few minutes she came out. "You've been awfully kind. Thanks again," she said.

She left the house. John Norman heard her heels click to the street walk. He dismissed her from his mind.

It was a busy mind. Currently the youngest and most energetic mayor in the history of this city, at the coming election John Norman was running for Congress. . . .

In the morning he drove to the airport to meet his wife.

Edith Norman uptilted her small dark face to be kissed. "I hope you've been lonesome every minute, darling," she said.

"Every minute," he assured her.

Edith had warm brown eyes and looked younger than most women of 35. She was fiercely proud of her husband. A year from now they'd be living in Washington.

"I didn't forget to water the geraniums," John boasted. "And I sent Judy her allowance."

After taking Edith home he drove directly to his City Hall office. The day was filled with hearings, dictations, conferences, and the endless petitions likely to be born in a city of 200,000 people. Strings pulling first this way, then that. It was late afternoon before John found time for a huddle with Pete Delby, who was managing the congressional campaign. With Delby he formulated an answer to a charge made in J. Harrison Hardesty's opposition paper, the *Clarion*.

John was home by 6, tired and hungry.

Edith met him at the door. "Why didn't you tell me you had a party

while I was gone?" she chided him.

"I didn't."

"Then how did this" — Edith held up a solid gold compact with the initials "CG" on it — "get into the powder-room?"

John hefted it curiously. "If gold's worth $35 an ounce, this must have set somebody back real dough. In the powder-room, you say?"

"It wasn't there," Edith said, "when I went away two weeks ago."

Then he remembered. "A woman," he explained, "came in to use the phone. She had mud on her fingers —"

"Begin at the beginning, please. What woman? She's a blonde. I can tell from the powder."

John gave every detail he could recall.

"Where," Edith questioned, "was the dinner party?"

"What dinner party?"

"The one she was on her way to when she got lost."

"How would *I* know?"

Edith looked thoughtful all through supper. Later she scanned the society page of the evening paper, line by line. "It doesn't mention any party last night in this neighborhood."

John settled back comfortably with his pipe. "So what. Lots of small, informal dinners don't get into the papers. The only funny thing is — why hasn't she come back for it? That gold compact."

"Maybe she has."

The constraint in Edith's voice made John look up. "You mean she did? Then why didn't you give it back to her?"

"I mean," Edith told him, "that twice today the telephone rang. I answered it each time. There was a pause. Followed by a faint feminine murmur: 'Sorry; wrong number.' Then a click as she hung up."

John shrugged. "People call wrong numbers all the time. Feel like taking in a show, Edie?"

She didn't. . . .

It hardly began to strike John Norman as anything serious until he came home from the office an evening later. Edith didn't meet him at the door. He found her in the sun parlor looking very tense.

"CG called up again," she informed him.

"You mean Green-Eyes? What did she say?"

"When she heard *my* voice answer she purred, as usual, 'Sorry; wrong number.'"

John reddened. "See here, Edie. We've been married fifteen years. Don't you trust me? You think Green-Eyes is waiting to hear *my* voice answer the phone and then say, 'Hide that compact before your wife finds it'?"

Tears welled in Edith's eyes. She turned impulsively to John and put her arms around him. "She *wants* me to think that. Don't you see? If she were really trying to get in touch with you she'd call you at your office. Not at home in the daytime, where your wife's almost sure to answer. Then, by stealthily hanging up, she

makes herself sound guilty and mysterious."

It was a sobering thought. "It could be a smear trick," John said.

"Of course it could. You're running for Congress. She'd know from the society pages just when I left town, and for how long. If she could make me accuse you of having an affair while I was away, and it got into the papers —"

"But you're *not* accusing me. And it won't get into the papers. Anyway, the whole thing's fantastic. I know my opponent, Lamson, wouldn't stand for a trick like that. Neither would J. Harrison Hardesty, who's backing him. Now, how about dinner, honey?" . . .

At 10 in the morning the secretary who screened John Norman's appointments said, "A Miss Clara Grant is on telephone number two, Mr. Norman. She says it's personal."

The initials on the compact leaped into John's mind. "I'll take it," he said tersely.

The voice on the phone spoke in the same tone of embarrassed apology he remembered: "I may have left my compact at your house the other evening, Mr. Norman. Did you happen to find it?"

"I found a gold compact with 'CG' on it."

"Thank heaven!" she said. "I was afraid I'd left it in a taxicab."

"Did you try to get me at my house?"

"Oh, no. It just this minute occurred to me I might have left it."

"If you'll give me your address, Miss Grant, I'll see that you get it."

"Thank you so much. It's Apartment 1, 3306 Fowler."

She hung up, and John chuckled. So much for Edie's witch-hunt suspicions! Trying to make something out of nothing. Clearly, Clara Grant was quite on the level.

But when he rang his wife to assure her of it, Edith was still doubtful: "Promise me you'll have someone check on her, John."

To please her, John promised. He sent for Dave Marcum, one of the abler plainclothes men on the city force.

Dave came in quietly and sat down. John gave him the known facts. "Now look, Dave. My wife suspects the compact was planted to smear me. I don't think so, but let's play it safe. I want you to go to 3306 Fowler, and find some excuse to talk to Miss Grant in Apartment 1. Size her up. Inquire around the neighborhood and make sure she's on the up-and-up. Find out if she has any political connections."

Dave Marcum's report, six hours later, dispelled the last shadow of apprehension in John's mind:

"Don't give it another thought, Mr. Norman. She *owns* that apartment building. It's a six-unit walk-up. She occupies one unit and lives off the rent from the other five. Crooks hardly ever own real estate. It keeps them from fading when they have to. As for politics, nobody in politics ever heard of this dame."

John hurried home to reassure Edith.

He didn't quite succeed. "I've still got my fingers crossed," she said stubbornly.

He took her in his arms. "But why?"

"Because I don't trust green-eyed blondes who borrow a married man's bathroom and then make pussyfooting calls to his wife."

John laughed. He pinched Edie's cheek and went to his den to work on the campaign speech he was to give the following night at Arlington.

Arlington was in a far corner of the congressional district. John caught a late afternoon train and went back to the parlor car. After making himself comfortable he closed his eyes and began mentally rehearsing his speech.

A voice startled him: "We can talk quietly here, Mr. Norman."

The blonde with the green eyes! Clara Grant. She had come into the car and taken the next chair.

"Well, Miss Grant," John said, "this is a surprise. I'm sorry I've not had a chance to return your compact. I planned —"

"That's not what I want at the moment," Clara Grant interrupted. Gone from her voice was the tone of apology. The green eyes had a predatory gleam.

"What *do* you want?" John asked cautiously.

"Twenty thousand dollars."

John smiled grimly. "I suppose you also demand that I withdraw from the congressional race?"

"You're quite wrong, Mr. Norman." The rumbling of wheels covered her voice. "I don't care who wins the election. All I want is twenty grand."

"A straight person-to-person shakedown. The answer is no. You've nothing on me. Even if you did have, I wouldn't pay you a dime."

"When you find out everything," she warned, "you may change your mind. If you don't, it'll be quite a shock to your wife."

John flushed. "Who put you up to this?"

"No one. I thought it out all by myself."

The train stopped at a station. In the comparative quiet Clara Grant lighted a cigarette and waited. When wheels began turning again she said, "I went to your house every night your wife was away. Always after midnight, except the last time. Those are the facts, and witnesses can prove them."

"Witnesses?" he asked.

"The witnesses," she asserted, "are all innocent, disinterested, and sincere. Now, about the pay-off, Mr. Norman. I'd rather not accept currency. You might try to trap me with marked bills."

"How else," John probed, "could I pay you 20,000?"

"I own the apartment house where I live. It's old and in need of repair, and on the present market won't bring more than 50,000. It's mortgaged for exactly that sum. I'm advertising it in the papers for 70. You

buy it for 70. Which means you simply give me your check for 20,000 and take title to the encumbered property. All done in the open, Mr. Norman, through any realtor you select."

That way, he saw, she'd be perfectly safe. Nothing to prove this conversation. If he accused her, it would be merely his word against hers.

"The deadline," she said coolly, "will be 6 P.M. of the Friday before election."

"I thought you said the election has nothing to do with it."

"The outcome hasn't. But the fact that you're running happens to make you a little more vulnerable."

John seethed. But surely it was just a bluff. How could she prove a series of midnight visits?

"Just what is your threat? If I don't pay before the election, what do you propose to do?"

"The opposition paper, Mr. Harrison Hardesty's *Clarion*," she said, "will receive an anonymous typed note. Apparently, it will come from a disgruntled taxi driver you had a row with one time. Actually, it will come from me. It will suggest that the *Clarion* take a look at the call sheets of the Fowler Street cabstand, with particular attention to a certain consistent midnight customer. The *Clarion* people want to defeat you, Mr. Norman. They'll start digging." . . .

That evening at Arlington, John stumbled through his speech. It was the poorest effort of his career. When it was over he hurried to the station and caught a train back to his home city.

He arrived at midnight and got into a taxi. "Take me," he directed grimly, "to the Fowler Street cabstand."

A sleepy dispatcher was on duty there. He recognized John from campaign pictures in the papers and on billboards.

"I'm trying to check on one of your recent customers," John said. "Mind if I look at your call sheets for the last several weeks?"

"We don't keep a record of names, sir."

"I know. Let me see them, anyway."

The dispatcher pushed a dog-eared book toward John. The entries were in pencil. Each line had a destination and a time of departure. Nothing else.

John thumbed to the first date of Edith's absence from home. An entry said: "4422 Heliotrope; 12:01 A.M." On each of the next twelve nights he found a similar entry. A day later the record said: "4422 Heliotrope; 6:44 P.M."

That was all. He could see that the dispatcher was neither curious nor suspicious. It would be the same with the cabdrivers. To them 4422 Heliotrope was just another house.

But it would be different with smart reporters from the *Clarion*. Tipped to this record, they'd quickly identify the address as John Norman's. They'd question the dispatcher and the cabbies. A consistently repeating fare like Clara Grant would be remembered. They didn't know

her name, but the fact of a series of midnight visits by a blonde would be established.

It could be a field day for the opposition and a hard-hitting sheet like the *Clarion*. From the first it had waged a no-holds-barred campaign against John.

John tossed the book back to the dispatcher. The taxi which had brought him from the station was still waiting. It did not operate from this stand. John rode home in it. . . .

At breakfast he told Edith everything.

"It's a shakedown, Edie. She wants $20,000.

For a bad moment he wondered if she'd doubt him. He could hardly blame her if she did. He was too proud to say, "She didn't really come in at midnight; she came only to the front walk." If Edie trusted him she'd have to figure that out herself.

He knew it was all right when Edith exclaimed bitterly, "She's a devil, that woman! I knew it all the time. Oh, John, what can we do?"

"Let's see if she really *is* running that ad."

John searched through the classified columns of the *Evening Tribune*, while Edith looked in the *Morning Clarion*.

"Here it is in the *Clarion*," Edith announced dismally. She read aloud:

" 'Just $70,000 for this lovely apartment of six compact units. Has every modern convenience. Hardwood floors throughout. BUY IT. Call Garfield 6600.' "

John looked up Clara Grant's number in the phone book. It was Garfield 6600.

"But you said *twenty* thousand, John," Edith exclaimed in confusion. "And the ad says *seventy*."

"The place is mortgaged to its full value, $50,000," John explained. "So I'd only have to raise twenty."

He drove dispiritedly to his office and sent for Dave Marcum. After bringing Dave up to date he said, "My only chance is to get the goods on her before the deadline. Get busy, Dave. I can't believe it's the first time she ever blackmailed anybody. Go back over her life. Find out whom she plays with. I want a microscopic report on her, and fast."

"Here's an angle," Dave suggested. "Maybe she's afraid the *Clarion* won't print that taxicab evidence without some solid charge to tie it in with. Like a lawsuit, or a street fight, or something."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, suppose some man's in this with her. She gets him to punch you in the nose on the City Hall steps, him giving the taxicab visits for a motive. Or maybe the boy-friend beats *her* up, or pretends to, for the same motive. Or say she has a husband in the background who sues for divorce, naming you."

John shook his head bitterly. "You don't know the *Clarion*. It wouldn't wait for an excuse like that to smear me with every dirty straw in the wind."

The deadline was three weeks away.

At the end of the first week Dave reported, "I guess I was wrong, Mr. Norman. She's in this on her own, and I'll bet my badge on it. If she had a husband or a boy-friend or a lawyer working with her, I'd have turned him up by now."

"Dig deeper," John said. "Go farther back."

Another week dragged by. Clara Grant's ad continued to run every morning in the *Clarion.*

Then Marcum reported again. He looked more baffled than ever. "I still can't tie anything on her, Mr. Norman. She's played the stock market a few times, and lost, but who hasn't? All five tenants at her apartment house think she's on the level."

"Keep digging," John said.

He went into the last week of his campaign with a hopeless feeling. What good would it do? Before polling day he'd be head over heels in scandal. The *Clarion* would pounce on it. Of that he was certain. The cabstand data was documentary evidence, and they'd use it with or without a boost from any other source. . . .

The day of the deadline came: Friday before election. At 11 in the morning Clara Grant telephoned. Her voice said ominously, "You have seven hours, Mr. Norman."

Six of those hours slipped by and John went drearily home. Edith put her arms around him. "You've nothing to be ashamed of, John," she said.

"Lots of people," he told her, "will think I have. They'll whisper like witches."

"Let them," she said, with a lightness she didn't feel. She broke away and crossed to the fireplace. She picked up the gold compact from the mantel. "I stopped in at Leighton's today, John."

"The jeweler? Was the compact bought there?"

"I don't know," Edith said. "I just figured that if it were bought in town it must come from Leighton's, it's such an expensive thing. I spoke to Mr. Craft, the man who sold us our silver. He said he thought the compact was specially made. He found a tiny registration number in the lid, and he said he would check through the files and call me. If we can find out who bought the compact, maybe —"

"How did you tell him you got hold of it?" John asked anxiously.

"I said I found it and wanted to return it to its owner."

"But he hasn't called you?"

"No." Edith's voice was dejected. "He hasn't called."

They were both watching the livingroom clock when it struck 6.

"The deadline," John said.

Exactly an hour later the door chimes sounded. John went to the door. The man he saw on the front porch was slight and gray. John didn't invite him in.

"What do you want, Crowder?" John demanded.

Joshua Crowder was no mere reporter for the *Clarion.* He was the managing editor himself. Just now he seemed mild and inoffensive. But

John knew he was tricky and craftily ambitious. He'd go the limit in polishing an apple for his boss and owner, J. Harrison Hardesty.

The man produced a typed note. "It's a copy," he announced, "of one somebody dropped on the city desk at 6 o'clock. Any comment, Mr. Mayor?"

John read it. Its wording ruthlessly fulfilled Clara Grant's threat. Her name wasn't on it. It might have come from a taxi driver with a grudge.

Crowder was too smart a newspaperman not to have stopped by the cabstand on the way here. Beyond doubt he'd copied down the cab-book entries and interviewed the dispatcher and a few cabbies.

"They all describe the same woman," he said, with a studied innocence. "How do you explain it, Mr. Mayor?"

"How would *you* explain it?"

"Obviously," Crowder said with a disarming candor, "it's a crude attempt at blackmail."

"Obviously," John echoed, so harassed that he failed to see the trap.

"Ah!" Crowder exclaimed, his eyes lighting. "Blackmail!" He was thinking in headlines already. "Have you anything to add? We'll have to cover it, of course, in our Bulldog edition."

"That's all." John closed the door and turned to Edith.

Her face was distraught. "But you shouldn't have admitted it was blackmail, John."

"Why not? It's the truth."

"But don't you see? Now you've given him a clear track. He won't even have to bother about ethics."

John laughed scornfully. "He wouldn't let ethics stop him. Not Crowder. It's just the chance he's been waiting for to get in solid with Old Man Hardesty."

He went to the telephone and called Pete Delby. "We're on a spot, Pete. The *Clarion's* printing a smear story. It's a frame, but it's dynamite. Meet me at campaign headquarters, Pete, and we'll hold a wake over it. And maybe you'd better round up some of our friends from the *Tribune*."

After he'd gone Edith Norman reviewed the situation in a mood of despair. In less than five hours that hideous story would be public gossip. It would wreck John's career.

Clara Grant! What did they know about the woman. What could they prove? Nothing, except that she owned an apartment house which she was advertising for $70,000. Every morning Edith had seen the ad in the *Clarion*. A brazen demand, and yet what a cunning cover-up! If John paid her price it would be no more incriminating than if he'd responded to any other ad in the column.

Desolate and restless, Edith picked up the last issue of the *Clarion* and was reading the ad again, when the phone rang.

"Mrs. Norman?" a cultured masculine voice inquired.

"Yes," Edith said.

"This is Mr. Craft, of Leighton's, Mrs. Norman. I must humbly apologize for not having called you sooner

about the owner of the compact. It slipped my mind completely. It wasn't until I got home that I realized —"

"That's quite all right," Edith interrupted. "You are very kind to take the trouble. Did you find — ?"

"No trouble at all, I assure you, Mrs. Norman. Any time Leighton's can be of service to you or the Mayor we will be proud —"

"Thank you, Mr. Craft. Did you find the owner? Was it one of your compacts?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, it is one of ours. And a very beautiful piece of work, if I may say so. It was especially executed for Mr. Hardesty — J. Harrison Hardesty. Mrs. Hardesty will be most grateful that someone of your honesty —"

"But the initials —" Edith began. Then she paused, a chill running through her.

"I beg your pardon," Mr. Craft said.

"You have been more helpful than I can tell you, Mr. Craft. I am indebted to you."

Mr. Craft laughed with derision. "It is we who are indebted to you, Mrs. Norman. Any time Leighton's can —"

"Yes, thank you," Edith said. She hung up slowly. Her mind raced from one thought to another, incapable of grasping the real meaning of this unexpected revelation.

She stared, unseeing, at the ad, then her eyes focused:

"Just $70,000 for this lovely apartment of six compact units. Has every modern convenience. Hardwood floors throughout. BUY IT! Call Garfield 6600."

From the first she'd noted the word "compact," a subtly insidious reminder to her victim. But now, reading the ad again, Edith saw something else. Reading only the capitals, she saw that the ad said:

JHH BUY IT! CG.

JHH stood for J. Harrison Hardesty, owner of the *Clarion*. . . .

Downtown at campaign headquarters, John Norman and his brain trust were sweating it out. Pete Delby was there, swathed in gloom, as was Sam Casey of the friendly *Tribune*.

"When it hits the street," Pete Delby mourned, "we're washed up."

Casey was grimly practical: "Your wife's right, John. You opened the door wide for him when you admitted it was blackmail. Beginning with that as a legitimate news sensation, he can drag in the whole mess. When dog bites mayor, it's news. And editorially he can even be adroit, if he wants to: 'We hope our distinguished mayor will quickly clarify his allegation. In spite of the evidence, reproduced impartially on page one of this issue, it seems incredible that —' "

Ted Porter, a *Tribune* leg man, came in. They'd sent Porter on a scouting tour to the *Clarion*.

Porter stated, "I happened to owe Chet Wilson, their chief proofreader, a sawbuck. So I dropped in to pay him off just as he was reading proof for the Bulldog edition. He got rid

of me before I could see anything but a headline: 'MAYOR ALLEGES BLACKMAIL.' It's a three-column spread, Sam."

Casey looked sourly at his watch. It was 10 o'clock. "In just two hours, John, your name's mud."

In the drawing-room of one of the more pretentious homes in the city, J. Harrison Hardesty sat facing a determined woman.

"You contradict yourself, Mrs. Norman," he protested. "First you say she's trying to make your husband buy a property for 20,000 more than it's worth. Then you say she's trying to make *me* buy it."

"On the surface," Edith agreed, "it doesn't seem to make sense. Still, 'JHH BUY IT CG' either means she has something on you, or else it's a coincidence. I don't believe in coincidences, Mr. Hardesty. I think she made the demand of you, before she ever thought of my husband, and you turned her down."

"Then why," Hardesty refuted, "didn't she shoot her bolt, if she had one?"

"That's the genius of it," Edith said. "The weakness of a blackmailer is that once he executes his threat he's disarmed. He can no longer hope to collect. That was Clara Grant's dilemma. How could she eat her cake and still have it? The answer was to shoot her bolt, not at you but at someone else. It would give you an object lesson. For a convenient alternate, she picked my husband. She framed him, and then made the same demand she'd already made of you. It doubled her motive, because he might even pay off. But her main target all the while has been yourself. Unlike my husband, you're a deep reservoir of wealth which she hopes to dip into again and again."

Hardesty mopped his plump, damp face.

"Is that all?"

"There's still the gold compact. It's too heavy and extravagantly expensive for a woman in moderate circumstances to buy for herself. So it was a gift from some man. What man? Yourself, of course. If it weren't, why would Clara so deliberately needle you with it in the ad, and emphasize the pattern by introducing it also into the parallel threat against my husband?"

"You're guessing," Hardesty said.

"No, I'm not, Mr. Hardesty," Edith said quietly. "*I know.* I know that you ordered the compact from Leighton's. It was made to a special design. And I can prove it. Clara can prove some things, too. She can tell tales to your wife — and prove them. In fact, that's the only real hold she has on you. Your fear of your wife's reaction."

Panic gripped him. He gave an uneasy glance upward, and Edith sensed that his wife was asleep upstairs.

"Isn't it a fact," she pursued, "that you married the Goddard fortune? And that your wife still controls the purse strings? She lets you write checks and give orders. But if she

knew about Clara Grant she could put you out in the street."

"You mean," he gasped, "that you'll tell her?"

"It won't be necessary. I'll make a trade with you, Mr. Hardesty. You take the *Clarion* off my husband's neck and I'll take Clara off yours." He stared hopefully. "But how?"

"I assume Clara doesn't know your wife's voice. And I'm sure she doesn't know mine."

When Edith explained her plan, Hardesty jumped at it eagerly. Coached by Edith, he called Clara Grant on the telephone. He said to her, "I've told my wife everything, Clara. She knows — But here she is. She'll tell you herself." He handed the phone to Edith.

Edith spoke severely into the mouthpiece: "This is Mrs. Harrison Hardesty. Harrison has made a clean breast of his indiscretions, Miss Grant, and I intend to ignore the matter. But if you annoy him again, I'll personally see to it that you are prosecuted for blackmail."

She hung up with an arrogant snap and passed the telephone to Hardesty. "Your turn now. Call the *Clarion*."

"Read it and weep!" Pete Delby mourned as he downed his fifth whisky sour. It was midnight at campaign headquarters and a boy had just delivered them the *Clarion's* Bulldog edition.

John Norman snatched it and looked at page one. The others bunched closely, staring fearfully over his shoulder.

"What is this?" Casey exclaimed. "You been kidding us?"

John turned to page 2, then to page 3, and on through the edition. Bewilderment shocked him. Nowhere was there any mention of himself, nor of a woman who took midnight rides in a cab. . . .

But there was mention of John Norman the following Wednesday, and of his election to Congress. John and Edith sat together in their living-room and read the *Clarion's* full coverage of the victory.

Edith was glowing. She turned to John. "I think," she said, "this would be a propitious moment for us to have a few words from our new congressman."

John's eyes were bright. "No man," he said, "can more truthfully say, 'I owe my victory to my wife.' To her abundance of love, her abundance of trust . . ."

"And," Edith interrupted, laughing, "to her normal allotment of feminine curiosity."

WITHIN THE GATES

by EDMUND CRISPIN

IT WAS IMMEDIATELY OUTSIDE THE entrance to an office building within a stone's throw, almost, of New Scotland Yard, that the thing happened.

The Whitehall area is sacred — if that is the right word — to Government. Trade leads a hole-and-corner existence there, and a house given over to nonministerial purposes is enough of a rarity in the district to attract fleeting attention from the idle passerby. Thus it was that Gervase Fen, ambling with rather less than his usual vigor from St. Thomas's Hospital, where he had been visiting a friend, toward St. James's Park, through which he proposed strolling prior to dinner at the Athenæum, paused to examine the brass plates and sign-boards flanking this particular doorway; and in so doing found himself shoulder to shoulder with a man who had just half a minute to live.

At this time — 8 o'clock in the evening — the street was almost empty, a near-vacuum shut away from the Embankment traffic on one side and the Whitehall traffic on the other. A street-lamp gleamed on the brass and the white-lettered wood: trade journals mostly, Fen noted — *Copper Mining*, *Vegetation*, *The Bulb Growers' Quarterly*, *Hedging and Ditching*. A little beyond the doorway, an elderly woman had halted to rummage in her shopping bag, and immediately outside it, a neatly dressed man with a military bearing, who had been preceding Fen along the pavement, glanced up at the street-lamp, drew from a pocket three sheets of typewritten foolscap clipped together with a brass fastener, came to a stop, and began reading. Fen was beside him no more than a moment and had no cause to notice him particularly. Leaving him still scanning his typescript, he walked on past the woman with the shopping bag and so up to the end of the street. Behind him, he heard a car moving away from the pavement — presumably it was the black sedan which he had seen parked at the entrance to the street. But there was no way in which he could have anticipated the tragedy that followed.

The note of the car's engine altered; one of its doors clicked open and there were rapid footsteps on the pavement. Then, horribly, the woman with the shopping bag screamed — and Fen, swinging round, saw the soldierly-looking man grapple with the stranger who had emerged from the waiting sedan. It was all over long before Fen could reach them. The assailant struck viciously at his victim's unprotected head, snatched the typescript from his hand as he fell, and scrambled back into the car, which slewed away from the curb

with a squeal of tires, and in another instant was gone. Pausing only to note its number and direction, Fen ran on and bent over the crumpled body at which the woman was staring in dazed, helpless incomprehension. But the skull was crushed, there was nothing, Fen saw, that he or anyone else could do. He stood over the body, allowing no one to touch it, until the police arrived.

And at 11 o'clock the next morning: "Very satisfactory," said Detective-Inspector Humbleby of the Metropolitan C.I.D. "Very satisfactory, indeed. Between you — you and that Ayres woman — you are going to hang Mr. Leonard Mocatelli higher than Haman. And a good riddance, too."

"The man must be quite mad." As was allowable in an old and trusted friend of the Inspector's, Fen spoke somewhat petulantly. "Mad, I mean, to commit murder under the noses of two witnesses. What *did* he expect?"

"Ah, but he hasn't got a record, you see." Humbleby lit a cheroot with a newfangled pocket lighter which smelled of ether. "*He* didn't think Scotland Yard had ever heard of him, and it must have given him a nasty turn when we hauled him out of bed in the middle of the night, and brought him along here. He was the only member of the group whose viciousness was likely to extend to murder, and that being so —"

"Wait, wait," Fen interposed fretfully. "I don't understand any of this. Who *is* Mocatelli? Whom did he kill, and why? And what is the 'group' you mention?"

At this, Humbleby's satisfaction diminished visibly; he sighed. "It's not," he said, "that I'm *personally* unwilling to give you the facts. But there's a certain rather delicate matter involved, and . . ." His voice trailed away. "Well, there you are."

"Discretion," said Fen with great complacency, "is my middle name."

"I daresay. But very few people *use* their middle names . . . Calm, now: because I think I shall tell you about it in spite of everything. It's possible you can help. And God knows," said Humbleby seriously, "this is a case where we can do with some help."

He had been standing by the window. Now, with an air of decision, he turned and planted himself firmly in the swivel-chair behind the desk. His office, to which they had returned immediately after the identification parade, was high up, overlooking the river, in a corner of New Scotland Yard: a small, overcrowded room with a large number of gas and electric stoves over which you tripped every time you attempted to stir. Filing cabinets lined the walls; queerly assorted books were piled in tottering heaps in the corners; and the decorations ranged from a portrait of Metternich to a photograph of an unattractive pet Sealyham which had passed to its reward, at an advanced age, in the year 1919. Scotland Yard

is as strictly run as any other office, and more strictly than most. But Humbleby's position there was a peculiar one — in that for reasons which seemed good to him he had always refused to be promoted to Chief-Inspector — and so to a considerable extent he was allowed to legislate for himself in the matter of his surroundings. To that eyrie had come many who had allowed its untidy domesticity, and the tidy domesticity of its occupant, to make them overconfident. And not one of a long succession of Assistant Commissioners, on first introduction to it, had been short-sighted or stupid enough to do more than smile.

Sprawled in the one armchair, Fen waited. And presently, Humbleby — having outlined on the blotter, to his own immense satisfaction, a fat bishop — said:

"We start, then, with this more than ordinarily cagey, more than ordinarily well-organized *gang*. It's two years now since we first became aware of its existence; and although we've got a complete, or almost complete, list of the members' names, together with a certain amount of good courtroom evidence, we've avoided making arrests — for the usual reason that there's been nothing very damning so far against the man we know to be in charge, and we've been hoping that sooner or later his agents, if left to themselves, will incriminate *him*. In that respect, we're not even after last evening, very much better off than we were at the outset; and I think it's quite likely that in view of Mocatelli's arrest, which but for the murder we shouldn't have contemplated, the head man will pack it up and we'll never catch him. However, that remains to be seen."

"Any specialty?" Fen asked.

"No. They've been very versatile: blackmail, smuggling, smash-and-grab, arson — all the fun of the fair. From our point of view it hasn't been any fun, though, and that for more reasons than one. So there was a good deal of rejoicing the other evening when one of the gang, a man named Stokes, got drunk, and attempted a criminal assault in an alley within five yards of a constable on his beat.

"We didn't rejoice at the actual *event*, of course; but it did enable us to arrest the man and to search his rooms. There, in due course, we came on a letter addressed to him and typewritten in code; and it wasn't exactly difficult to deduce that this letter had something to do with the operations of the gang.

"As you know, we've got a biggish Cipher Department here on the premises; and you're aware, too, that complex ciphers — such as this one obviously was — are dealt with by quite elaborate teamwork, helped out by machines. That's as it should be, of course — but at the same time it tends to be rather a slow business: method, as opposed to intuition, always *is* slow. On the off-chance, then, of getting results more rapidly, I gave a copy of the cryptogram to Colonel Browley and —"

"Browley?" Fen interrupted. "You mean the man who ran the Cipher Department of M.I. 5 during the war?"

"That's him. He retired in 1946 and went to live in Putney, where he's been spending most of his time on botany and scientific gardening and stuff like that. But we still use him as a consultant expert from time to time, because there's no doubt that he had a real flair for codes, and could sometimes solve them by a sort of inspired guesswork."

Fen nodded. "Putney," he said. "Direct tube-line to Westminster — and that was about where I picked him up."

"Oh, yes: it was Browley who was murdered, unhappily. And having got that far, you'll easily see why."

"You mean that he'd succeeded in decoding this letter; and that the letter was so important to the gang that they had to silence him and steal his report."

"Exactly . . . I can't say" — here Humbleby wriggled uncomfortably — "I can't say that any of us *liked* Browley very much. He was one of those men who somehow contrive to be fussy and careless at one and the same time — an exhausting combination — and latterly his mind had been going to seed rather: he was getting on toward 70, you see, though admittedly he didn't look it . . . Well, anyway, to get back to the point, Browley rang me up yesterday afternoon about this letter. I was out, as it happened; so he just mentioned his success and told the constable who answered the phone that he'd be coming here with his report during the evening — by which time I myself would be back. I'd warned him, you see, that the report was to be delivered to me and to me only."

There was a brief silence; then:

"Oh," said Fen, in a particular tone of voice.

"So that when the constable offered to have it collected from Putney, Browley said that he had to come to town in any case, on some private errand or other . . . with the result you witnessed. From what we knew of this gang, Mocatelli was by far the likeliest man to have done the job. So we picked him up, and you and the Ayres woman have now identified him as the murderer, and that's that."

"The sedan," said Fen, "was *waiting* for Browley — not following him. It was known that he was coming."

And reluctantly Humbleby inclined his head. "Oh, yes," he said, "there's a leak all right. There's a leak somewhere in this Department. That's half the reason why Mocatelli and his merry men have been getting away with it so easily — though since I first suspected a leak, some weeks ago, I've been keeping the more important information about the gang to myself; I imagine that if I hadn't done that, we'd hardly have found Mocatelli at home when we went to call on him last night . . . Well, there it is: not a nice situation. Rare, thank the Lord — miraculously so,

when you compare our salaries with what a well-heeled crook can afford to offer — but very bad when it *does* happen." He glanced at his watch. "I'm seeing the Assistant Commissioner about it in five minutes. If you'd like to wait till I get finished, we can have lunch together."

Fen assented. "And you've no notion," he added, "what was in the stolen report? You didn't find any rough notes, for instance, in Browley's house?"

"None. His training had made him careful about *that* sort of thing, at least, and he'd certainly have destroyed anything at all revealing before leaving home to come here . . . There's this, of course." Humbleby fished in a dossier and produced a crumpled scrap of paper. "It was evidently torn off the bottom of one of the pages of his report when the thing was snatched out of his hand."

Fen raised his eyebrows. "The blow came first, you know, and the snatching not till —" He checked himself. "No, wait, I'm being stupid. Head injury: cadaveric spasm."

"That's it. I had the devil of a job getting this fragment away from him, poor soul . . . But it doesn't help at all."

Fen examined the line or two of typewriting on the paper. Literally transcribed, it ran: '. . . *so that x inthe treatment of this var eetyof cryptogam care mush be taken to* . . .' "Not," Fen observed, "one of the world's more expert typists, was he?"

"No. All his reports were like that. And he could never resist the temptation to incorporate sermons, on the basic principles of deciphering, in everything he sent us. If only he'd stuck to the point, that bit of paper might have been useful. As it is —" Humbleby broke off at a knock on the door. "Come in!" he called, and a youthful, pink-cheeked Sergeant appeared. "Yes, Robden? What is it?"

"It's about the contents of Colonel Browley's pockets, sir."

"Oh, yes, it was you who turned them out, wasn't it . . . All the stuff will have to go to his lawyer, as there aren't any relatives. I'll give you the address. And do *please* remember, this time, to get a detailed receipt."

"I say, Humbleby" — Fen spoke pensively — "may I ask the Sergeant to do an errand for me? I've just developed the first symptoms of an idea — though it probably won't come to anything."

"Well, provided it isn't anything too elaborate or lengthy —"

"No, just a phone call." Fen was scribbling some words on the back of an old envelope, which presently he handed to Robden. "And from an *outside* phone, please, Sergeant. I don't want there to be any possibility of your being overheard."

The Sergeant glanced at the envelope and then at Humbleby, who nodded; whereupon, collecting the lawyer's address which Humbleby had jotted down for him, he took himself off. "No questions for the moment," said Humbleby, rising, "because it's

time I visited the A.C. But I shall expect an explanation when I get back."

Fen smiled. "You shall have one."

"And also, I shall expect a conference about this business- we've been speaking of. Over beer. It's been well said that salt, once it has lost its savor —"

"Do stop talking, Humbleby, and go."

"Wait here, then, and try not to meddle with things. I shan't be long."

In fact, he was not absent for much more than a quarter of an hour; and his return coincided with Robden's.

"No, sir," said the Sergeant cryptically. "Nothing of that sort. He *had* sent in one or two, but they'd always been rejected, and he was so angry about that that the editor was positive he'd never try again. There was nothing commissioned, in any case."

Fen sighed. "You're much too unsuspicious for a policeman, Robden," he said mildly. "And much too unsuspicious for a crook. And for the two things combined, quite hopelessly gullible."

Fen's tone altered. "It apparently never occurred to you that I sent you to an outside phone in order to have time to ring the editor of *Vegetation* before you did. And the story he told me — and which he assured me he would tell you also when you telephoned — was rather different from what *you've* just said."

Robden had gone white, so that dark rings appeared around his normally candid brown eyes. He looked, and was, very young. But Fen, as he gazed out across the river at the expanses of South London, was thinking of old women in little shops who might one day go in intolerable fear because their protection against the thug and the delinquent had become a mockery and a sham; of night-watchmen burned alive without hope of reprisal in well-insured warehouses. . . . Robden's youth and folly, weighed in the scale against such possibilities, were no better than a pinch of sand; and so Fen hardened his heart, saying:

"It's possible, of course, that the editor of *Vegetation* did in fact tell you a story different from the story he told me. But since he agreed to have witnesses listening to what he said — very friendly of him, that, in view of the fact that he didn't know me from Adam — that's not a point we need argue about for the moment."

"*Vegetation?*" Humbleby echoed dreamily. He had already nudged his leg against a bell-push in the knee-hole of his desk, and now, as Robden backed abruptly towards the door, a revolver appeared, as if by some kind of noiseless magic, in his right hand; so that all at once Robden was rigid and motionless. "*Vegetation?*" Humbleby repeated.

"Just so," said Fen. "Here is a botanist with a private errand in town. He is found standing outside the offices of *Vegetation* with an article of cryptogams in his hand."

"Cryptogr*ams*."

"No. Crypto*gams*. A class of plants without stamens or pistils. So it seemed worthwhile getting in touch with the editor of *Vegetation* and finding out if he was expecting such an article from Browley. And he was.

"This article was what the murderous Mocatelli stole; and very disappointed he must have been when he found out what he'd got. But since, as we know, Browley had the report on the gang's code-letter with him, what in the world became of *that?* Mocatelli simply grabbed the wrong typescript and ran — he didn't do any rifling of Browley's pockets. Nor did anyone else, because I myself stood guard over the body and refused to allow it to be touched. Which leaves the police. *Someone* was a traitor — that much was already certain. So that when the Sergeant who turned out Browley's pockets failed to mention the code report which must certainly have been there, I set a trap for him and he fell into it headfirst."

Out of a dry mouth Robden said: "Plenty of people had to do with Browley's body before I did."

"No doubt. But you're the only person so far who's lied about the *Vegetation* article. And since you would come under immediate suspicion if the truth about that article were known, it's not difficult to see just why you lied."

Behind Robden the door opened quietly, and at a nod from Humbleby the two constables advanced to grip their former colleague's arms. For an instant he seemed to contemplate resistance; but then all the valor went out of him, and he shriveled like a dead leaf in a flame.

"He'll get a stiff sentence," said Humbleby when the party had gone. "Much stiffer than he really deserves. That's always the way when one of *us* goes off the rails, and you can see why." He brooded; then: "Cryptogams," he muttered sourly "Crypto*gams* . . ."

"Like formication," said Fen. "Which, although you might not believe it, has no connection whatever with —"

"Quite so." Humbleby was firm. "Exactly so. And now let us get something to eat."

"O"

Who would have believed that so wonderfully gifted a writer as F. Scott Fitzgerald — author of such books as THIS SIDE OF PARADISE, THE GREAT GATSBY, *and* TENDER IS THE NIGHT — *would have written a straight detective story? Yes, it always comes as a surprise, if not a shock, to learn that the most celebrated figures in literature are practitioners in the noble art of mystery writing, and in the even nobler art of detective-story writing. Recall, if you will, the great names who have been contributors to EQMM — Sinclair Lewis, W. Somerset Maugham, Edna St. Vincent Millay, John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Aldous Huxley, O. Henry, H. G. Wells; and think of the other famous authors who have written tales of crime and detection, without feeling that they have "stooped to conquer" — Pearl S. Buck, John Galsworthy, Rudyard Kipling, Thomas Hardy, Willa Cather, Guy de Maupassant, Anton Chekhov, Robert Louis Stevenson, Oscar Wilde, Balzac, Dumas, Thackeray, Longfellow, and even Walt Whitman . . .*

It passeth all understanding that the detective story should still be the object of scorn on the part of so many literary critics. Perhaps it is because, as one of the greatest detective-story writers once said, "Men scorn what they don't understand."

Be that as it may, we now bring you — unashamedly — a detective story by F. Scott Fitzgerald. So far as we have been able to check, this story is not included in any of the author's published books. But someday, mark our words, it will be — even in a revised edition of, say, THE [BEST] STORIES OF F. SCOTT FITZGERALD.

THE DANCE

by F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

ALL MY LIFE I HAVE HAD A RATHER curious horror of small towns: not suburbs; they are quite a different matter — but the little lost cities of New Hampshire and Georgia and Kansas, and upper New York. I was born in New York City, and even as a little girl I never had any fear of the streets or the strange foreign faces — but on the occasions when I've been in the sort of place I'm referring to, I've been oppressed with the consciousness that there was a whole hidden life, a whole series of secret implications, significances and terrors, just below the surface, of which I

knew nothing. In the cities everything good or bad eventually comes out, comes out of people's hearts, I mean. Life moves about, moves on, vanishes. In the small towns — those of between 5 and 25,000 people — old hatreds, old and unforgotten affairs, ghostly scandals and tragedies, seem unable to die, but live on all tangled up with the natural ebb and flow of outward life.

Nowhere has this sensation come over me more insistently than in the South. Once out of Atlanta and Birmingham and New Orleans, I often have the feeling that I can no longer communicate with the people around me. The men and the girls speak a language wherein courtesy is combined with violence, fanatic morality with corn-drinking recklessness, in a fashion which I can't understand. In *Huckleberry Finn* Mark Twain described some of those towns perched along the Mississippi River, with their fierce feuds and their equally fierce revivals — and some of them haven't fundamentally changed beneath their new surface of flivvers and radios. They are deeply uncivilized to this day.

I speak of the South because it was in a small Southern city of this type that I once saw the surface crack for a minute and something savage, uncanny and frightening rear its head. Then the surface closed again — and when I have gone back there since, I've been surprised to find myself as charmed as ever by the magnolia trees and the singing Negroes in the street and the sensuous warm nights. I have been charmed, too, by the bountiful hospitality and the languorous easy-going outdoor life and the almost universal good manners. But all too frequently I am the prey of a vivid nightmare that recalls what I experienced in that town five years ago.

Davis — that is not its real name — has a population of about 20,000 people, one-third of them colored. It is a cotton-mill town, and the workers of that trade, several thousand gaunt and ignorant "poor whites," live together in an ill-reputed section known as "Cotton Hollow." The population of Davis has varied in its 75 years. Once it was under consideration for the capital of the State, and so the older families and their kin form a proud little aristocracy, even when individually they have sunk to destitution.

That winter I'd made the usual round in New York until about April, when I decided I never wanted to see another invitation again. I was tired and I wanted to go to Europe for a rest; but the baby panic of 1921 hit father's business, and so it was suggested that I go South and visit Aunt Musidora Hale instead.

Vaguely I imagined that I was going to the country, but on the day I arrived the Davis *Courier* published a hilarious old picture of me on its society page, and I found I was in for another season. On a small scale, of course: there were Saturday-night dances at the little country-club with

its nine-hole golf-course, and some informal dinner parties and several attractive and attentive boys. I didn't have a dull time at all, and when after three weeks I wanted to go home, it wasn't because I was bored. On the contrary I wanted to go home because I'd allowed myself to get rather interested in a good-looking young man named Charley Kincaid, without realizing that he was engaged to another girl.

We'd been drawn together from the first because he was almost the only boy in town who'd gone North to college, and I was still young enough to think that America revolved around Harvard and Princeton and Yale. He liked me too — I could see that; but when I heard that his engagement to a girl named Marie Bannerman had been announced six months before, there was nothing for me except to go away. The town was too small to avoid people, and though so far there hadn't been any talk, I was sure that — well, that if we kept meeting, the emotion we were beginning to feel would somehow get into words.

Marie Bannerman was almost a beauty. Perhaps she would have been a beauty if she'd had any clothes, and if she hadn't used bright pink rouge in two high spots on her cheeks and powdered her nose and chin to a funereal white. Her hair was shining black; her features were lovely; and an affection of one eye kept it always half-closed and gave an air of humorous mischief to her face.

I was leaving on a Monday, and on Saturday night a crowd of us dined at the country-club as usual before the dance. There was Joe Cable, the son of a former governor, a handsome dissipated and yet somehow charming young man; Catherine Jones, a pretty, sharp-eyed girl with an exquisite figure, who under her rouge might have been any age from eighteen to twenty-five; Marie Bannerman; Charley Kincaid; myself and two or three others.

I loved to listen to the genial flow of bizarre neighborhood anecdote at this kind of party. For instance, one of the girls, together with her entire family, had that afternoon been evicted from her house for nonpayment of rent. She told the story wholly without self-consciousness, merely as something troublesome but amusing. And I loved the banter which presumed every girl to be infinitely beautiful and attractive, and every man to have been secretly and hopelessly in love with every girl present from their respective cradles.

"We liked to die laughin'" . . . "— said he was fixin' to shoot him without he stayed away." The girls "'clared to heaven"; the men "took oath" on inconsequential statements. "How come you nearly about forgot to come by for me —" and the incessant Honey, Honey, Honey, Honey, until the word seemed to roll like a genial liquid from heart to heart.

Outside, the May night was hot, a still night, velvet, soft-pawed, splat-

tered thick with stars. It drifted heavy and sweet into the large room where we sat and where we would later dance, with no sound in it except the occasional long crunch of an arriving car on the drive. Just at that moment I hated to leave Davis as I never had hated to leave a town before — I felt that I wanted to spend my life in this town, drifting and dancing forever through these long, hot, romantic nights.

Yet horror was already hanging over that little party, was waiting tensely among us, an uninvited guest, and telling off the hours until it could show its pale and blinding face. Beneath the chatter and laughter something was going on, something secret and obscure that I didn't know.

Presently the colored orchestra arrived, followed by the first trickle of the dance crowd. An enormous red-faced man in muddy knee boots and with a revolver strapped around his waist, clumped in and paused for a moment at our table before going upstairs to the locker-room. It was Bill Abercrombie, the sheriff, the son of Congressman Abercrombie. Some of the boys asked him half-whispered questions, and he replied in an attempt at an undertone.

"Yes. . . . He's in the swamp all right; farmer saw him near the cross-roads store. . . . Like to have a shot at him myself."

I asked the boy next to me what was the matter.

"Trouble," he said, "over in Kisco, about two miles from here. He's hiding in the swamp, and they're going in after him tomorrow."

"What'll they do to him?"

"Hang him, I guess."

The notion of the forlorn Negro crouching dismally in a desolate bog waiting for dawn and death depressed me for a moment. Then the feeling passed and was forgotten.

After dinner Charley Kincaid and I walked out on the veranda — he had just heard that I was going away. I kept as close to the others as I could, answering his words but not his eyes — something inside me was protesting against leaving him on such a casual note. The temptation was strong to let something flicker up between us here at the end. I wanted him to kiss me — my heart promised that if he kissed me, just once, it would accept with equanimity the idea of never seeing him any more; but my mind knew it wasn't so.

The other girls began to drift inside and upstairs to the dressing-room to improve their complexions, and with Charley still beside me, I followed. Just at that moment I wanted to cry — perhaps my eyes were already blurred, or perhaps it was my haste lest they should be, but I opened the door of a small card-room by mistake and with my error the tragic machinery of the night began to function. In the card-room, not five feet from us, stood Marie Bannerman, Charley's fiancée, and Joe Cable. They were in each other's arms, absorbed in a passionate and oblivious kiss.

I closed the door quickly, and without glancing at Charley opened the right door and ran upstairs.

A few minutes later Marie Bannerman entered the crowded dressing-room. She saw me and came over, smiling in a sort of mock despair, but she breathed quickly, and the smile trembled a little on her mouth.

"You won't say a word, honey, will you?" she whispered.

"Of course not." I wondered how that could matter, now that Charley Kincaid knew.

"Who else was it that saw us?"

"Only Charley Kincaid and I."

"Oh!" She looked a little puzzled; then she added: "He didn't wait to say anything, honey. When we came out, he was just going out the door. I thought he was going to wait and romp all over Joe."

"How about his romping all over you?" I couldn't help asking.

"Oh, he'll do that." She laughed wryly. "But, honey, I know how to handle him. It's just when he's first mad that I'm scared of him — he's got an awful temper." She whistled reminiscently. "I know, because this happened once before."

I wanted to slap her. Turning my back, I walked away on the pretext of borrowing a pin from Katie, the Negro maid. Catherine Jones was claiming the latter's attention with a short gingham garment which needed repair.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Dancing-dress," she answered shortly, her mouth full of pins. When she took them out, she added: "It's all come to pieces — I've used it so much."

"Are you going to dance here tonight?"

"Going to try."

Somebody had told me that she wanted to be a dancer — that she had taken lessons in New York.

"Can I help you fix anything?"

"No, thanks — unless — can you sew? Katie gets so excited Saturday night that she's no good for anything except fetching pins. I'd be everlasting grateful to you, honey."

I had reasons for not wanting to go downstairs just yet, and so I sat down and worked on her dress for half an hour. I wondered if Charley had gone home, if I would ever see him again — I scarcely dared to wonder if what he had seen would set him free, ethically. When I went down finally he was not in sight.

The room was now crowded; the tables had been removed and dancing was general. At that time, just after the war, all Southern boys had a way of agitating their heels from side to side, pivoting on the ball of the foot as they danced, and to acquiring this accomplishment I had devoted many hours. There were plenty of stags, almost all of them cheerful with corn-liquor; I refused on an average at least two drinks a dance. Even when it is mixed with a soft drink, as is the custom, rather than gulped from the neck of a warm bottle, it is a formidable proposition. Only a few girls like

Catherine Jones took an occasional sip from some boy's flask down at the dark end of the veranda.

I liked Catherine Jones — she seemed to have more energy than these other girls, though Aunt Musidora sniffed rather contemptuously whenever Catherine stopped for me in her car to go to the movies, remarking that she guessed "the bottom rail had gotten to be the top rail now." Her family were "new and common," but it seemed to me that perhaps her very commonness was an asset. Almost every girl in Davis confided in me at one time or another that her ambition was to "get away and come to New York," but only Catherine Jones had actually taken the step of studying stage dancing with that end in view.

She was often asked to dance at these Saturday night affairs, something "classic" or perhaps an acrobatic clog — on one memorable occasion she had annoyed the governing board by a "shimee" (then the scapegrace of jazz), and the novel and somewhat startling excuse made for her was that she was "so tight she didn't know what she was doing, anyhow." She impressed me as a curious personality, and I was eager to see what she would produce tonight.

At 12 o'clock the music always ceased, as dancing was forbidden on Sunday morning. So at 11:30 a vast fanfaronade of drum and cornet beckoned the dancers and the couples on the verandas, and the ones in the cars outside, and the stragglers from the bar, into the ballroom. Chairs were brought in and galloped up en masse and with a great racket to the slightly raised platform. The orchestra had evacuated this and taken a place beside. Then, as the rearward lights were lowered, they began to play a tune accompanied by a curious drum-beat that I had never heard before, and simultaneously Catherine Jones appeared upon the platform. She wore the short, country girl's dress upon which I had lately labored, and a wide sunbonnet under which her face, stained yellow with powder, looked out at us with rolling eyes and a vacant leer.

She began to dance.

I had never seen anything like it before, and until five years later, I wasn't to see it again. It was the Charleston — it must have been the Charleston. I remember the double drum-beat like a shouted "Hey! Hey!" and the unfamiliar swing of the arms and the odd knock-kneed effect. She had picked it up, heaven knows where.

Her audience, familiar with Negro rhythms, leaned forward eagerly — even to them it was something new, but it is stamped on my mind as clearly and indelibly as though I had seen it yesterday. The figure on the platform swinging and stamping, the excited orchestra, the waiters grinning in the doorway of the bar, and all around, through many windows, the soft languorous Southern

night seeping in from swamp and cottonfield and lush foliage and brown, warm streams. At what point a feeling of tense uneasiness began to steal over me I don't know. The dance could scarcely have taken ten minutes; perhaps the first beats of the barbaric music disquieted me — long before it was over, I was sitting rigid in my seat, and my eyes were wandering here and there around the hall, passing along the rows of shadowy faces as if seeking some security that was no longer there.

I'm not a nervous type; nor am I given to panic; but for a moment I was afraid that if the music and the dance didn't stop, I'd be hysterical. Something was happening all about me. I knew it as well as if I could see into these unknown souls. Things were happening, but one thing especially was leaning over so close that it almost touched us, that it did touch us. . . . I almost screamed as a hand brushed accidentally against my back.

The music stopped. There was applause and protracted cries of encore, but Catherine Jones shook her head definitely at the orchestra leader and made as though to leave the platform. The appeals for more continued — again she shook her head, and it seemed to me that her expression was rather angry. Then a strange incident occurred. At the protracted pleading of some one in the front row, the colored orchestra leader began the vamp of the tune, as if to lure Catherine Jones into changing her mind. Instead she turned toward him, snapped out, "Didn't you hear me say no?" and then, surprisingly, slapped his face. The music stopped, and an amused murmur terminated abruptly as a muffled but clearly audible shot rang out.

Immediately we were on our feet, for the sound indicated that it had been fired within or near the house. One of the chaperons gave a little scream, but when some wag called out, "Caesar's in that henhouse again," the momentary alarm dissolved into laughter. The club manager, followed by several curious couples, went out to have a look about, but the rest were already moving around the floor to the strains of "Good Night, Ladies," which traditionally ended the dance.

I was glad it was over. The man with whom I had come went to get his car, and calling a waiter, I sent him for my golf-clubs, which were in the stack upstairs. I strolled out on the porch and waited, wondering again if Charley Kincaid had gone home.

Suddenly I was aware, in that curious way in which you become aware of something that has been going on for several minutes, that there was a tumult inside. Women were shrieking; there was a cry of "Oh, my God!," then the sounds of a stampede on the inside stairs, and footsteps running back and forth across the ballroom. A girl appeared from somewhere and pitched forward in a dead faint — almost immediately another girl did the same, and I heard a frantic

male voice shouting into a telephone. Then, hatless and pale, a young man rushed out on the porch, and with hands cold as ice, seized my arm.

"What is it?" I cried. "A fire? What's happened?"

"Marie Bannerman's dead upstairs in the women's dressing-room. Shot through the throat!"

The rest of that night is a series of visions that seem to have no connection with one another, that follow each other with the sharp instantaneous transitions of scenes in the movies. There was a group who stood arguing on the porch, in voices now raised, now hushed, about what should be done and how every waiter in the club, "even old Moses," ought to be given the third degree tonight. That a Negro had shot and killed Marie Bannerman was the instant and unquestioned assumption — in the first unreasoning instant, anyone who doubted it would have been under suspicion. The guilty one was said to be Katie Golstien, the colored maid, who had discovered the body and fainted. It was said to be "that Negro they were looking for over near Kisco." It was any Negro at all.

Within half an hour people began to drift out, each with his little contribution of new discoveries. The crime had been committed with Sheriff Abercrombie's gun — he had hung it, belt and all, in full view on the wall before coming down to dance. It was missing — they were hunting for it now. Instantly killed, the doctor said — bullet had been fired from only a few feet away.

Then a few minutes later another young man came out and made the announcement in a loud, grave voice:

"They've arrested Charley Kincaid."

My head reeled. Upon the group gathered on the veranda fell an awed, stricken silence.

"Arrested Charley Kincaid!"

"Charley Kincaid!"

Why, he was one of the best, one of themselves.

"That's the craziest thing I ever heard of!"

The young man nodded, shocked like the rest, but self-important with his information.

"He wasn't downstairs, when Catherine Jones was dancing — he says he was in the men's locker-room. And Marie Bannerman told a lot of girls that they'd had a row, and she was scared of what he'd do."

Again an awed silence.

"That's the craziest thing I ever heard!" some one said again.

"Charley Kincaid!"

The narrator waited a moment. Then he added:

"He caught her kissing Joe Cable —"

I couldn't keep silence a minute longer.

"What about it?" I cried out. "I was with him at the time. He wasn't — he wasn't angry at all."

They looked at me, their faces startled, confused, unhappy. Suddenly the footsteps of several men

sounded loud through the ballroom, and a moment later Charley Kincaid, his face dead white, came out the front door between the Sheriff and another man. Crossing the porch quickly, they descended the steps and disappeared in the darkness. A moment later there was the sound of a starting car.

When an instant later far away down the road I heard the eerie scream of an ambulance, I got up desperately and called to my escort, part of the whispering group.

"I've got to go," I said. "I can't stand this. Either take me home or I'll find a place in another car." Reluctantly he shouldered my clubs — the sight of them made me realize that I now couldn't leave on Monday after all — and followed me down the steps just as the black body of the ambulance curved in at the gate — a ghastly shadow on the bright, starry night.

The situation, after the first wild surmises, the first burst of unreasoning loyalty to Charley Kincaid, had died away, was outlined by the Davis *Courier* and by most of the State newspapers in this fashion: Marie Bannerman died in the women's dressing-room of the Davis Country Club from the effects of a shot fired at close quarters from a revolver just after 11:45 o'clock on Saturday night. Many persons had heard the shot; moreover it had undoubtedly been fired from the revolver of Sheriff Abercrombie, which had been hanging in full sight on the wall of the next room. Abercrombie himself was down in the ballroom when the murder took place, as many witnesses could testify. The revolver was not found.

So far as was known, the only man who had been upstairs at the time the shot was fired was Charles Kincaid. He was engaged to Miss Bannerman, but according to several witnesses they had quarreled seriously that evening. Miss Bannerman herself had mentioned the quarrel, adding that she was afraid and wanted to keep away from him until he cooled off.

Charles Kincaid asserted that at the time the shot was fired he was in the men's locker-room — where, indeed, he was found, immediately after the discovery of Miss Bannerman's body. He denied having had any words with Miss Bannerman at all. He had heard the shot but it had had no significance for him — if he thought anything of it, he thought that "some one was potting cats outdoors."

Why had he chosen to remain in the locker-room during the dance?

No reason at all. He was tired. He was waiting until Miss Bannerman wanted to go home.

The body was discovered by Katie Golstien, the colored maid, who herself was found in a faint when the crowd of girls surged upstairs for their coats. Returning from the kitchen, where she had been getting a bite to eat, Katie had found Miss Bannerman, her dress wet with blood, already dead on the floor.

Both the police and the newspapers attached importance to the geography of the country-club's second story. It consisted of a row of three rooms — the women's dressing-room and the men's locker-room at either end, and in the middle a room which was used as a cloak-room and for the storage of golf-clubs. The women's and men's rooms had no outlet except into this chamber, which was connected by one stairs with the ballroom below, and by another with the kitchen. According to the testimony of three Negro cooks and the white caddy-master, no one but Katie Golstien had gone up the kitchen stairs that night.

As I remember it after five years, the foregoing is a pretty accurate summary of the situation when Charley Kincaid was accused of first-degree murder and committed for trial. Other people, chiefly Negroes, were suspected (at the loyal instigation of Charley Kincaid's friends), and several arrests were made, but nothing ever came of them, and upon what grounds they were based I have long forgotten. One group, in spite of the disappearance of the pistol, claimed persistently that it was a suicide and suggested some ingenious reasons to account for the absence of the weapon.

Now when it is known Marie Bannerman happened to die so savagely and so violently, it would be easy for me, of all people, to say that I believed in Charley Kincaid all the time. But I didn't. I thought that he had killed her, and at the same time I knew that I loved him with all my heart. That it was I who first happened upon the evidence which set him free was due not to any faith in his innocence but to a strange vividness with which, in moods of excitement, certain scenes stamp themselves on my memory, so that I can remember every detail and how that detail struck me at the time.

It was one afternoon early in July, when the case against Charley Kincaid seemed to be at its strongest, that the horror of the actual murder slipped away from me for a moment and I began to think about other incidents of that same haunted night. Something Marie Bannerman had said to me in the dressing-room persistently eluded me, bothered me — not because I believed it to be important, but simply because I couldn't remember. It was gone from me, as if it had been a part of the fantastic undercurrent of small-town life which I had felt so strongly that evening, the sense that things were in the air, old secrets, old loves and feuds, and unresolved situations, that I, an outsider, could never fully understand. Just for a minute it seemed to me that Marie Bannerman had pushed aside the curtain; then it had dropped into place again — the house into which I might have looked was dark now forever.

Another incident, perhaps less important, also haunted me. The tragic events of a few minutes after had driven it from everyone's mind, but I had a strong impression that for a

brief space of time I wasn't the only one to be surprised. When the audience had demanded an encore from Catherine Jones, her unwillingness to dance again had been so acute that she had been driven to the point of slapping the orchestra leader's face. The discrepancy between his offense and the venom of the rebuff recurred to me again and again. It wasn't natural — or, more important, it hadn't seemed natural. In view of the fact that Catherine Jones had been drinking, it was explicable, but it worried me now as it had worried me then. Rather to lay its ghost than to do any investigating, I pressed an obliging young man into service and called on the leader of the band.

His name was Thomas, a very dark, very simple-hearted virtuoso of the traps, and it took less than ten minutes to find out that Catherine Jones' gesture had surprised him as much as it had me. He had known her a long time, seen her at dances since she was a little girl — why, the very dance she did that night was one she had rehearsed with his orchestra a week before. And a few days later she had come to him and said she was sorry.

"I knew she would," he concluded. "She's a right good-hearted girl. My sister Katie was her nurse from when she was born up to the time she went to school."

"Your sister?"

"Katie. She's the maid out at the country-club. Katie Golstien. You been reading 'bout her in the papers in 'at Charley Kincaid case. She's the maid. Katie Golstien. She's the maid at the country-club what found the body of Miss Bannerman."

"So Katie was Miss Catherine Jones' nurse?"

"Yes ma'am."

Going home, stimulated but unsatisfied, I asked my companion a quick question.

"Were Catherine and Marie good friends?"

"Oh, yes," he answered without hesitation. "All the girls are good friends here, except when two of them are tryin' to get hold of the same man. Then they warm each other up a little."

"Why do you suppose Catherine hasn't married? Hasn't she got lots of beaux?"

"Off and on. She only likes people for a day or so at a time. That is — all except Joe Cable."

Now a scene burst upon me, broke over me like a dissolving wave. And suddenly, my mind shivering from the impact, I remembered what Marie Bannerman had said to me in the dressing-room: "Who else was it that saw?" She had caught a glimpse of someone else, a figure passing so quickly that she could not identify it, out of the corner of her eye.

And suddenly, simultaneously, I seemed to see that figure, as if I too had been vaguely conscious of it at the time, just as one is aware of a familiar gait or outline on the street long before there is any flicker of recognition. On the corner of my own

eye was stamped a hurrying figure — that might have been Catherine Jones.

But when the shot was fired, Catherine Jones was in full view of over 50 people. Was it credible that Katie Golstien, a woman of 50, who as a nurse had been known and trusted by three generations of Davis people, would shoot down a young girl in cold blood at Catherine Jones' command?

"But when the shot was fired, Catherine Jones was in full view of over 50 people."

That sentence beat in my head all night, taking on fantastic variations, dividing itself into phrases, segments, individual words.

"But when the shot was fired — Catherine Jones was in full view — of over 50 people."

When the shot was fired! What shot? The shot we heard. When the shot was fired. . . . When the shot was fired. . . .

The next morning at 9 o'clock, with the pallor of sleeplessness buried under a quantity of paint such as I had never worn before or have since, I walked up a rickety flight of stairs to the Sheriff's office.

Abercrombie, engrossed in his morning's mail, looked up curiously as I came in the door.

"Catherine Jones did it," I cried, struggling to keep the hysteria out of my voice. "She killed Marie Bannerman with a shot we didn't hear because the orchestra was playing and everybody was pushing up the chairs. The shot we heard was when Katie fired the pistol out the window after the music was stopped. To give Catherine an alibi!"

I was right — as everyone now knows, but for a week, until Katie Golstien broke down under a fierce and ruthless inquisition, nobody believed me. Even Charley Kincaid, as he afterward confessed, didn't dare to think it could be true.

What had been the relations between Catherine and Joe Cable no one ever knew, but evidently she had determined that his clandestine affair with Marie Bannerman had gone too far.

Then Marie chanced to come into the women's room while Catherine was dressing for her dance — and there again there is a certain obscurity, for Catherine always claimed that Marie got the revolver, threatened her with it and that in the ensuing struggle the trigger was pulled. In spite of everything I always rather liked Catherine Jones, but in justice it must be said that only a simple-minded and very exceptional jury would have let her off with a mere five years.

And in just about five years from her commitment my husband and I are going to make a round of the New York musical shows and look hard at all the members of the chorus from the very front row.

After the shooting she must have thought quickly. Katie was told to wait until the music stopped, fire the revolver out the window and then hide it — Catherine Jones neglected

to specify where. Katie, on the verge of collapse, obeyed instructions, but she was never able to specify where she had hid the revolver. And no one ever knew until a year later, when Charley and I were on our honeymoon and Sheriff Abercrombie's ugly weapon dropped out of my golf-bag onto a Hot Springs golf-links. The bag must have been standing just outside the dressing-room door; Katie's trembling hand had dropped the revolver into the very first aperture she could see.

We live in New York. Small towns make us both uncomfortable. Every day we read about the crime-waves in the big cities, but at least a wave is something tangible that you can provide against. What I dread above all things is the unknown depths, the incalculable ebb and flow, the secret shapes of things that drift through opaque darkness under the surface of the sea.

"O"

IN THE PINCERS

by L. J. BEESTON

AT ABOUT HALF-PAST 7 O'CLOCK IN the evening O'Fell got the letter.

At 6 he had arrived home at his Hampstead house, as usual; dined at half-past; kissed his children good night at 7; got out his cigars, cushioned his easiest chair, produced a sensational novel.

Suddenly a terrible blow fell upon O'Fell.

The handwriting on the envelope, stirring the deeps of a recollection which had fifteen years piled on top of it, sent a vague thrill of pain along his nerves. The name "William Kent" stabbed his memory and hurt him. Bah! Perhaps he was only peering for trouble. He jerked open the envelope, tugged out the letter, turned first to the end. It was signed "William Kent."

When O'Fell saw that name fear clutched at his heart with its grasp cold as ice and rigid as frost. The letter ran as follows:

My Dear O'Fell, — You will be surprised to hear from me after all these years. I write in very tragic circumstances. By the time you receive this communication it is probable that life for me will have ended. I have been a dying man for two years. I might have lived for two more, but I understand that my heart is failing, and my last hours are nearly spent.

For two almost unendurable years I have contemplated that lawless action which was committed by myself, and you, and Lennill. It has been an ever-present phantom by my bedside, mocking my physical agony. I used to smile when told of sick men who were haunted by a sin of the past. But it is true; horribly, maddeningly true.

Our crime cannot sit so lightly on your soul that you have forgotten it. No word from me can be necessary to recall it to you. We fled to America together, you and I; Lennill went to South Africa for good. The law may find him there; I can do no more than furnish justice with his name. Until an accident of chance made me acquainted with your business and residence in London, quite recently, I had no idea what had become of you. Not without a bitter struggle did I decide to send you this line saying what I am doing. It may be wrong of me to warn you. If I do so, it is because we were once associates, and because I understand that you have long since been a clean-living man.

I have put down in writing the entire story of our crime. Nothing less than that can help me in these

final moments. Before you judge me harshly, remember what I have suffered, and the dark into which I shall have passed by the time you read this. I was not afraid — then, when we schemed together; but I confess that now I am a man mortally afraid.

My written confession is intended for the eyes of the police, and to them it is addressed. Coward that I am, I could not bring myself to send it while still a living man. It forms part of a correspondence which I have handed to my minister, the Rev. John Andrews, of Furze Bank, in this avenue. I have instructed him to open the packet after my death, so that even he shall know nothing of my guilt until then — until he has forwarded my shameful story to the authorities.

I have nothing more to add. Do not curse a man who finds himself unable to face the unknown without unburdening his conscience of a deed which has embittered the closing years of his life. — William Kent.

O'Fell had started to read with a quaking heart. He finished in a storm of fury.

"The pitiful cur! The puling, cringing hound!" he burst out, jumping to his feet. "Ten times damned coward to leave others to face a music he started himself!"

After this discharge the blood which had rushed to his head ebbed pretty quickly, and O'Fell began to realize that coolness was needed here, not wrath. With an effort he fought down excitement, read the letter again, took a few turns up and down his carpet. And contemplation revealed the fact that he was in about as unpleasant a situation as even a nightmare could scare him with. For the thing which he and his two associates had done was a punishable offense, and although it is true that fifteen years are fifteen years, yet a crime unexpiated never grows old in the sight of the law.

"My soul! They can hand me out a couple of years in jail for that!" he muttered.

Bad enough, and anticipation of its likelihood oozed a clammy perspiration on his palms and lined forehead. But that would not be all. He had created for himself a position; he was respected; his friends were many. And his wife and children, whom he adored, had their happiness founded upon him — sure rock that they thought he was. And he *was* that. That misdemeanor of the past had been made by circumstance, not disposition. He had genuinely regretted it, and with relief had seen it sink deep in time.

Now it was tossed up again.

"Curse his cowardice! Curse his treachery!" groaned O'Fell.

He kept making a half-dash for the door, with intent to go round to the address on the letter and see Kent. But each time he checked the impulse. In the first place the writer

was probably beyond reach. Or, in any case, he — Kent — would certainly refuse to see him. Then, again, the mischief was half-done, since the minister named in the letter was in receipt of the packet containing the vital communication for the police.

"*He* is the man I want to get hold of, not Kent," moaned O'Fell, holding his aching head. "But to approach him would be worse than useless. I know his sort! He has been doing his best to make Kent utterly miserable with some doctrine of eternal punishment. If I go to him with this story he will raise his eyes and merely shrug."

Yet reflection showed him that this did not seem altogether just. Kent had put his confession down in writing, and had not spoken of it to anyone. It was just in the cards that the Rev. John Andrews might be a pastor of a more bracing order than O'Fell's morbid and distempered mood represented him. But since what had been entrusted to his charge was the secret of a dying — perhaps dead — member of his church, to suppose that he could fail in his duty of delivering it was a thought without a shred of hope.

"And yet while I wait here, doing nothing, the minister might be opening his packet, might even now be forwarding that accursed letter to the police!" groaned O'Fell, now torn with wretchedness and fear. "Something I *must* do! Either I must get that letter into my own hands by fair means or foul, or else I must pack up tonight — now, this very minute, and bolt for it. Good God! the police!"

At that instant the bell in the hall trilled sharply. O'Fell turned white as a corpse. He stepped on tiptoe to the door and listened, his heart seeming to beat all over his body at once. A lady friend had called to see his wife; that was all.

Two minutes later O'Fell left his house without saying a word to anybody. He picked up a taxi at once.

"As fast as you can," he commanded.

At the top of Thorn Avenue, which was the address given in Kent's letter, O'Fell dismissed his cab. In peering for the house called Furze Bank, O'Fell found himself opposite William Kent's. There was no light behind any window, save a front one on the first floor. Across the yellow linen blind the shadow of a human form kept flitting. Presumably the master had not yet sped.

The residence of the Rev. John Andrews was a score of yards farther along, on the opposite side of the road. There was no light in the front windows.

O'Fell glanced at his watch. An hour before midnight. In this quiet suburb the residents attended to their beauty sleep, for the avenue was deserted.

With a feeling that it looked bad loitering outside the house, he opened the wooden gate and went through. Suddenly he saw a pale patch of light shining through a window at the back

of the premises. It emanated from a snug little study. On a writing-table was an electric lamp. The desk was covered with papers and two of its drawers were partly pulled out.

O'Fell edged near and peered into this room. It was unoccupied. And as he looked, an impulse came to him and tugged at him, drawing him closer and closer to the open window.

This was the minister's study. There was no question of that. Those open books were obviously theological volumes. Well, what more likely than that William Kent's communication was in one of the drawers of that desk?

For three seconds O'Fell considered his chances. A sudden bold and determined leap might well carry him right across the abyss of ruin which yawned at his feet.

He took a deep breath and climbed over the window-sill.

His first act was to pass a lightning glance over the papers on top of the desk. What he sought was not there. He tugged open the first drawer; it was full of receipted bills. He tried the second; it contained the minister's tobacco and a box of cigarettes. He tested the third. Here was a bundle of papers tied with green tape. He lifted the lot out, and with sweating, frantic fingers was groping among them when a deep, calm voice said:

"Though of real spiritual worth, my friend, I fear that those sermons represent but a slender cash value."

They dropped to the floor. O'Fell's staring eyes glared into the tranquil ones of the Rev. John Andrews, who, stroking his gray beard, steadily surveyed his visitor through gold-rimmed spectacles.

O'Fell might have thought of the window behind him, but the shock of the meeting was the culmination of what he had endured during the past three hours. He caught at the edge of the desk to keep himself from falling.

The reverend gentleman took a step sideways and put out his hand to the button of a bell.

"Don't! Don't!" gasped O'Fell. "I am not a thief! I swear I am not a common thief!"

The other hesitated, lifting surprised eyebrows. "Indeed?" said he, pleasantly. "I rather thought you were. May I ask ——"

"Anything — anything!" exclaimed O'Fell. "I came here tonight to see you. I wanted a certain letter. I found your window open and was mad fool enough to enter surreptitiously."

"And quick enough to invent a story. Sit down. You are, at any rate, much agitated. Pardon me if I keep my finger on this electric bell. A letter? Continue — if your ingenuity will permit you to."

"The letter given to you by William Kent, who is on his death-bed," answered O'Fell. who realized that only promptness and truth could save him.

"Indeed?" said the other again. "This is interesting. I certainly was given a communication, under seal, by the gentleman you name; and

William Kent will probably not last the night out. But what right have you to force yourself so monstrously into this matter between him and me?"

"The right of a man on the brink of ruin," was the hoarse and immediate response. "That letter is for you to forward to the police after the death of the man who wrote it. It contains a confession of guilt, which he had not the pluck to make while living. I am involved in that guilt. He wrote to me saying what he had done. Here is his letter, which I received a few hours ago."

"Really? Put it on that chair and then go and sit down again."

O'Fell obeyed. The other took up the letter and read it through.

"This is fresh to me," said he, after a long pause. "For some time, however, I felt that Kent had something on his mind. What is the crime to which he refers?"

O'Fell licked his dry lips.

"Or have I been listening to a lie?" went on the minister, sternly.

"Would to God you had!" lamented the other, weakly. "It's a long story and I don't think you would understand it — being out of your line altogether. It was a bucket-shop affair. There were three of us in it."

"Ah! Some illegal transaction in stocks, I gather?"

"That's it," was the answer.

"And fraud was committed. I see. How much did you profit by your dirty work?"

"Personally it meant about £1000, — and about as much to the others."

"Three thousand pounds wrung from people who, perhaps, trusted you with their all. I can imagine nothing more atrocious. And so, in just and mortal fear of that secret being brought to light, you forced your way into this room to steal the confession of a dying confederate!"

"To implore your compassion!" burst out the other. "That wrong is years old. I have lived it down — or thought I had lived it down. If it crushes me now, it crushes my wife and my children, who are innocent people, who are absolutely dependent upon me, who — who love me. How can that frightful calamity be a just atonement for my wrong? I will make what recompense is possible, but please spare me so overwhelming a calamity! Do you not see, Mr. Andrews, that Kent's action is that of a coward, a poltroon? In death he does what he dared never do in life. I implore you to give me that letter, or to tear it up before my eyes. It can bring only utter misery, utter heartbreak. You are not dealing with a hardened felon. You who are a minister of mercy show me mercy now!"

It was a cry of anguish which was bound to compel response.

"But it is a very sacred charge committed to my keeping," said the other, obviously moved. "I have pledged my word to William Kent to obey every direction which is contained in this packet." And the pastor took it from a drawer in the desk

which his visitor had not looked into. "How can I surrender so vital a document to you without creating for myself endless doubts later on? It is a very hard matter."

"You will doubt in any case," flashed in O'Fell upon the softened voice. "What if you send me to prison and crush my family? Won't you doubt then? If you err, err on the side of pity. Let me atone by restoring that thousand pounds of soiled money."

"That is nonsense. How can you hope to trace your victims?"

"I admit that that would be impossible. But I will freely and gratefully hand you the sum to devote to such charities as you are connected with."

The other frowned at the eager proposal thrust upon him. "That sounds well, but it is not convincing," he answered, greatly perturbed. "It is a course which tempts, and which is therefore to be distrusted. But perhaps you are, after all, wrong in supposing that the communication you have such cause to dread is inside this packet. In the circumstances I feel I am right in making sure of the point before continuing the discussion."

The reverend gentleman opened the packet with a paper-knife. He drew out two or three letters, which he examined. O'Fell looked at them with scorched eyes.

"Here is one addressed to the Commissioners of Police," said the minister, gravely. He turned it over and over, his fingers trembling with emotion. "It must be as you said. I never thought to find myself placed in such a situation. I admit it is one to shrink from."

O'Fell kept wiping his sweating palms. He burst out, in a voice which was on the verge of breakdown:

"Will you permit me to send you my check for the money, Mr. Andrews? I will send it directly I get home tonight. If you will cash it in the morning and send me that letter I will be grateful to you to my dying hour. For God's sake, Mr. Andrews, show me mercy in this matter!"

"Tut, tut!" said the other, peevishly. He walked up and down, considerably distressed. "I will think it over," he answered.

"And kill me by the suspense," groaned O'Fell. "I cannot face the long hours of tonight unless you give me a word of promise. Will you send me that letter directly you hear from me? I'll go down on my knees if you wish it!"

A long and tense silence ensued. Suddenly the minister faced his visitor.

"I may be doing wrong," said he, "but I will err on the side of mercy. It shall be as you wish. You may go. You had better leave by the way you came in. The house is locked up."

O'Fell tried to speak his thanks, but a sob choked his voice. Suddenly he found himself outside, in the fresh, pure air. What a load had fallen from his numbed heart!

He found a solitary taxi at the railway station, and the driver, under

promise of a double fare, whirled him back across London. He had come in an agony, he returned exulting.

He wrote his check before turning in, and posted it with his own hands. He slept at last: a long, dreamless slumber.

Shortly after noon on the following day a registered packet arrived. O'Fell tore it open. It contained Kent's letter to the police. O'Fell read it from first line to last, and then he held each page, one by one, in a flame, and crushed the ashes between his palms. Thank God he had laid that spectre eternally!

It occurred to him that politeness called for an acknowledgment of the letter. He decided to go in person to express his thanks, for his gratitude was real.

A maid opened the hall-door of Furze Bank.

"Is the minister at home?" smiled O'Fell, cheerily.

"The which, sir?" was the puzzled response.

"The Reverend Mr. Andrews," said O'Fell with some asperity.

"No such person lives here," was the tart answer. "Does you mean Mr. Lennill? If so, you can't see him. He went away early and suddenly this morning; gone for a 'oliday abroad. And Mr. Kent, his friend, 'e went with him. They caught the 10:40 from Charing Cross. I can't tell you anything more."

O'Fell was vaguely aware that a hall-door had been closed, not without a decisive bang, in his astonished face. He turned and went off slowly — very slowly. At the wooden gate he came to a stop and stared down at the stones. He did not seem to be thinking at all; his face expressed only a hopeless sort of stupefaction; yet certain sentences were darting through his half-numbed brain, fragmentary phrases such as "The scoundrel no more dying than myself! . . . Got on my track . . . he and Lennill . . . knew I had made money . . . planned it all between them . . . fifteen years since I saw Lennill . . . gray beard and glasses . . ."

O'Fell threw back his head and made a noise in his throat; and the servant-maid, who had opened the door and was watching his retreat, said audibly:

"Lord! What a man! What a larf!"

"Q"

Most critics agree that it was E. C. Bentley's TRENT'S LAST CASE, *published in 1913, which almost singlehandedly infused naturalism into the detective story. Whether history will ultimately confirm or reject this theory, one thing is certain:* TRENT'S LAST CASE *is one of the modern classics in the field and its influence on the development of the detective novel will never be forgotten. Even so realistic an authority as Sir Basil Thomson, once head of Scotland Yard, said publicly that in his opinion* TRENT'S LAST CASE *is the best detective novel ever written.*

Mr. Bentley has been inactive, so far as detective stories are concerned, for some time. He has not written a short story about Philip Trent ever since the publication of TRENT INTERVENES, *and that goes back fifteen years. But for EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest, Mr. Bentley came through with a short story which, while not a detective short, may also be destined for a classic niche.*

In our introduction to the James Hilton story in this issue, we called your attention to what Vincent Starrett listed as the three major divisions of the mystery story: the ghost story, the riddle story, and the detective story. In this issue we bring you, in addition to Mr. Hilton's "pure" modern mystery tale, outstanding examples of Mr. Starrett's three subdivisions. You will find detection in the stories by T. S. Stribling, Edmund Crispin, Charles B. Child, Thomas Flanagan, and F. Scott Fitzgerald; you will find riddle in the double story by Frank R. Stockton; and you will find the third classification superbly represented in E. C. Bentley's tale of the Harvest Bringer of Bolivia and the primitive Indians who believed and the Englishman who did not . . .

THE FEEBLE FOLK

by E. C. BENTLEY

> "*The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks.*" Proverbs XXX, 26.

MAJOR HUNTINGDON SAID IT WAS nonsense. Later on he repeated his remark in Spanish to Father Aquila. They were sitting in the piazza of the Father's house in the Estancia San Tomas, which lay on the farthest fringe of the Catholic mission on the great Bolivian plateau.

The Major was carefully cleaning a pair of beautiful hunting rifles.

"Pablo does not lie," said the old priest. "If he says he has seen, he has seen." The Major grunted. He believed that all Indians lied; and three weeks' stay had convinced him that Father Aquila knew little of the world. But the Father knew the flock he had watched over for seventeen years, and he understood each one of his 400 Indians as Major Huntingdon never understood anyone in his life.

The Father sent for Pablo, and Pablo, a stalwart young Indian, came up from his fence-mending. He glanced unfavorably at Huntingdon, whose popularity among the flock was small. He was always doing something — which was bad; and always wanting something done — which was worse. He entertained no high opinion of them, and this he did not conceal. He told them in English that they were a lazy lot of duffers, and they seized the sense of the criticism without difficulty.

Pablo repeated to Father Aquila the story he had already told the Major.

"Last night as the sun went down," he said, "I saw the Harvest Bringer. Every year he is seen by a few as he runs over the fields, but always far off, and always at the setting of the sun. The heathen Indians say that his power begins at that time of the day, and lasts till dawn. Without doubt he is a devil, Senor Commandant, but without doubt there is never any harvest unless he has made his path through the fields in spring. The Father knows that four times since I was born our old men have warned him that there would be no harvest, because the Harvest Bringer had not come down from the mountains. The first time the Father would not listen, but the hail came, and the crops were killed, and many died of want. Is it not so, my Father? And the other times the Father, when they warned him, sent for stores from the Holy Fathers at La Paz, and we were fed."

"It is true," assented Father Aquila. "If I had not done so," he added in his guest's ear, "my flock — poor souls, can I blame them? — would infallibly have left me and joined themselves to the heathen again."

"And since by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin," continued Pablo, "this devil is permitted to remain upon the earth and bring the poor Moxos their harvest, we rejoice and praise God when he is seen, and his tracks are found in the young barley, as the Senor Commandant found them this morning."

Major Huntingdon was surprised at Father Aquila allowing a gross superstition of this sort to survive. For his part he would believe in the existence of a white rabbit that was bigger than a sheep when he had actually seen it. The tracks which he had come upon that morning had been made by some animal larger than anything he had ever heard of as inhabiting those regions, and he intended to find out what the animal was. He believed it was a bear. If he could get

a couple of men he would start next morning to find it. In a day or two he hoped to return with the skin of the Harvest Bringer, and that absurd story being at an end, the Father would be able to teach Christianity without comprehending the heathenism of the country.

While Major Huntingdon spoke thus, Pablo listened with a quiet smile. "Do not alarm my people," pleaded Father Aquila. "If you talk in this way, they will be shaken. Their faith is very young, and the fear of their old gods is not bred out of them by any means. Pablo, you will be silent about this. The Senor Commandant will not go."

"But I will go," said Huntingdon. "I am determined to put an end to this folly. You ought not to stand in my way, Father; it is clearly best for you that it should be stopped. Besides, an animal of this size found on the *puna* is a matter of scientific interest. And I must own that this is an irresistible chance for a little hunting in a country where I have seen nothing but sheep and rabbits."

"Let the Senor Commandant go," said Pablo, with a smiling face. "He will find the rabbits of this country troublesome, if he should by chance go hunting one of them. Do not be anxious for the people, my Father. They will only laugh at the man who talks of going out to hunt the Harvest Bringer. For the heathen Indians say he is a kind God, and that his wrath is against none but those who molest him. He will not be angry with us for the madness of one stranger."

Huntingdon did not look at the speaker. He glanced up the barrel of the rifle with which he was busy, snapped the breech, laid the weapon down, and took up the other. "The people will laugh at the man who talks of coming back with the skin of the Harvest Bringer," went on Pablo, in a slightly raised voice. "When he sets out on his hunting, perhaps they will pity him."

"Pablo, you are not respectful," said the Father. "You may go." The young Indian went out.

"My son," said Father Aquila, "do not go. Many men have gone into the *desiertos* who never came back, and they went after no more than a strayed horse or a bullock, or only to find out the secrets of the land. The solitude has eaten them up. But why do you go? To hunt down and kill a creature you never saw, that does no harm — many think it does much good. I say nothing, I do not know; but this I say, that a man living as I live, alone in spirit among my untaught children, loses hold of the certainty he used to have about such things. You say it is nonsense; I say, who knows? But I care nothing for that, I worship the Saviour. I care for this, that we must not wantonly hurt the creatures. My son, you must have a cruel heart. In this place we have many sins to our charge. We are lazy, we gamble a little, we drink a little; but we are kind to one another and to all living works of God. Stay with us, I implore you, and seek for

gold if you must. But do not go out into the *desiertos* on such an errand. I feel a presentiment of great evil in it."

Father Aquila's guest was by no means a hard-hearted man. In his own country his name was well-known as that of a fine sportsman and daring hunter. He had the self-contained, energetic spirit which delights in putting forth skill to overcome difficulty and danger, in meeting and vanquishing nature on her own ground. Part of the same character was the fondness for travel and exploration which he was rich enough to indulge; and since quitting the service these pursuits had formed the serious task of his life. He had early lost his wife, and it was only for the sake of a son, already come of age, that he passed a month or two of each year in England. The rest of his days he chose to wander in little-known places of the earth, to live roughly, and to shoot. Many men admired Huntingdon, but few beside those of a nature like his own understood or liked him, and it was not strange that the mild old Jesuit missionary, who had spent half his manhood within consecrated walls and the rest among the gentle Indians of that country, should sometimes shudder at this embodiment of the predatory Englishman so familiar to Latin minds.

But he did not forget that he was host. Huntingdon had come into that country to look for signs of gold — the region had once been the bed of a great inland sea. The Father had eagerly invited him to take up his quarters at the Mission, and it was now the third week of a stay that had meant much to the old man in his isolation.

So Father Aquila warned him. But his guest was determined to follow the mysterious trail that led over the *desiertos*, and the next day he started on his journey. To carry food, weapons, and camping-kit, he took with him two Indian hunters, men of a wild tribe that had strayed across from the Southeast, and had pitched its lodges by the Estancia San Tomas. Not a man of the Father's Christian flock would have followed that trail for any earthly or heavenly consideration. They knew they had done their old gods an ill enough turn in forsaking their worship, and would run no further risk. But the savage hunters were unconverted. When it was explained to them that Huntingdon wished to find the creature that had broken the singular tracks through the barley, they were incredulous at first, then laughed and agreed, with much grunting and in limited Spanish, to go with him upon the high terms he offered. They thought of this chase of the rabbit as we think of the quest of the pot of gold at the rainbow's foot; but they had no objection to taking Major Huntingdon's money. So at noon he set out with his bearers across the *desiertos de Lipez*, following the broad trail in the waving grass toward the distant mountains. . . .

Over the face of the *puna*, the high plains of the great plateau, the Major and his hunters followed the track for two days, cut by the blasts that rushed down from the peaks, scorched and blinded in the daytime, nipped by the dry cold at night. The trail lay straight as an arrow towards the Cordillera. On the third day they began to ascend the first slopes of the mountain wall, and left the long, brushing grasses behind them. A light snowfall had covered the surface of the ground and the tracks showed clear. They led to the upper ridges.

In the night of the third day the Indians fled. They had uttered no word and made no sign. The Major awoke in the morning to find them gone, and what was curious was the fact that they had taken nothing with them. The bags of food were untouched, and, stranger still, the blankets, their own cherished property, in which he had seen them roll themselves, lay tumbled on the ground as though the sleepers had been awakened suddenly to a danger so appalling that escape could be their only thought.

Huntingdon was one whom natural difficulties filled with an antagonism hardly less than that which he felt against men who thwarted him. He resolved to push on. He believed he must be close upon his game, for no creature would choose a home among the bare and frozen peaks to which another day's scaling of the slopes would bring him. Taking with him a flask of brandy and a little food, he went forward, rifle on shoulder, breathing hard, as all strangers breathe who taste the air of the upper Cordillera. The trail, still clear upon the snow that veiled the rocky ground, soon led him into a broad defile winding upwards between two rugged cliffs. Cut off now from any view of the plains, he marched through a wilderness of towering rocks.

The mountains that rose on either side of him formed a picture of strange, wild beauty. But cold death seemed to lie upon the place. The wind had fallen utterly. Not a cloud flecked the sky. So clear was the air, so unbroken the stillness, so lonely, barren, and destitute of all life was the scene, that the hunter might have fancied himself a wanderer among the lunar volcanoes, solitary as no man ever was, the one being alive in the utter desolation of a perished world.

Huntingdon was no dealer in fancies; but he felt, as the day wore on, an influence from these surroundings that he did not like. It cost him something of an effort to continue his march when the thought came to him of how it would be when darkness began to fall. But he pressed on, hour after hour.

The sun dropped slowly behind the mountain rim. The tracks went up a low ridge of rock, a step leading to a higher level of the ascent. This he climbed quietly, until his head rose above the long, gentle, snow-covered slope that lay beyond.

Not 50 yards from him was the great rabbit. It sat up on its haunches

in a listening attitude, motionless and tense, its ears pointed, its flank turned toward the disturbing sound. Snow-white all over, without the ugly head-markings of the native kind, it stood out clearly, as the pursuer's eye came cautiously above the level against the dark rocks of the peak beyond; a shot impossible to miss. But it was the portentous size of the animal that made Huntingdon catch his breath. In the mess-room of his old regiment hung a pair of the finest horns in the world, given by himself; in his son's rooms in London lay the skin of a tiger that was historical. But the head of a rabbit as big as a small donkey, measuring a good five feet from the scut to the tip of the ears, was a trophy never dreamed of.

The monstrous creature dropped upon its forepaws and ran a few steps, then sat up again. A man, with more sense of the prodigious, might have shuddered in awe. Huntingdon trembled with excitement. All his terrors left him at the sight of the game. He crouched out of view. His one thought was to kill and to kill cleanly. Steadying himself with an effort, he raised his rifle, and without a sound rested the barrel and took aim.

The echo of the shot roared up the mountain with a hideous clapping tumult, like the beating of a devil's alarum. Huntingdon dropped his weapon. Suddenly he was exhausted and faint. For a moment he was struck with a mad, inexplicable fear and sense of horror, that came upon him like a gust of icy wind. He almost fell, his brain reeling; but he flung away the unknown delusion that was mastering him. Every trained instinct of the mind rose up and cried shame.

There lay the huge rabbit on its side, still and white as the snow all round it. He reached it and bent down to examine the prize. A clean shot through the heart, with little blood to show the wound in the coat. As he buried his hands in the warm fur, there was a slight convulsive movement of the head. A last flicker of life burned up suddenly in the glazing eye, and it stared into his own.

The gillies of the Scottish Highlands know what is meant by the deer-fever; and so may any man, they tell you, who goes to blood the dying stag. Whoever looks in the eye of the victim as life ebbs is smitten, they say, with a nausea that weakens and unmans him. Huntingdon had been severely wounded in more than one engagement, but nothing in his experience was comparable for a moment to the sudden deadly faintness, the horrible sickness and collapse that fell upon him as the dark distended pupil met his look. He groaned heavily, and his hands went up to his head; then, with shut eyes, he staggered a few paces away. As the twilight hurried down, he sank upon the snow-covered moss like a dead man.

When Huntingdon came to himself, shattered and almost dead with

cold, it was day. That he lived at all was a miracle, a sheer impossibility somehow darkly brought to pass; but this did not strike him until long after. His hand first struggled to the pocket where his flask should be. Still in a daze, he took brandy, and his mind came back wanderingly; he began to remember and looked about him.

Was nothing changed? As the senses rallied, he perceived again the dull sky and dark peaks, the white desolation and the barren solitude. And the silence was still the silence of a dead world. But now he scrambled to his feet and gazed round him with wide open eyes.

For the body of the rabbit was gone. There was no trace of it to be seen. The monstrous bulk that two men could have carried only with difficulty had disappeared and left no vestige behind it. The tracks of his own feet about the place were plain and sharp. The snow was crushed and melted where his own body had lain. But where the great rabbit had fallen dying on the ground, the powdery flakes lay smooth and unbroken, nor was there any other mark visible in any direction except the ones he himself had made.

Staggering back upon the path he had traveled, he left that fearful place. In his spinning brain a cold fear and a sense of guilt like Cain's warred against the commonplace that still stood at bay. Now and then as he stumbled among the rocks in panic haste he would tell himself he was behaving like an idiot, with desperate appeals to his expiring reason. Such moments he clung to pathetically. In these poor intervals of self-delusion he would talk aloud to himself, as frightened children do, with a pretense of facing a bad but by no means hopeless situation. He would argue himself out of his haunting terror. The fatigue and the night in the open, he told himself, had played the deuce with his wits, but he must manage to keep going until he saw the Mission again. The old Padre was quite right, and he had been a fool; but he must not lose hold of himself, he must keep cool and he would pull through. But an instant's pause in the flight would bring his horror on afresh.

He felt that he must rejoin his kind or go mad and die of his fears. He dared not think of them or shape them, but he knew that to look behind him would kill him, and he made on with eyes fixed on points ahead. The marks of his own ascent were still clear, but of those which he had followed up the slopes there was no sign. He reached the plain and the spot where the abandoned burdens lay, and pressed on over the *puna* along the broad track made by his own and the Indians' feet. So he fled for a day and a night and part of a second day, lighted along the trail by the burning sun and the great full moon that flooded the plains with livid light.

In the afternoon of the second day Father Aquila, coming out upon his piazza, saw the hurrying figure with

round, glassy eyes and sunken face of a deadly white coming toward the house. For a moment he did not recognize the man, and drew back scared, but when he saw him fall upon the ground and lie still, he ran to him, knowing it must be Huntingdon returned. The good priest had him carried to bed and tended him by day and night, through a week of fever and madness that left scarcely a hope of recovery. Sometimes he lay inert and speechless, exhausted and half-dead; sometimes he raved and fought madly to escape. The Father had no English and could make nothing of what he heard.

At last a good North-country constitution triumphed over the effects of exhaustion, exposure, and shock. Huntingdon began to mend and grew sane. Father Aquila asked no questions, for it was best for the patient to lie still and think of little until he should be stronger. But he soon demanded to know if the two Indian hunters had come back, and would have an answer. Then he was told that nothing was known of them; but that just before his own return the whole tribe had fled in the night eastward toward the Vermejo river.

The invalid, as soon as he could be moved, was taken by short stages to the town of La Paz. There he was visited by a physician of great repute, an Irish medical student who had left his own country under a cloud. After a long examination this practitioner thought it the safest plan to prescribe some harmless drugs and to talk of *fiebre amarilla.* But his patient had seen a whole village dying of it in the Lipez country, and he knew that shuddering and nausea at sunset every day, with a tendency to start at shadows, were not among the symptoms. Nevertheless he mended fast, and his nerve came back. He called his illness "the horrors," treating it lightly, and decided, as soon as he had gathered strength, to push on through the Andes with a few men and mules, and so southeastward to the River Plate. The journey was long and rough, but his adventurous taste was alive again, and nothing would persuade him to return to the Estancia San Tomas, thence to gain the head of the Arequipas railway.

So it fell out that Father Aquila saw no more of his Englishman. Huntingdon wrote him a letter full of gratitude, enclosing a gift to the Mission whereby it profited for many years after. But the Englishman could not induce himself to go again within sight of the peak of Illimani.

Huntingdon stood on the deck of the *Merlin,* one of the Cheek & Macconochie boats which, dispatched at regular intervals, and fitted with electric light, refrigerators, and all modern comforts, accommodated (so the advertisement had said) a limited number of passengers. When he felt the ship lifting to the swell as she stood out of Buenos Aires he was conscious of a sense of relief. "Let me get away from the country and the climate," he thought, "and I'll soon

shake this off." He had convinced himself that "this" was something in the air that affected his health. "I've not been thoroughly right," he told the *Merlin's* captain, "since a day's shooting I had up on the Bolivian *puna*. I took a touch of something that evening —" he was shivering as he spoke — "that I've never got rid of, and haven't been able to hold a gun since. Just want this breeze to blow through me a bit, eh?" And the captain agreed, looking at him with curiosity.

The second officer, Mr. Tiarks, was at his seasons a sentimental man. That evening something moved him. He leaned beside Huntingdon on the rail for some time in silence, as the distant coast faded and dwindled to a blue streak. "Now that is what I call a perfect sundown, Major," he said at last. "That is a beauty — you can't show me the beat of it. No, sir, you can *not*. All that gorgeous color and that rim of the sun showin' over that long streak which is Brazil — don't it make you feel kind of widened in your mind, an' full of rest an' peace an' goodness? And now just notice that cloud risin' up out of South America, comin' right for us before the wind. Why, now, if that ain't cute . . . See what it is, Major? Like a big rabbit a-settin' up, the very spit, his ears cocked an' all . . . You look bad, sir. What's wrong with you, anyway?"

A head, the captain's, appeared above the bridge-railing and said, "Your spell, Mr. Tiarks." The captain was going below to preside at table, towards which the limited number of passengers were making their way. But the Major did not seem enthusiastic about his dinner. He walked away down the deck and sought his cabin.

Mr. Tiarks, mounting the bridge, remarked in a puzzled tone: "He's gone early. A light swell like this don't affect 'em much as a rule, but there's all sorts of stomachs in this world. Told me he was a good sailor too."

"That man's not sick," said the captain, shaking his head. "I know him for a seasoned traveler — tell it in a million ways. Something on his mind, though; he kind of looks that way to me. Did you make any remark calculated to stir up bitter memories or aggravate his bile in any way?"

"Aggravate nothin'," replied Mr. Tiarks, slightly piqued. "We were just discussin' scenery an' suddenly he wilted. We were speakin' of that cloud, captain. Looks queer, now, don't it?"

"Why, yes," assented the captain, willing to make conversation for a few moments. "Like a fat old rabbit, looks to me. Reminds me of something in *Othello*. And with this wind," he added after a slight pause, "she'll be right over us pretty soon. Well, now, I'm due below. Keep her just so." And he retired.

At 3 o'clock on a hot August day the *Merlin* came alongside her quay at Southampton, and young

Robert Huntingdon waved his cap in the air as the Major appeared on the upper deck and glanced round.

"Awfully pulled down the old governor looks," was the son's inward observation. The drawn face with its hollow eyes startled and pained him. He had never before seen his father in anything but perfect health.

To this son, who was now preparing to enter his father's profession, Huntingdon was fondly attached, and young Robert returned fully the affection of the only parent he had ever known. And beyond this each considered the connection an extremely creditable one; there was admiration and respect on both sides, for on nearly all matters their hearts were in agreement. The Major, now meeting the boy after more than a year's absence, felt more emotion than he ever showed.

Each was completely at his ease by the time the train ran into Waterloo. On both sides there had been much to say. All queries about his health Huntingdon satisfied with a few words borrowed from the diagnosis of the doctor at La Paz, and in good faith declared that the voyage had worked a cure. Marked though he was by suffering, his nerves were whole again, his slumbers unbroken, and the morbid fancies that had come from time to time plagued him no more, violently driven out by the undiversified eating and sleeping of the Atlantic passage. So profoundly was he now convinced that his adventure on the mountain was simply delirium born of hunger and fatigue that it had slipped in a few eventless days into the place of visions. There Huntingdon, whom every hour took farther from the *desiertos*, fully believed his ghastly experience to have found its home. He said nothing of it to his son.

"Now I'll tell you what I've done," Robert had said as they journeyed to London. "As soon as I got your letter and heard how you'd been knocked over and were still seedy, I thought you'd want to lie up a bit and rest in the country till you were right again; so I wrote to the Whim and told Dickinson to get things straight at once, as we should be coming down to fish. I heard from him on Wednesday that the place was all ready for us, and I sent off Murdoch yesterday with Topsy and Turk. All we've got to do is to pack up our kits and start off as soon as you like. How does that strike you?"

It struck Huntingdon as an excellent plan. The Whim was the name given by him in the early days of his marriage to a small farmhouse in the Lake Country, bought to gratify a fancy of his wife. They had lived there a great deal till her death, for the fancy clung, and he had often since passed a month or two there shooting, sailing, and fishing with his son, when he returned from traveling and hunting in far lands. The thought of the peaceful, comfortable little house, of days with the rod, and long moorland rides was very grateful to him. It was arranged that the next day or two should

be spent in town settling the Major's affairs; then they would go North.

But the success of the arrangement was dashed at the very beginning by a singular thing which happened on the second night passed in London. Huntingdon was occupying a spare bed at Robert's chambers in the same room with his son. The night was cool, and after he had turned in, Robert's mind returned to the novel idea that his father's health called for attention. Perhaps he was not warm enough. Foraging in the dark he drew forth a large traveling rug and threw it over the bed; Huntingdon thanked him drowsily and pulled it over his ears. But immediately afterwards he spoke in a different tone.

"What skin is this, Bob?" he said.

Robert Huntingdon had never in his life heard the voice of mortal fear. Like most of the young men he had to do with, he was full of physical courage. But in the way these words were spoken in the darkness and the silence there was something which made him start up in bed with the sweat on his forehead. The accents were not loud, but low and stammering like a dying man's, and with this there was a subtle, wordless influence, the telepathy of dread.

The slow footsteps of a policeman, in every tread the ordered life of today, approached and passed the house. The spell snapped. Robert Huntingdon shook his head, as clearing the brain of some rags of ancient nature, laughed shortly, and turned his eyes to where in the deep gloom he could faintly, distinguish hands clutching at the rug. His father, too, had heard the tramp of the feet that never rested upon virgin earth in all their round, and understood their criticism: that to feel as one may feel on the Cordillera is to make an ass of oneself in rooms off the Haymarket. The Major strove to rally himself and said in a firmer voice, "I suppose it's because my nerves are jumpy, but somehow there's a funny feel about this fur. Is there — is it quite all right?"

The impotence of the question made Robert laugh again, though it alarmed him. "Why, father, what do you think you've got hold of?" he said. "That's no fur, it's a Scotch plaid, the genuine thing — brought it myself when I came back from Uncle Austin's shoot."

"But I tell you this is fur — thick and soft and — and white." The Major fought to master his words, and then added slowly, "Bob, I don't really think I want anything of this kind. I'm not cold. Take it away, will you?"

"Chuck it on the floor."

"No, take it away" — he spoke quickly — "I can't touch it again, I tell you. The feel of the skin makes me feel sick, as sick as — for God's sake take it off me!" The last words broke out in a voice that made his son jump up and hurry to him.

"Right you are, guv'nor. It's gone. But there must be something dicky about your sense of touch, father.

What made you go on swearing it was a skin? There's no such thing in this room, I know. Your hands must be cold. Are you all right? Shall I light up and have a look at you?"

"No, don't. I'm perfectly all right, thanks, only my hands are rather cold." Chill as ice, and clammy, he might have said. "Don't turn on the light. I'd rather not have it."

So Robert saw nothing of his father's face, which was well for his peace of mind. All that night sleep never visited Major Huntingdon's pillow. He lay in an agony of mind, dreading each moment the sense of some new hallucination, motionless, with closed eyes. But before his darkened pupils again and again there came a picture of mountain peaks, and of a man kneeling with his hands buried in the coat of a dead creature. And then all turned red as blood, and the picture faded in a mist of blood. . . .

Upon the fells of Westmoreland, where the hills are greener and the flocks whiter than ever they are in the south, they spent ten days. From early morning until dark they were in the saddle, or by the stream, or leaning to windward of the humming sail, until the magic air of the lakes and fells blew away like a smoke-wreath all recollection of Major Huntingdon's nightmare. He felt even better than he had after the ocean passage. Peace and the majestic presence of unspoiled nature, benignant as she can only seem to a man returning to his home country, entered his soul and shut that door that never is opened wide in the lives of most men.

Huntingdon fished, and had good sport. When his thoughts turned to that night in his son's rooms, he could smile. Another trick of the brain. A week or so of English country life had driven the sickness out of him, and the fancies along with it. But the lordly confidence in the strength of his mind, frame, and nature that had sent him on a hundred desperate ventures, and taken him through a hundred unnerving perils, was altogether gone from him. He told himself he was used up. He realized that he could never again stake heavily upon his own endurance and fortitude; no more tiger-shooting on foot, no more scouting up to the enemy's watch-fires for him. It was bound, he supposed, to have come sooner or later; but who would have thought it would take the form it did? A kind of D.T., as he said to himself; not a gradual decay of faculties, but a sudden break-up at intervals of the empire of common-sense. He felt now almost as fit for anything as ever, but was conscious at the same time that the feeling might quit him abruptly in a crisis. He must settle down to an easier mode of living and give his mind no chance of going astray. For he felt confident at least of this: that once set down among the things and peoples that he knew, once absorbed in the prosaic life of home, where there were no untrodden ways, no strange beliefs, no secret solitudes, he could have peace.

On the night of the tenth day the two were smoking in a comfortable room where guns and rods were kept, a room they called the study. It lay at one end of the little house and opened by a French window upon the lawn fronting the place. It had been a hard day of tramping for both and it was no later than 9 o'clock when the last pipe was begun. Robert suddenly remarked, "I think I'll take a gun out early one morning and knock over some of these rabbits."

Huntingdon had a glass on the way to his lips; but on hearing this he put it down carefully. "I've not seen any about the place," he said, and paused to swallow a rising in the throat. "I've often thought it odd, too, there shouldn't be any signs of them. How badly the lamp burns."

"Beastly flickering light," Robert agreed, as he adjusted the wick. "But about these rabbits — I noticed the same thing as you did when we came, and Dickinson explained that the blasting over at Long's had driven them out of the neighborhood. But I know there must be some down in the little wood still. I'll tell you what I saw last night. After you'd gone up, about 10:30, I turned out the light and then went to shut the French window. Well, on the lawn before where your window is there was a square patch of light thrown down from your room; and right in this patch, of all places, three of the little brutes were sitting with their ears cocked — heard me moving, I suppose. Perfectly still they sat, looking just as if they'd got their eye on you, you know. It made me feel quite crawly, somehow, for half a minute; then I shied a slipper at them and off they went. But ten minutes later I looked out from my room. I saw your light was gone, but there they were in the same place again. I could just make them out in the shadow."

Huntingdon had turned away with his back to the lamp that his face might not be seen. Now he drank a little, spilling some of the liquor as he raised the glass to his lips.

"Bob," he said, and stopped while a shudder mastered him for a few moments. He went on in a shaking voice, "I'd rather you let them alone. You'll think I'm foolish about it, but that's because you haven't been through what I have — the notion of shooting a rabbit, even the very sight of one, gives me a shock. I can't give you the whole story, but I can tell you that the worst piece of luck I ever had came through shooting one of them. It was that that broke me up the way I was when I wrote to you. It all but did for me at the time, and I can't help my feelings about it, that's the fact. Don't talk about this again — I wish you hadn't thrown things at them — don't mention this again — I can't stand it."

His son leaned forward with anxiety in his looks; but Huntingdon still faced toward the side of the room, staring blankly at the distorted shadow of his own figure on the wall.

"All right, guv'nor," said Robert gently. "Never again. I'm sorry —

more than I can say. Let's forget about it and go off to bed. You'll be right as a trivet in the morning. Jove, I'm fagged out." He rose from his chair, throwing his arms above his head with a yawn.

"There!" screamed Huntingdon, as his tumbler fell with a crash on the floor, and he flung a quivering hand out to the wall. The young man's shadow, as he rose to his feet, had sprung up beside his father's just as the lamp flame gave a little start upward. With stretching arms, the dark mass leaped into view, suggesting a monstrous head with long ears.

At the instant of his own cry, Huntingdon sprang up and turned with arms extended as though to keep off what he feared, while his eyes glared horribly. "My God!" he sobbed, "Oh my God! It was there."

Robert, thinking his father had been seized with a fit, ran forward just in time to catch him as he fell. With one of the men he got him to bed, while another ran for a doctor.

Major Huntingdon's illness was not long or serious, and a week saw him on his feet again. But another illusion was gone. He lived now under a cloud of fear. Many weak spirits have ended, in a fit of mad resolve, an existence of much less dread and torture of the mind than he was bearing; but Huntingdon was sane and unmoved, though now quite destitute of hope. He said nothing about his mysterious seizure and the days of prostration that followed it. For his son's sake and for his own self-respect he determined to front his destiny alone and in silence. He could die, but there should be no dark story of madness in the family for any act of his. He thought he had gauged the limit of the malevolence that, as he believed, pursued him. He would abide its merciless stroke with folded arms.

He was now advised to go south and seek company and distraction in the Riviera hotels. Ready enough for change, he agreed to this, and a speedy end to their stay at the Whim was decided upon. Their last day began with sunny, windy weather, and they set out, on Robert's suggestion, for a last ride over the fells.

Returning, they struck into a road and went on between the great hills until, just as the sun was setting, the little white house with its dark trees appeared against the living green of the countryside away upon their left. A squat wall of ragged flakes of ironstone bounded the way on each side. The air, the beauty of the scene, and his father's better health filled Robert Huntingdon with delight in living. The animal he rode, too, was in good spirits. "Topsy goes as lively as if she were just out of the stall," he said. The young mare was a rash purchase of his own and flattered his judgment by turning out so well. "She's as full of fun as a monkey and ready for anything you like. I think I'll take the short cut over this wall and give her one more gallop on the grass."

He turned the mare's head to the left and put her at the low barrier.

With a snort and a rush she was across the broad road, when just before her a big rabbit sprang out of the fern at the wall's foot and bolted past.

Topsy squealed and broke away with a horrible swerve. Her rider was flung from the saddle. His head struck the wall with shattering force, and in an instant he lay dead upon the road.

(*The following passages are taken from the journal of a young savant who accompanied Sir Oliver Pender's expedition to Lake Bakteghan in Southern Persia, which did such important archeological work among the buried cities of that region.*)

April 20: Major Huntingdon is the only one of the party with whom there is no getting on. He is the most silent man I ever knew, never speaking unless addressed; and he is not a man to encourage one to open a conversation. In the evenings he will sit among us motionless and abstracted, eyes staring sadly into the darkness for hours, unless drawn into consultation about the work. He has never made the least reference to his past life. Carson says he used to be a mighty hunter, and shot with Sir O. in the Himalayas years ago, so it is curious that he never joins us when we sally out in pursuit of fresh meat. I asked him the other day if he only cared about big game. He turned his back on me without a word and went into his tent; apologizing later, said he felt suddenly ill and is subject to such attacks. Carson puts his strangeness down to some severe shock, a bereavement he thinks, hinted at by Sir O., who is, however, very reticent. The oddest thing about him is the awe the laborers feel toward him. They look at him with terrified eyes and rush to do anything he orders in a way that contrasts sharply with their general laziness and unpleasing manners. The Katkhuda, who is a decent fellow, explains to me that they think Huntingdon, without being a devil personally, has something to do with devils of a most potent kind; that he is a good man himself, but knows things none of us know, and is unmistakably tainted with devil.

July 16: A good day's work on the inner court we opened yesterday; two walls unearthed, certainly bearing carvings and inscriptions, but not yet cleaned. Huntingdon is missing tonight — seen to leave the camp early in the afternoon, as if starting on one of his solitary walks. All expected him to be driven back by the floods of rain that afterwards came on, but up to now (10:30) no news of him. We fear an accident of some sort.

July 17: Terrible discovery today. A man who lives nearby, hearing last night in the men's quarters about Huntingdon being missing, came up this morning to volunteer information. Had seen a man answering to the description late yesterday afternoon. Being caught in the torrents of rain, he had sought shelter in our last year's workings on the hillside about half a mile away; there he found a man with white hair standing inside the mouth of the excavation, looking out at the

sky. He did not stay there, because the man, he said, frightened him, he didn't know why; so he went home at once through the storm. Carson and myself at once took a gang to the spot — the temple where we made the Nabopolassar find. As we feared, the workings had collapsed, the entrance to the gallery being choked, and it took two hours working our hardest to clear the passage.

The body lay within, a little way beyond where the falling-in had occurred. It was untouched by the fall, and at first I thought death must be put down to suffocation. But Carson pointed out that all signs of it were absent, and that the extent of the workings put it out of consideration. Carson concluded he had died of shock. "Look at the face," said he. I did, and am sorry for it. But a very strange thing is that Huntingdon evidently lived and moved about some time after the collapse, the alarm of which Carson at first supposed to have prostrated him at once. It seems as if he had taken it with coolness, and turned his mind to escaping, for all over the floor we found the ends of wax matches, by the light of which he seemed to have been examining his position. He appeared to have been struck down suddenly while doing so. A burned match was between his fingers and the box lay close by where it had fallen. The body was stretched at the foot of the long wall bearing the great carving of the royal hunt, at the spot where the King is shown striking a rabbit with his arrow. I should not like that grim inexorable face to be the last thing my eyes rested on.

All greatly upset by this dreadful business. Sir O. was very much grieved, but told us this evening that any death was a merciful release from the existence that Huntingdon led. It appears that his mind never recovered from a severe illness, the result of some hunting misadventure, and that the loss of his only son a few years ago made matters worse; so that he lived in continual black depression and heaviness of heart. I wish I could forget what I saw.

The rain of the last two days has been so severe that the slipping down of the soil above the workings is not to be wondered at. The natives tell us, moreover, that the burrowings of the rabbits that have newly appeared on the hill must have greatly loosened the earth at that spot. . . .

EDITORS' NOTE: *If any writer in the world other than Tom Stribling could have written the curious, flabbergasting, utterly outré detective story we now give you, then we'll do private-eye penance, stand in sleuthian sackcloth, pay a ferreting forfeit, hang our homicidal head, and eat criminological crow on the corner of Fraudway and Crimes Square.*

THE WARNING ON THE LAWN

by T. S. STRIBLING

THE MORNING HEADLINES ONLY depressed me: *Senate Crime Investigating Committee Sits in Tiamara; Topflight Criminals Flee Subpoena Servers* — and so on and so on.

My depression, I am somewhat embarrassed to admit, was not that of a patriotic citizen, eager for the purification of his city and country. No, it was peculiarly personal to myself. The Senate Crime Investigating Committee clarifies and eliminates criminal mysteries that I otherwise could collect, write, and sell. Every mystery the Committee solved, every criminal they unmasked, was so much bread off my pantry shelf. So, with some despair, I turned to other criminal news: *Miss Mona Moon, the movie star vacationing at the Sherry-Plaza, has lost her jewels along with her sixth husband.* I called Poggioli's attention to it across the breakfast table.

"Now here is a case that will undoubtedly come to us," I said, pushing the story to him.

My friend read it. "Why us?" he inquired.

"Because female movie stars, although they appear very prodigal and all that, are really a very thrifty set. She will come to you in order to get herself written up in my notes on your cases, so that she will gain the widest possible publicity for the loss of her jewels. If they are costume jewelry, which she would never admit, she'll be getting a bargain — not to mention a change of husbands, which is also excellent advertising."

Poggioli didn't think so. He never thinks very much of my ideas. Just at this point a very large, expensive car drew up in front of our apartment, and a little later our bell rang sharply.

"There she is now," I said.

I went out and was not surprised to see on our threshold a plump, personable, synthetically young woman who looked like a six-goal player in the hard-riding game of American matrimonial polo. I thought I would pull a Poggioli trick and astonish her with my deductions.

"You want to see Professor Poggioli about your jewels, isn't that so?"

"No—about my husband."

I was surprised at what she chose to recoup; then I realized my first guess was right, so I said, "So the jewelry you lost really are costume jewels after all."

She looked at me in a perplexed way. "I'm afraid I don't know what you are talking about. I haven't lost any jewels."

"Aren't you Miss Mona Moon, the movie star?" I asked.

My visitor flushed with pleasure. "Do I really look like Miss Moon? Some of my friends have said so. No, I'm Mrs. T. T. Thompson of the T. T. Thompson Plastiglass Corporation. I came to see Professor Poggioli, the criminologist."

I suspected that she wanted to inveigle Poggioli into making a speech before some women's club or other. She now looked exactly like the women's club type. I said to her, "Professor Poggioli is not a speech-maker, Mrs. Thompson. He is a retired university lecturer, so he has no ability whatever as a public speaker. He would simply put your club to sleep."

The mature, good-looking woman made a nervous, negative gesture. "I'm not here to look for a speaker. I want him to tell us who burned that warning on our lawn."

I was shocked. "Burned a warning on the lawn of the president of the T. T. Thompson Plastiglass Company!" I had meant to solve her problem myself. In fact, I always mean to solve the problem of Poggioli's next client, in order to get my hand in and not have to rely so heavily on Poggioli's deductions and researches into crime. It certainly is high time that I begin to stand on my own feet and do my own reasoning and criminal investigating, instead of depending on such a curmudgeon as Henry Poggioli. But every time, just when I'm ready to get started, some peculiar twist develops and I am simply forced to turn it over to Poggioli — which I now did.

In our dining-room, where Poggioli still sat over his newspaper and coffee, the criminologist looked up, then rose and offered our visitor a chair and a cup. She took the chair but was too nervous for coffee. I explained for her: "This lady is the wife of T. T. Thompson, president of the T. T. Thompson Plastiglass Company, and they have had a warning burned right on their lawn."

Poggioli's eyes became instantly concerned. "They are always burned in some conspicuous place like that. Let me see the note."

Mrs. Thompson began a search through her purse. "Yes . . . I have it here somewhere." She started pulling out things and piling them on the breakfast table. "Here it is."

I wondered annoyedly why I hadn't asked her for the note. They always leave a note, such people do, stating the moral objections they have to the person they warn. If I had only thought to ask for the note, I could probably have cleared up the mystery myself.

Poggioli took the note and read it aloud. "*DROP ADA* . . . (signed), Committee of Public Safety." The great criminologist nodded his head in satisfaction. "Very, very interesting — well worth investigating, Mrs. Thompson."

I said, "I don't see how a note and a warning in fire can be very interesting when they happen so often through the years."

"Ordinarily you would be right," said Poggioli, "but in this particular case you are wrong. You see, it is almost a contradiction in terms."

"How?" I asked, a little blankly.

"Heretofore, all castigation for moral offenses has been given by a class just *above* the class being warned. That is the normal course of moral correction. Usually, the immorality of a higher class — and in America that means a wealthier class — is not condemned and punished, but imitated by the classes just below. Now for this group, whoever they are, to threaten Mr. Thompson merely because he has a mistress, is completely atypical. Ordinarily, if the lower classes could get the money, they would imitate him; if not, they would envy him; but they would never dream of correcting him or threatening him."

The moment Poggioli explained, I saw that he was right. I said, "That is peculiar, isn't it?"

"Very odd . . . very unnatural. I assume, Mrs. Thompson, that you know this Ada and her relationship with your husband — to judge by your resenting the note and your trying to conceal it from your women friends. At least, you have been trying to pretend that you didn't know anything about it, because I know how a woman feels if she admits outright that she knows her husband has a mistress — very bad for her morale, makes a kind of hanger-on out of her . . ."

"I know who it is," said Mrs. Thompson in a bleak tone.

"I imagine it's his secretary," I said, with a sudden flash of insight.

"Well, yes. I'm sure it's his secretary," said Mrs. Thompson.

"What do you mean . . . you're sure it's his secretary? When you say you're 'sure it's his secretary,' it means you are faintly doubtful that it *is* his secretary. Now who else do you think it could be?" Poggioli gazed at Mrs. Thompson.

"Nobody, nobody at all. All I meant was, they have spelled her name wrong. It isn't Ada — it's Ida."

Poggioli looked first at her, then at me, in amazement. "That certainly does throw a mystery over the whole affair."

"Why?" I said. "Simply spelling a woman's name wrong?"

"Utterly improbable that they would spell her name wrong. Men never make a mistake in the name of an easy woman. That is part of the evolution of the human male, Mrs. Thompson — to identify correctly a woman he can safely approach. So the probability that the warning

burners would write *A*da when it was *I*da is infinitesimal. . . ."

"But her name *is* Ida — Ida Leonard."

"Listen," proposed Poggioli, "let us run over to your home, Mrs. Thompson, and see if we can pick up any other scrap of evidence identifying 'Ada'."

"It's just simply Ida Leonard, but I'd be glad if you would come with me and see what you can find out. It's awful, Professor Poggioli, to have to pretend you know nothing about your husband's affairs. If they don't believe you, they think you are dumb for not getting a divorce and alimony, and if they do believe you, they think you are just dumb."

Mrs. Thompson drove us to her mansion in a new Cadillac. In Tiamara the new-rich drive Cadillacs, and the newer their wealth the newer the Cadillacs. On the way over another bright idea struck me.

"Look here, Poggioli, I've got the whole thing solved. We don't have to bother going to Mrs. Thompson's home."

The lady lifted the precisely curved brows she had acquired in some swanky beauty shop. Of course I shouldn't have said "*bother*" going to her home.

"What have you thought of?" asked Poggioli.

"Just this," I said. "Mr. Thompson's got *two* mistresses — one named Ida and the other named Ada. That explains everything. It even makes clear your lower-class people criticizing and threatening upper-class people. Because they don't approve of two mistresses at one time. That's the truth, Poggioli — the American people don't. One at a time, yes, but two, no. Why? Simply because we sympathize with the first mistress. We feel that a married man has no moral right to be unfaithful to his first mistress. If a woman has that much love and confidence in a man to live with him without a legal shred to hang onto, we feel he is a dirty skunk if he isn't loyal to her. That's why this group, whoever they are, threatens the rich Mr. Thompson. They don't want to imitate him — they disapprove of his morals."

Poggioli listened to me carefully, a very rare thing for him to do.

"Your reasoning," he said, "is original and excellent. In fact, it is convincing — except for one detail."

"What's that?" I asked.

"The law of probability," said Poggioli. "The probability that Thompson would fall *out* of love both with an Ida and with an Ada is too remote to be considered."

"Is that your only objection to my theory?" I cried.

"That's all."

"Well, you will find, Poggioli, that such pernickety, petty . . ." Mrs. Thompson cleared her throat. "I'm afraid you'll find you are wrong," I concluded.

I will state here frankly that the remainder of my own personal obser-

vations and speculations on this case were aimed at proving that T. T. Thompson kept two mistresses. I felt if I could wipe Poggioli's eye just once, he would never treat me so cavalierly again.

We went on to Mrs. Thompson's home and there was very little to see. She spent nearly two hours showing us the designs for some new decorating in her library. Her books consisted of a premium-gift dictionary and a single shelf of best-selling fiction. I don't know why she had the dictionary — even a free one.

Quite by accident, I think, she had come upon the warning that had been burned on her lawn. It was made of two hard, clear sticks, tied together.

"What are these sticks made of?" asked Poggioli.

"Oh, my husband manufactures that. It's plastiglass."

"Then this came from his own factory?"

"Yes, I suppose it did. I guess it's his own men who are criticizing his carryings-on with Ida."

"But every one of them would know it was Ida — not 'Ada'."

"Yes, I suppose they would. Maybe they wrote it 'Ada' not to hurt Ida's feelings, if it got back to her." That was a strictly feminine way of looking at it. I still stuck to my theory of a real flesh-and-blood "Ada." "What are you going to do now?" asked Mrs. Thompson, who wanted to show us some more designs, this time for her living-room, I think.

Poggioli said he would run over to the Plastiglass factory and see what he could find out there.

"I don't think they'll let you in the stockade," said Mrs. Thompson, "especially if you are looking for evidence against T. T."

"But the signers of this note — the workers — are evidently antagonistic to your husband."

"Why, that is a fact," exclaimed Mrs. Thompson, as if she had never thought of it before.

"I'll take you over there and get you inside the stockade. All of them know me and it won't be any trouble. But I won't go in myself. I'll just tell the guard who you are, then I'll turn around and come back. I don't want to see anybody."

We started out again in her car and Poggioli said this was one of the most extraordinary cases he had ever known — for a millionaire's workmen to criticize the private morals of their employer . . .

"They wouldn't," I said, "unless he had two mistresses."

"What I don't understand," put in Mrs. Thompson in disgust, "is what T. T. sees in Ida Leonard — such a washed-out creature, and no personality at all!"

"That's why he found a second one," I said.

Neither of them paid any attention to me. "There's the stockade and the guard at the gate," said Mrs. Thompson. She drew up to the entrance and motioned the man to come to her car. "Let these two men

into the plant," she directed, and when we stepped out, she turned and drove away.

It has never been my habit to be brusque with men who carry pistols, even if they are as relatively harmless as policemen; so I stood before the guard, not knowing quite what to do next. The guard himself was under no such constraint. He looked at me and Poggioli, and said, "You two lads are on the Thompson side of this matter, aren't you?"

Poggioli began talking diplomatically. I can always tell when he is going to be diplomatic by the way he clears his throat.

"No, no, I wouldn't say exactly that we are on the Thompson side . . ."

"Well, exactly which side would you say you were on? You came here with Mrs. Thompson."

"Yes, we did, but purely as private investigators. By profession I am a criminologist."

"Criminologist . . . Just what do you do?"

"I study crime."

"Brother, you couldn't come to a better place! But you are bound to be on one side or the other . . ."

"I was not properly introduced to you," said my companion. "My name is Poggioli — you may have heard . . ."

A complete change came over the guard. "Why, of course! You are the great detective who doesn't take pay. Glad to meet you, Mr. Poggioli. Who do you want to talk to in here?"

"Well, anyone who knows the details of the trouble in this here plant."

The guard nodded cooperatively. "Mm — mm, I see . . . I wonder now who would know the details of the trouble in this plant?"

Poggioli said, "How about one of the foremen?"

"Certainly, Mr. Poggioli. Just walk down past that toolhouse yonder and call for Jim. Jim'll know everything and tell you anything you want to know."

On the way to the toolhouse we naturally passed a number of men, some walking, some in trucks, some on motor scooters, and finally a very odd fact dawned on me. I said to Poggioli, "Do you see what I see?"

He said yes, he thought he did.

"The point is," I continued, "what have they got in their pockets? It is very odd that so many men should carry tools with curved handles. Why should everybody have a leather cutter or a curved-handle knife in his hip pocket?"

"I feel sure they are not knives or leather cutters," said Poggioli.

The foreman, Jim, also had one. He kept his back turned rather studiously from Poggioli, but I saw the outline of his tool, or whatever it was, in his back pocket.

Jim was a largish, hail-fellow-well-met man, but today he seemed preoccupied, or worried. When Poggioli introduced himself, Jim knew him and said that he always thought detectives visited a place after a crime had been committed. I noted a little stress on the word "after"

and said, as lightly as I could, "And not before, eh?"

Jim laughed a little. "I hope not before."

"Is this a special day," I went on, "when everybody carries leather cutters around with them?"

"Leather cutters?"

"Yes," and I nodded at his hip pocket, which he had turned from Poggioli.

"Oh, that's not a leather cutter," he said. "It's more in the nature of a punch." Then he said more seriously, "I brought mine down today to get it fixed."

"Has it anything to do with . . . Ada?" I went on in my same light vein.

"Ada?"

I saw that he was really at sea. "Well, it could be Ida," I admitted. "Ida Leonard."

"Oh, Miss Leonard. She's the boss's secretary. Well . . . no-o . . . I brought my gun down on account of Miss Leonard's traveling bag." And the good-natured foreman looked at me with the expression of a riddle-maker propounding a conundrum.

The reference to Ida's traveling bag floored me. I gave up. Poggioli began talking seriously to Jim about the company and the company's organization. He asked if the workers held any stock in the company. Jim said, yes, they did. All workers who had been in the plant more than twelve months were eligible to buy stock, and that everybody, or almost everybody, had purchased some. "They had a right to," concluded the foreman, "for at the time it looked as if the company would make big money."

"And now," I began subtly, "it doesn't look as if . . ."

Poggioli frowned slightly at me and shook his head, "I wonder if there would be any way," he interrupted, "to bring about a peaceful settlement between the workers and the management?"

"I don't know anything about that," said the foreman. "It would be a very good thing to do, however."

"I wonder if there is somebody I could see . . ."

"Mm — mm . . . It might be Mr. Hicks, our department manager. But you wouldn't be able to see him today."

"Would you telephone him and find out for me?"

"Why, yes . . . what'll I say to him?" Jim walked into the toolhouse and we followed.

"Just tell him that Professor Poggioli, the criminologist, would like to see him in reference to averting a sudden drop in the value of the company's stock."

Jim looked around in amazement, "You mean you could do that!"

"I can try," said the criminologist.

Jim nodded, did the telephoning, and said, "He'll see you. Walk three blocks straight down to the Administration Building and go to Room 781."

Mr. Hicks was a smallish, very serious man, cut after the pattern in which all department managers seem

to run. On the walls of his office were photographs of plastiglass motor cars, furniture, utensils of all sorts. When he grew tired of selling plastiglass he would rest his brain by looking at these photographs.

He was pleased, in a serious, sober way, to see so great a man as Poggioli. He confessed he had always thought of Poggioli as being a rather light-minded man. Poggioli said the reason for that was because I had always written up the notes on Poggioli's cases in a rather trivial style. Mr. Hicks then asked Poggioli what he thought of corporate law and corporate practice.

That floored me again. I wanted to ask about Ada and Ida, and settle the point, and here they were discussing corporate law and corporate practice.

"Exactly which point are you referring to?" inquired Poggioli, "in your distinction between law and practice?"

"Well . . . say, bonuses," said Mr. Hicks.

"Bonuses?"

"Yes, the amounts the higher executives of a corporation vote themselves above their regular salaries. You know, the stockholders have nothing whatever to say about that matter."

"They have a legal right to enter suit for its recovery. In fact, I believe stockholders have recovered bonuses in several instances."

"But such a suit isn't entered once in a thousand times."

"No, it isn't. In large corporations the bonuses are a very small percentage of the company's gains, and the amount taken from each stockholder is small, almost nothing."

"That's true," agreed Mr. Hicks somberly, "but if the management can vote themselves a small percentage, they can also vote themselves a large percentage. If they can vote themselves a bonus once a year, they can vote bonuses twice, three times a year — as often as they want to and as much as they want to."

For the two men to go on gabbling like that, with the whole working force of the plant wearing pistols in their back pockets, began to get on my nerves.

"If the stockholders don't like it," I said, "they can outlaw it."

Mr. Hicks became suddenly aware that I was in his office. He turned on me with the controlled scorn of a department manager.

"Make a law against it! How can we make a law against it? By what legerdemain can we influence the lawmakers in Washington to introduce a bill to outlaw corporate bonuses?"

Before I could say anything else, Poggioli thanked him for his courtesy and inquired the way to Miss Ida Leonard's office.

"You're going to see her?" asked the manager with interest.

"I thought I would."

"Would anything she could do have a bearing on the situation at this late hour?"

I had no idea what it was a "late hour" for, but Poggioli seemed to understand. "Yes, it may be possible to arrange something with Miss Leonard to give the men in the plant a little more time to reach a peaceful solution."

At this Mr. Hicks was moved. He came around from his desk, took Poggioli's hand in both of his, and pressed it. "God speed you, Professor Poggioli," he said earnestly. "I hope you rescue our company from the utter ruin it now faces. The easiest way to get to Miss Leonard's office is to go downstairs, ride on the conveyor belt to Station 13, get off, take a small escalator on the left, ride to the top, get on a moving platform, and then get off when you come to the sign saying 'Executive Offices.' Walk through the General Filing and Accounting Department, and Miss Leonard's office will be the fifth on the right."

As we started off to follow these instructions, I said, "I wish I could find out the 'Ada' end of this business."

"You mean 'Ada' as a woman?"

"Certainly she is a woman!"

Poggioli shook his head. "No. 'Ada,' I regret to say, is not a woman. She is three initials — A — D — A — which undoubtedly stand for an association of gangsters which have bought out President Thompson's stock, are going to take over the management of the company, and in the future confiscate all the profits of the corporation through the device of bonuses. At least, that's what manager Hicks and all the rest of the men believe."

I was shocked. "How in the world did you find all that out?"

"Manager Hicks told me just as plainly as he could. He thinks it is going to happen today — I mean the take-over; and I know the workmen-stockholders are going to make a desperate stand against it. Your question — the one you put to the foreman, Jim — brought out the fact that the men expect the sell-out of the plant and the elopement of Thompson and his secretary today."

I searched my head in vain for the question I had put to the foreman. "What did I say to Jim," I finally asked, "and what did he say to me?"

"You asked about Miss Leonard, and Jim said it was not Miss Leonard that had roused the workmen, it was her traveling bag. That meant they cared nothing about her morals; they were rebelling against the desertion of the plant by the President and his secretary."

"O-oh . . . traveling bag!"

"That's right."

"Now explain Ada to me again. What do the letters actually stand for?"

Poggioli has no patience with a man who digs for details. He snapped, "Oh, anything — anything at all! African Dromedary Association . . . Allbright Doodling Activities . . . anything! The point is, Thompson is selling out to A.D.A. and the corporation is going to be gutted."

"Why did he sell out?"

"A dozen possible reasons. Maybe he's tired of his business and wants to cash in. Maybe he's tired of his wife and wants to go off with Miss Leonard. Maybe he's getting a big share of stock in A.D.A. in return for the Plastiglass Company."

"I wish Ada was a woman," I said.

"Why?"

"So I could sell this story — not for myself — but for the benefit of the reading population of the United States. Half of them own stocks. This story is very important for them to read and reflect over, but they won't read or reflect over it unless it's about a woman."

Poggioli nodded. "That is the first correct judgment you have made."

By this time we had reached the office of the secretary to the President.

Miss Leonard was not the sort of person I had expected to meet. She was a slender, pleasant efficient-looking girl — the kind a man would marry, not elope with. As we entered her office she was sitting at a pink plastiglass desk, looking out through the clear plastiglass side of her office onto the long boulevard that led to the entrance of the stockade. On her desk was a small pink plastiglass clock, which she glanced at now and then. On each article of these plastiglass furnishings, I noticed the company's slogan: *Stronger than Steel — Clearer than Glass — Cheaper than Wood.* It really was a remarkable product.

Miss Leonard turned from watching the avenue. "How did you get in, Professor Poggioli? I didn't see your car."

Poggioli told her how we came, then added, "You've been watching the driveway for some time, have you not, Miss Leonard?"

"Yes, I have," she said nervously.

"A great deal depends on the arrival of someone soon?"

The president's secretary moistened her lips. "A very great deal, Professor Poggioli."

"Will you tell me how much time there is left — before you expect these callers?"

The young woman glanced at her jewel-like clock once more.

"In . . . six and a half minutes, Professor Poggioli."

The psychologist went taut. "Listen, Miss Leonard," he said rapidly, "which do you put first — the general good of your thousands of coworkers, the economic stability of American industry, or . . . your own personal plans?"

It was a brutal way to put it. It gave the girl absolutely no moral escape.

"Why . . . why do you ask me that, Professor Poggioli?"

"Because I'm a criminologist. I try to foresee and forestall violence. I am also trying to prevent a precedent being set in American corporate existence that threatens our whole financial structure . . . and incidentally you will prevent bloodshed here in the plant."

The young woman stared at him. "I . . . I can do all that?"

"You can — by putting your personal interests aside and acting for the common good. But it will mean a great sacrifice for you."

She drew a long breath. "What . . . what do you want me to do?"

"Merely delay your elopement for a half-hour, an hour — as long as it takes . . ."

"For what?"

"Call up Orange 54321, ask for Captain Blake, let me talk to him, and you'll understand."

I couldn't imagine what Poggioli wanted, and neither could the girl. She got Captain Blake on the line and handed the receiver to Poggioli.

"Captain Blake, this is Poggioli. You now have about four and three-quarter minutes to act. Call all your radio cars in this section to converge on the Thompson Plastiglass Company. In a very few minutes a car or cars with some half-dozen men in it will enter the Plastiglass stockade and drive toward the main offices. Seize them all, subpoena them to appear before the Senate Crime Investigating Committee now sitting in Tiamara. Accept no excuse, no alibi, no pleas of important business. They are among the leading criminals of America."

I was amazed. I said to Poggioli, "Look here, you've hit the nail on the head. Your plan will make the Senate Investigating Committee one of the strongest powers for justice in our nation. We cannot, of course, put all the topflight racketeers in the penitentiary, but why not summon them all before a Senate Investigating Committee and keep them waiting in the anteroom for the rest of their lives?"

Nobody paid any attention to me. Poggioli turned to Miss Leonard.

"Young lady, I want to thank you for what you will do for American finance. If the police are not here in time, don't run off with President Thompson. Delay the proceedings . . ."

"Oh, I will indeed, Professor Poggioli. You see, T.T. stood me up. He planned, after he had sold out, for us to fly to Mexico. But at the last minute he shifted from me to Ada Delehanty. He is now going to elope with her, or so he thinks. I put that warning and note on T.T.'s lawn myself."

Poggioli stared at the girl. Then he turned to me with an expression as if he were about to launch into one of his profound and amazing, yet perfectly simple, explanations.

But he closed his mouth and said nothing.

SQUEEZE PLAY

by MICHAEL GILBERT

MR. ROSE WAS A BIG MAN IN ALL senses of the word. His body was huge. A lot of it was muscle run to fat, but time could not deprive him of his powerful shoulders and the thick, strong wrists which made him a sabre champion 30 years before.

His mind was capacious. It was a mind which had been able to embrace and master all the intricacies of the profession of a diamond dealer and yet find room, in some spare storage space, to tuck away such odd trifles as azalea-growing and contract bridge. He grew perfect azaleas in the large garden of his home in Hampstead. His contract bridge was feared in half the bridge clubs from one end of London to the other.

His business was enormous. He was a leader of the Diamond Ring. In his time he had made a great deal of money. He had also made a number of enemies. These had failed because they had made the mistake of attacking Mr. Rose directly. It is patently absurd to attack a man who is mentally big enough to outmaneuvre you, financially big enough to buy you up, and physically big enough to throw you into the river.

This February night he was waiting in the drawing-room of his Hampstead home for the first opponent who threatened to defeat him simply by avoiding the attack direct. He had attacked through Mr. Rose's daughter.

Jessica was the child of Mr. Rose's old age. She was nearly eighteen; she was as beautiful as a tiny, jeweled hummingbird, and about as witless. Nevertheless, he loved her dearly and it was this love which was making it so difficult for him to deal adequately with Ronald.

Ronald was coming to see Mr. Rose that night, after dinner, and while he was waiting for him Mr. Rose reflected on the forthcoming interview and on the character of Ronald. His studied conclusion was that in a long and varied life he had never met anybody who appealed to him less. He had known many criminals, but none who combined in that particular degree a false front of *bonhomie* with a cold inner selfishness. Ronald was apparently prepared to torment a young girl to gain his own ends, but he was not prepared to suffer either pain or inconvenience himself. And unless Mr. Rose was much mistaken he was a coward as well as a liar.

After a career in the Air Force which was nine parts pure fiction to one part of debatable fact he had, so far as Mr. Rose had been able to discover, been living on susceptible girls ever since.

Jessica Rose had been easy meat to him. He was so well equipped for the conquest, with his Jaguar Sports Car (lent to him by a trustful garage), his carefully dyed R.A.F. overcoat, and

his carefully cultivated R.A.F. slang; his casual mentions of a D.F.C. (though never when there was anyone present who might check it up); above all, his endless leisure and seemingly endless money.

Mr. Rose had sized him up the first time he had met him and had been horrified to think that his daughter should have such a friend. He had not made the obvious mistake of warning her against him. Jessica might sometimes be witless, but she had a will of her own.

Then, a fortnight before, the bombshell.

They were going to get married.

Mr. Rose's first reaction to this news had been to put a reliable firm of private detectives onto the job of uncovering Ronald's past.

What they had discovered had confirmed Mr. Rose's worst suspicions, but unfortunately it was apparent that he was dealing with a discreet rogue. Ronald's actions had often been despicable, but rarely criminal. Moreover, he had, unfortunately, not committed the crowning indiscretion of marrying before.

The private detective, when he reported these negative results, added that he supposed Mr. Rose knew that he could withhold his consent to the match. Mr. Rose thanked him and said that he had realized this. He did not add that, in his view, the remedy usually caused more undesirable publicity than the ill it was designed to cure.

Then Ronald had made a proposition so barefaced that even Mr. Rose was startled.

He had suggested, in short, that Mr. Rose might care to purchase his daughter's immunity. It was not the proposition itself, but the price which had shaken him. Ronald had demanded the Collander matching diamonds.

When Mr. Rose realized that Ronald was serious and that there was no other way out of it, he had made one of his quick decisions.

He had asked Ronald to come up to the house to discuss the matter with him.

As he reached this point in his meditations the bell rang; he went to the front door himself and let the young man in.

It was evident at once that Ronald had been fortifying himself for a difficult interview with a drink. Nevertheless, he was far from drunk.

He stood in the hall and demanded truculently, "Where are we going to talk?"

"There's a fire in the drawing-room," suggested Mr. Rose, "that is, if you've no objection."

"Well, I do object," said Ronald. "Let's go into some other room."

Mr. Rose thought for a moment.

"I see," he said, with the suggestion of a smile on his big, pale face. "You are thinking of microphones in the wainscoting and policemen behind screens."

"Never you mind what I'm thinking of," said Ronald. "We'll go in the dining room, or we won't talk at all."

Mr. Rose nodded. He led the way into the heavy, old-fashioned dining room, turned on the lights, and then switched on the electric log-fire. Neither man sat down.

Mr. Rose came straight to the point.

"I suppose you realize what you are asking for," he said.

"You can take that as read," said Ronald.

"You know that although the Collander diamonds are mine — mine to dispose of, I mean — I really hold them in trust."

"Surely."

"You know the reason for the trust, and just what sort of heel I should look if I gave them away."

"Jess told me something about it."

Mr. Rose winced as if he had been hit. Outside of her own family nobody called his daughter Jess. When he had recovered his voice he said:

"What if I won't do it?"

Ronald took a careful pull at his cigarette, looked at the glowing tip, and then said, "Somehow, do you know, I don't think our marriage is going to be a very happy one."

"Suppose I tell my daughter what you have suggested?"

"She won't believe you. We both know you don't approve of me."

"'Approve' is a wild understatement," said Mr. Rose. He seemed to have recovered some of his good humor. "Well, now, this is what you might call a squeeze, isn't it?"

"You won't get anywhere by insults," said Ronald.

"The remark was not intended as an insult," said Mr. Rose gently. "I was employing a metaphor from contract bridge. Possibly you don't play."

"I don't mind a hand if the stakes are right. I prefer poker."

"A squeeze, in bridge," went on Mr. Rose, "is achieved when you make your opponent guard two suits and then force him into an impossible position, where he has to discard from one of them, and no matter which suit he discards from, he loses. Is it straining the expression too far to say that you are squeezing me in Hearts and Diamonds?"

"Very neat," said Ronald. "Very well put. Well, then which are you going to throw away?"

"Neither," said Mr. Rose. He put his hands into his pockets and took out a short, weighted, deadly-looking leather cosh. "I am afraid you have made the common mistake of not counting your cards. I still have a Club."

Ronald took a step towards the door. He seemed less happy than he had been. "Look here, don't try any of that sort of stuff," he said.

"Why not?" said Mr. Rose. "Why should I not break your neck with this little fellow," he swung the cosh affectionately, "and take your body out in the car and drop it in Epping Forest?"

"You can't do it," said Ronald. "I'm not such a mug as that. There's only one way out of this house, isn't there? Onto the road in front. There's a call box at the corner. I've got a friend there. If he sees your car come

out he's going to ring the police. How do you like that?"

"Capital," said Mr. Rose. "Capital!" He flicked the cosh up and down and it whiffled unpleasantly in the air. "So you've got the Club suit blocked as well?"

"I fancy so," said Ronald.

"The trouble with you inferior bridge players," said Mr. Rose, "is that you fail to take *all* the necessary factors into account. There are at least two things you have omitted from your calculations. One, I admit, you could hardly have known about. Before I sent for you tonight — " Mr. Rose rocked his enormous bulk backwards and forwards on his feet and regarded Ronald dispassionately — "I had a talk with my doctor. He confirmed a previous diagnosis. Reluctantly, I think, but quite definitely I have only got two months more to live. I won't bother you with details, but my engine has outgrown its pumping system. This, as you will appreciate, radically alters my outlook towards certain matters. Where there is a necessary — removal operation, shall we say? — to be conducted, and provided that there is no *immediate* risk of detection —"

"You can't do it," said Ronald hoarsely. "I tell you, my friend will —" .

"Your friend will see nothing," said Mr. Rose. "That is your second mistake. I have no real intention of removing you by the front entrance. I mention that merely in order to discover what precautions you *had* taken. I spent a pleasant two hours this evening trenching a new azalea bed. I shall shortly —" Mr. Rose moved lazily but so that he stood between Ronald and the door — "I shall very shortly be filling that trench in again." His arm went up; and came down, once.

Five minutes later he was unbolting the tool shed in the garden. He was breathing rather heavily, under the burden he carried.

As he did so, a thought struck him, and his face creased into a smile of genuine, unmalicious mirth.

"Poor old Ronald," he said. "Not a good player, really. It never even occurred to him that I might have a Spade left as well."

EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

DEATH IN DWELLY LANE *by F. V. MORLEY* (HARPER, $2.75)	". . . as offbeat as anyone could wish . . . You may find this roaring fun or crazy confusion. B minus." (LGO)	". . . written with a pen dipped in vinegar and overflowing with originality. Gentleman's relish." (AdV)
INTO THIN AIR *by JACK IAMS* (MORROW, $2.50)	"The final twist shouldn't surprise any faithful reader, but . . . brisk and full of gay conversation." (LGO)	"Liveliest possible doings hold interest to end which is unfortunately slapdash . . ." (AdV)
THE CORPSE WITH STICKY FINGERS *by GEORGE BAGBY* (CRIME CLUB, $2 50)	". . . a satisfactory, if not too surprising killer." (LGO)	"Swell puzzle, and background has a gruesome fascination. Very good." (AdV)
THE DOG IT WAS THAT DIED *by E. C. R LORAC* (CRIME CLUB, $2.50)	"Solution not quite up to standard, but Inspector MacDonald's detection as good as ever." (LGO)	"Good job, but pay-off is delayed too long. Atmospheric." (AdV)
A SHROUD FOR MR. BUNDY *by JAMES M. FOX* (LITTLE, BROWN, $2.75)	"So much happens . . . that you may never get it quite clear . . . B minus." (LGO)	"Author has real talent and should take steps to translate his shorthand. Puzzling." (AdV)
.38 *by WILLIAM ARD* (RINEHART $2 50)	"Corpses are strewn about and the whole thing takes some believing." (LGO)	"Chase never merry but always active; has its goofy moments . . ." (SC)
NICE PEOPLE POISON *by MARY HASTINGS BRADLEY* (LONGMANS, GREEN, $2.50)	"This piece of detective satin is cut to classic style, wearable by any of our best-dressed writers." (LGO)	"Too pat, too formula, too wordy, too fishy. Won't do." (AdV)
THE QUEEN'S AWARDS: SEVENTH SERIES *edited by ELLERY QUEEN* (LITTLE, BROWN, $2.75)	"What is there to say, each year, except, 'It's excellent'?" (LGO)	"It's choice throughout. Gourmets' feast." (AdV)

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

"Quiet, genteel, witty, allusive, and impeccably plotted . . . warmly recommended . . ." (AB)	"Whimsied piece of bric-a-brac; much good spoofery; nice yarn underneath it all. High I Q. fun." (SC)	
". . . a lively suspense melodrama, sharply and wittily told . . ." (AB)	". . . infectious if preposterous mishmash . . a bright flash in a dull season." (JS)	
". . . masterful development . . . neat variation of an old end-game . . ." (AB)	"This is a very light exercise which should be more fun than it is." (FC)	
". . . a little below her best . . . But there is still fine solid novelistic meat here . . ." (AB)	"Compact plot and engaging detecting." (DD)	
". . . plot is off-trail . . . the telling . . . is light, blithe and entertaining." (AB)	"Plotted smoothly . . . tolerable and even amusing." (JS)	
"Hard hitting yarn without lull in interest . . ." (DD)	". . . violent time . . the sort of complications we used to expect from French farce." (JS)	
"Nice job, but lacks sharpness and clear focusing of previous effort. Medium." (SC)	". . . cloudy confusions . . . Peaky, but socially acceptable." (JS)	
"This is not only a book to read — it is one to own." (FP)	". . . exceptionally . . . good group of competitors." (JS)	

KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES

AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*

FC: *Frances Crane in her syndicated column*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*

DD: *Drexel Drake in the Chicago Tribune*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*

FP: *Fay Profilet in the Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*

JS: *James Sandoe in the New York Herald Tribune*

AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

Elba O. Carrier's "Honest Abe" is one of the seven first stories which won special awards in EQMM's Seventh Annual Contest. It is a clever and amusing tale, and we are happy to publish it and thus launch Mr. Carrier on a writing career, even though the "Carrier career" must in the beginning remain part-time.

The author had squeezed in one semester at Boston University when Pearl Harbor set into motion certain events which finally placed Mr. Carrier in the service of his country. After being a Technical Medical Equipment Officer in the Pacific Coast area, Mr. Carrier took his family — his wife and two daughters — back to college where they parlayed a two-room apartment and a vegetable garden and a lot of hard work into a couple of college degrees. Then Mr. Carrier became a teacher, and his first job was to make chemistry interesting to 125 freshmen, of the female species, at Sargent College. The author thinks that this particular experience is what convinced him that he could make crime interesting to EQMM readers.

Mr. Carrier has always enjoyed writing and story-telling. But because of the economic pressures of our age he has had to spend most of his time doing things that pay. Hence, he is what might be called a "summer writer." Each summer, when his teaching duties have relaxed, he lets the writing bug bite him again. "Honest Abe" represents his first sale, and we hope that it is followed by many more as the summers come to pass . . .

HONEST ABE

by ELBA O. CARRIER

I GOT OUT OF THE CAB AT APEX Square and pulled a $10 bill from my right-hand pants pocket. I waited for the change and put the $8.75 in my left-hand pants pocket. The cabbie didn't even look at the ten-spot, except to see that it was a ten.

It wouldn't have made much difference anyway. Even if you stared at them, you couldn't spot they were phony. That was the kind of bills that Honest Abe Pritchard put out. Absolutely genuine Government ten-spots — except that they were fakes, of course.

The man at the cigar store grinned

like an old friend when I came in.

"Hi, Joe," he said. "Missed you yesterday. First Monday you ain't stopped in for weeks."

I shrugged. I couldn't tell him Abe Pritchard and I had had a big squabble yesterday so that we lost a whole blasted day of distribution. I was hoping to double up my routes today.

"Monday hangover," I said simply, taking my cigars and matches and waiting for the change from my ten. It went into the left pocket.

By noon I had got down to Langley Circle and I had to buy a shopping bag for the packs of cigarettes, cigars, and half-pint whiskeys. I was hungry but I figured I ought to get my stuff back to the hotel before starting out again. I had cracked fifteen tens from that right-hand pocket but I still had 25 to go.

When I spotted the telephone booth, I knew I wanted to call Alma. I had to dial twice and it rang a long time before she answered.

"Listen, Alma, how about letting me run up and see you this afternoon?"

Alma's voice wasn't sure. "Gee whiz, Joe, I don't think you'd better. I think Abe's getting wise."

That gave me a funny feeling. "Wise to what, Alma? Nothing's happened yet. All I got from you is promises."

"I know, Joe, but you ain't married to Abe Pritchard. You don't know what a hard egg he can be."

"I know enough. We spent yesterday haggling over the money. He's sore because I spend so much while cashing his phony bills." I choked on the words and stared around to see if anybody had heard me. There wasn't anyone around. "How about this afternoon, Alma?"

"I don't dare, Joe. He didn't believe I went to a movie Friday night. He made me tell him the whole of both pictures and then he took me back there Saturday night to see for himself. Say, did you pay for those movie tickets with a ten, Joe?"

"Of course. Why?"

"Because Abe used a twenty and refused to take the ten the cashier gave him in change. He made her show him all the tens she had and then he picked one out himself."

That made me sore. "He's got a dirty, suspicious mind! Anyway, she probably still wouldn't have the same bills from the night before. When am I going to see you, Alma?"

"How about telephoning tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow, tomorrow! That's all I get. Okay, I'll call tomorrow but I'm getting sick of waiting."

I walked along Cummings Street and wished hard. Alma was a pretty little blonde, big eyes, dimples, soft skin. What happiness could she have, married to a half-bald, middle-aged, eagle-beaked mutt like Abe Pritchard? What right did he have to a sweet chick like Alma anyway? Checking up on her at the movie house and trying to spot some of his own bills!

He was a dirty rat — that's what

he was. Imagine, accusing me of holding out some of the change from those phony tens! I wasn't holding out much either.

I caught a cab and dumped the shopping bag at my hotel. The cabbie took a ten and I swapped off another for livers and onions at a cafeteria. Then I worked Ames Street to the subway and by 4:30 my feet were yelling bloody murder and I still had five tens to go.

I passed Louie's Smoke Shop and I thought of placing some bets on the late races. But I didn't. My bets didn't always work out as good as they looked and Abe would kick like a steer because I didn't have anything to show for the money.

At 6:30 I passed off the last bill for a veal cutlet. I hate veal but it was the cheapest thing on the menu and Abe charged me for anything I couldn't show.

Pritchard came up to my hotel room before 8 and we had another scrap over the money. He counted all the change out, down to the pennies, and wrote down the value of everything in the shopping bag. We didn't even get started on the split until I produced the fin I had stashed away.

I kept looking at his scrawny neck and wondering if I had enough strength to snap it. Then I could have Alma. But there are complications in knocking somebody off. Detectives like to dig up triangles when one of the angles becomes a corpse. Then too, I'd have to hide the body. I couldn't pass that off on a cigar store. And finally, there was the matter of the goose. It's kind of hard to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.

"Got another batch for tomorrow, Abe?" I asked, folding up my three-out-of-ten cut.

"I left it in the shop. You can get it in the morning around 9."

I looked at him hard. "Aren't you gonna work tonight?"

"Not tonight." He looked back at me just as hard. "I'm taking my wife to a movie."

He slammed out and I gritted my teeth and began to explore in my head the places you can hide a five-foot-ten stiff. By 10 o'clock I was exhausted from dragging his dead body all over the city in my mind and I went to sleep.

The next morning I was at the print shop at 8:30 with a lulu of an idea in my head. It depended on how many Pritchard tens I could find spread around the shop. You don't worry about killing a goose that's biting you if there's a shop full of golden eggs already laid.

I nearly fell over a little runt who was dragging a ladder out the door.

"Who are you?" I bellowed.

"I'm Tim Nieman." He pointed to the sign he was trying to put up. "Is there anything I can do for you, sir?"

I gulped. "Where's Abe Pritchard?" But my heart was already heading shoeward.

"Oh, he's retired. Sold the place to me. Made the final arrangements last night and now the shop is mine.

We had to rush the details yesterday so he and his wife could make the boat to Europe, this morning." He looked at his watch. "Guess they're gone now. Hope they have a nice trip."

I stood there choking.

"Say," he looked up at me suddenly. "You're not Joe — Joe —"

"Beckett," I said weakly.

"Yes, that's it. Joe Beckett. Mr. Pritchard left a package for you."

I caught my breath and his arm. "Where is it?"

He went in and I stumbled all over the sign trying to follow him. But when I saw it, I almost burst.

It wasn't a big enough package to hold plates — it was hardly more than an envelope. I could picture the plates at the bottom of the Atlantic.

I got a block away before I tore open the wrapper.

A printed card said, "This is the last batch. Your payoff."

I looked inside. That was something anyway. A hundred brand-new tens.

The payoff. A thousand stinking bucks. How do you like that? A thousand bucks for taking all the risks and dragging feet all over the cursed city to pass off his phonies. And Alma gone now. Lost forever.

I stopped in my stride. Or was she? What was keeping me out of Europe? I could follow them, bop him, and take Alma and the bag of bills he must be carrying. I almost fell into the first tobacco store I came to.

I traded a ten for two packs of butts and almost ran to the next store. It was a meat market and I bought a pound of frankfurters which I threw into an alley. I picked up a can of crab meat in a grocery and a bottle of aspirin in a drug store. In a haberdashery I picked out a buck tie but the pimply-faced kid looked at the ten I handed him and his face turned so white his complexion nearly cleared.

"I'll — I'll have to run out for change, sir." He stammered.

I didn't like the look in his eyes. And I could hear sirens. I tried to block the kid from getting to the door but he slipped under my arm.

The sirens grew louder and I had a funny feeling that they were coming right here. I couldn't find a back door, so I ran out the front after the kid. I met the grocer, druggist, and butcher — and about 40,000 cops on the sidewalk. In just about two seconds my jaw was aching.

They helped me get up and took the packet of bills out of my pocket.

"That's the nerviest I ever heard," the sergeant said. "How long did you think you were going to get away with it?"

The necktie kid was waving his bill under peoples' noses and everyone was laughing. Even the sergeant had tears in his eyes.

"What's wrong with 'em?" I finally gasped. "They're real genuine —"

The sergeant looked at my face for a minute. "A comedian yet!"

He held up one of the ten-spots.

That dirty doublecrossing "Honest Abe" Pritchard, the guy who could do anything with a printing press, had put Lincoln's face on all my $10 bills.

THE SHEIK IT WAS WHO DIED

by CHARLES B. CHILD

IT WAS A PATCHWORK LAND OF brown desert and emerald grass, the fruit of recent rain. Camels swollen with young munched contentedly; mingled flocks of sheep and goats dotted the slopes of the stony hills.

An armored car, flying the flag of the Kingdom of Iraq and the pennant of the Desert Police, raced swaying toward an encampment of black tents. The turret seat was occupied by a dark little man, who said irritably in Arabic, "This motion is as distressing as a ship. I trust I shall not be sick."

A gaunt sergeant of police eased his cramped legs, and replied, "Sir, may the Compassionate and All-Merciful grant that the sight of the corpse may revive you."

"The corpse, my dear Abdullah, has first call on such a prayer." Inspector Chafik of the Criminal Investigation Department became aware of his ill-humor, and tried to discipline himself by repeating the 113th sura of the Koran, entitled Brightness; but his mind was running in the groove of the case which had brought him to the desert.

A radio from the assistant director of police at Samawa had read, "Sheik Ibn-al-Karibi poisoned. Homicide possible. Investigation requested by Sheik Jabir, brother, who suspects political motive."

A few months previously, Chafik remembered, Al-Karibi had thwarted the ambitions of the Raki, a fanatical warrior tribe of the neutral zone; a lozenge of territory dividing the frontiers of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The sheik's refusal to participate in the rising had gained him many enemies, and it was known that Ibn-Nu'uman of the Raki had sworn vengeance.

The manner of the death was suggestive. The police doctor at Samawa had reported indications of a systemic poison; although prevented by religious scruples from making an autopsy, he suspected strychnine.

"Poison and politics are old bedfellows," Chafik said.

"Sir?" said Sergeant Abdullah.

"Oblige me, my dear Abdullah, by reciting the case history of Ibn-al-Karibi. The dryness of your voice may absorb the dampness of my confusion."

"Sir, he had recently taken to himself a young wife. Although married for 30 years to the Lady Mariya, there was no issue. It is reliably reported that the second wife was granted favor. If the child she carries be a son, he will inherit the wealth and power of his esteemed father. I have no experience of plurality of wives, but I am inclined to speculate on the feelings of the elder wife —"

"Enough!" The Inspector checked

his assistant with an upraised hand.

The armored car had now reached the Karibi camp and presently halted before the tent of the sheik. Inspector Chafik gave a final glance at his neat clothes, and adjusted his polka-dot tie as he stepped out.

The pavilion was roofed by a woven canopy of goat's hair. It was 70 feet long and divided by a partition hung with tapestries and rugs. On one side was the *makaad*, the men's quarters, and on the other the harem. The high bier of the sheik stood in the middle of the floor, the corpse shrouded with a red robe, a Koranist crouching at the head and swaying to a hypnotic chant.

There were many tribal notables present. They sat with faces averted from the bier and gave attention to a man who reclined on a divan. He was speaking slowly, with authority, but stopped at sight of the visitor and rose to exchange salaams.

Sheik Jabir, the brother of Ibn-al-Karibi, had the typical lean, dark face and high-bridged nose of the desert aristocrat. He toyed with a camel-stick, which he presently used to signal for the ceremonial thimble-cups of coffee.

Inspector Chafik, with regret for his nicely pressed trousers, squatted on a violet cushion with yellow tassels. The presence of the corpse was ignored, and nearly twenty minutes passed before Jabir said, "An enemy has acted dishonorably. My brother is slain. To you of the police we turn for vengeance."

"Vengeance is a sword carried only by God, but if it be so willed, I may uncover the truth," said Chafik. "How did this thing happen?"

"My brother returned heated from hunting gazelle. He drank *shineena*, and afterward complained of giddiness and stiffness in his neck. Then he fell to the floor."

"There were convulsions?"

Jabir nodded.

"How soon did he die?"

"Within two hours."

The Inspector looked at the signet ring on the little finger of his left hand, but was imperceptive of the dull red stone. He was thinking that the police doctor's suspicions were correct; the symptoms described by Jabir were those of strychnine poisoning.

"You are sure this drink of soured milk killed him?"

"I gave what was left in the bowl to a dog. It died."

"The evidence is conclusive. Who prepared the milk?"

The brother of Al-Karibi tapped nervously with the camel-stick. He said with obvious reluctance, "It was prepared by the elder wife, the Lady Mariya."

"She prepared it expressly for her husband?"

Jabir made a dignified gesture of protest. "The question is irrelevant. I do not ask you to seek an enemy in the household. My brother's life was threatened by the Raki dogs, and surely this deed is their shame."

"You have proof?"

"If I had, my knife would have found Ibn-Nu'uman's throat —"

Chafik said, "Then as you are without proof please concede the necessity for my questions. I must have all the facts before I can shape a design. Did the Lady Mariya prepare the *shineena* for her husband?"

"So far as I know it was prepared for her sister-wife, who is with child. These things should not be discussed."

The Inspector glanced at the tapestried wall of the harem and noted that the hangings moved. His voice was clear as he went on, "It was, of course, known to me that your brother had taken a second wife, one named Furja, and was soon to be blessed with child. The hope of an heir must have made him very happy."

"He was a man of years, twelve more than I, but the hope made him young."

"And the Lady Mariya shared his joy?" Chafik asked delicately.

"What man knows what a woman thinks? But she nurses Furja. To bring her *shineena* while she rested was surely an act of kindness —"

Inspector Chafik said softly, "Do you say 'surely' because you wish to convince yourself?"

Jabir's slender hands tightened on the camel-stick and bent it. His mouth was a thin line. Then, yielding with distaste, he said, "If there is doubt in me it is caused by rumor. It is known she sorrowed because the years were barren. And when he took a young wife and a child was conceived —"

"Rumor suggests jealousy was also conceived?"

Jabir stood up, his eyes clouded by anger. "They say the bowl was prepared for Furja. They say it was only chance my brother came hot from the hunt, entered the harem, took the bowl and drank. Otherwise —" The camel-stick snapped between his convulsive hands and he threw the fragments to the ground. "By God and by God, this thought is indeed evil!" he said bitterly. "May wisdom guide you to prove it a lie, for, in truth, I am blinded by my brother's body and can think only of vengeance." . . .

Inspector Chafik stood in the doorway of the harem. With an exquisite bow he expressed respect for the two wives of Ibn-al-Karibi, and sorrow for their loss of a husband. He said, "The name is Chafik J. Chafik. I am of the police. Am I permitted to enter?"

A woman reclined on a divan near the partition of the *makaad*. She was young and pretty. Her arms were heavy with bangles, her hands with rings, and her body with child.

Chafik said, "A thousand pardons! If the moment is inopportune, I will withdraw."

A deep voice replied from the shadows, "Furja is strong enough to answer your questions. Enter."

He bowed again. The second woman, who had risen from a stool, was aged by desert standards, but traces of great beauty lingered in her face.

"You are the Lady Mariya, Al Khatoon," he said, giving the title of honor accorded the elder wife of a great sheik.

"What would you hear from us?"

"The story of what happened here. I regret the necessity of asking you to relive events which brought you such sorrow, but —"

"I am not weak," Mariya said, glancing at the other woman. "We shared 30 years, my man and I. They were not always fat years."

"To appreciate a soft bed, sleep first on a hard one," said Inspector Chafik.

"A soft bed breeds envy —"

"And also enemies, Lady Mariya. Do you think Ibn-Nu'uman of the Raki did this thing?"

She shook her head. "Nu'uman has courage. Poison is a coward's weapon. You follow a false trail if you share Sheik Jabir's suspicions."

He looked at her shrewdly. "I wish to know how it came about the sheik drank *shineena* prepared for your sister-wife."

Mariya answered without hesitation. "Our husband came to give us greeting and news of the hunt, as was his custom. When he saw the bowl by Furja's side, he said, 'The desert is in my throat,' and Furja offered him the milk —"

"I said, 'Drink, husband,' and so killed him," moaned the woman on the divan.

Chafik interrupted sternly, "Enough! When he drank, did he say anything?"

"He said, 'This is bitter,' and put the bowl down. I mixed honey with it and he drank again, very deeply. Then he said it was still bitter and called for water. Afterward —"

Inspector Chafik turned to the elder wife. "Tell me where and how you prepared the *shineena*."

"I made it in the cook tent behind the harem. I took a jug and put in it *libin*, well soured and thickly curded. I beat into it fresh milk until the whole had the consistency of cream."

"Was some left in the jug?"

"Perhaps half a bowl —"

"What did you do with it?"

"I gave it to Ibla, my tiring woman, who was with me. She is also with child. No harm came to her."

Inspector Chafik looked at the shadow humped across the doorway, made by his assistant who stood discreetly outside. "Go question this woman, Abdullah," he called.

"But I could have told Ibla what to say," she said.

"Abdullah is hard to deceive." He shrugged and continued the questioning. "Did you bring the bowl straight here from the other tent?"

"Yes, and Ibla walked with me."

"Show me where you put it."

Mariya pointed to a low, ivory-inlaid table placed in the narrow gap between Furja's divan and the wall of the men's quarters. "She was sleeping, so I put it there at her side."

"You left the bowl. Where did you go then?"

"I sat in the doorway for nearly an hour, waiting for my man."

"Who saw you?"

Mariya considered the question. "Several passed me. Jabir stopped to speak. He had lost a ring which he valued as a talisman and had turned back from the hunt to look for it."

"Did he find it?"

"I do not know. He went into the *maḳaad* saying he might have dropped it there."

"Was that all that happened?"

"Except for Furja's bad dream. She thought she saw a snake."

Inspector Chafik turned to the sheik's other wife. "Tell me of your dream."

Furja made a pretty little gesture of protest. "It was not a dream. I saw a snake, or a lizard with a very long tail. It was near the table, the bowl. But when I made a movement it vanished into the hangings of the wall."

Chafik pulled aside the table and examined the partition between the men's quarters and the harem. There were several slits in the woven fabric, made with a sharp knife at the level of a person kneeling. He opened one by spreading two fingers and had a clear view into the *maḳaad*. When he finally stood up he noticed the two women were embarrassed.

"The harem has eyes," he said gently. "And possibly ears, too. How soon after you brought the bowl, Lady Mariya, was this snake or lizard seen?"

He noted she gave his question careful thought. "It could not have been very long. First Jabir came and spoke to me. Furja had her dream a few minutes later. When I told her not to be foolish, she went to sleep without drinking her milk."

"Let her be thankful she did not drink." Chafik's voice was harsh. He went on. "I must review everything as it happened. Will you make me *shineena* as you made it for your sister-wife?"

Mariya said, "I will do it."

When she had gone, he moved slowly around the tent, touching things but saying nothing. He was unusually pale, his lips tight. Furja lay back against the cushions and watched him.

Finally Chafik said, "Lady, why are you afraid?"

"Afraid?"

"There is trouble between you and the Lady Mariya."

Furja shivered as if with cold and huddled under the folds of her heavy robe. "Mariya used to love me," she said.

"When did the change begin?" Chafik asked.

"I don't remember —"

"Before the news there was to be a child?"

"Perhaps about then." The words came in a whisper.

"She has been cruel?"

"No. Never cruel. But she is always watching me. She makes me afraid — I am so afraid."

"Of what?"

"That she may have —" Furja checked herself, but after a moment added abstrusely, "It was so untrue."

"What was untrue?"

"Nothing — nothing!" She hid her face in the cushions and began to cry.

Chafik said with compassion, "Rest, and forget your fears. The child may be a son, the sheik's heir."

He salaamed and left the harem.

Mariya came from the cook tent carrying an earthenware bowl in which was a white, creamy liquid flecked with minute particles of butter. She gave the bowl to Inspector Chafik and said, "It is not poisoned."

He raised it and drank. "The flavor is delicious. It would be sacrilege to spoil it with strychnine —"

"How was it put in the *shuneena*?"

"When I know that I shall know who killed the sheik." Chafik peered into the bowl like a crystal-gazer. "Could anybody have entered the harem while you talked with Jabir?" he asked.

Mariya answered, "Impossible."

"My profession teaches that to the wicked nothing is impossible. How long did you talk to the sheik's brother?"

"Long enough to become irritated. Perhaps three minutes." She noticed the Inspector was puzzled, and divining his next question, said, "Jabir annoys me because his hands are unstill. He twirls a stick incessantly, usually a camel-stick."

Chafik smiled. "I have noted his habit."

"Addiction is a better word. If he is without a stick he picks up anything that comes to hand, such as the reed with which he annoyed me while we talked. But you wish to know if anybody could have passed us. I say again it was impossible —"

"Tell me, Lady, what is between you and your sister-wife. You do all for her physical welfare, but your affection is withdrawn."

"You are very observant," the woman said. "You have eyes like a chameleon, watching all ways." She turned toward the harem and then came slowly back. "My affection for Furja was withdrawn when suspicion came to gnaw within me."

"Suspicion of what?"

"Shortly after my man took her to wife, she looked on another —"

"Who was this man?"

"Mitkhal, our nephew. He is young as she is young." Mariya clasped her hands, wrung them, and added, "May I be forgiven for what I say. There should be loyalty between women. In my heart I believe Furja only looked foolishly, as a young girl looks. And I acted quickly to have Mitkhal sent elsewhere. Then came the blessed news of the child —"

"You were pleased?" Chafik asked.

She said fiercely, "I would love my man's child as my own. Yes, I was happy, even as an expectant mother, until the day I sat alone in the harem and heard talk in the *makaad*. My husband had gone to Baghdad and the men were free with their talk."

"What did you overhear?"

"They discussed the possibility of an heir being born, and then Jabir said, 'May the son resemble my brother,' and laughed. Laughed!"

The guest tent was spacious, rich with rugs and hangings of Damascus silk. But the brass bedstead was incongruous; the coverlet a sour note of purple. A lantern slung from a pole threw light on the little man in jade pajamas who squatted tailor-fashion in the middle of the bed, smoking while he stared at an earthenware bowl and a glass jar with a screw top.

He said to the gaunt police sergeant who towered against the lowered flap of the door, "Abdullah, what do you see here?"

"Sir, I see a bowl containing *shineena* and a jar two-thirds filled with transparent crystals, resembling granulated sugar —"

"A bitter sugar," said Inspector Chafik. "I found this jar in the medicine chest of the sheik, in the men's quarters. The crystals are strychnine. There was no lock to the chest. I was informed by Sheik Jabir that anyone needing poison to kill a jackal, or other carrion creature, helps himself."

"As did the murderess —"

The Inspector raised neat, plucked eyebrows. "Which murderess?"

"Sir, I confess this case is overgenerous with feminine suspects, but I have formed an opinion, based only on facts. Have I permission to speak?"

"I welcome your voice, Abdullah."

"Sir, it is a fact the sheik's younger wife carries the child never granted the other wife. A fact the *shineena* was prepared by the Lady Mariya. A fact, by evidence of Ibla the tiring woman, the bowl was not poisoned when it was taken into the harem. Thus —"

Chafik said, "Wait. Let us poison this bowl and establish another fact."

He unscrewed the jar and poured some granules of strychnine into a folded paper, then carefully shook it into the milk. The crystals had a perceptible glitter as they floated on the surface, mingled with the minute clots of cream. The Inspector glanced at his watch and lighted a cigarette.

"Continue," he said.

"Sir, I see this as a crime of passion, not a political assassination. I am also of the opinion the bowl was poisoned within the harem."

"I share both opinions."

"The Lady Mariya is a clever woman. It is inconceivable she would have added poison after bringing the milk to her sister-wife without preparing an alibi. If Furja had died, the guilt would have been on Mariya, and her husband would surely have killed her as is the harsh law of the desert."

"Abdullah, I listen with both ears. Who then killed Ibn-al-Karibi?"

The long face of the sergeant became even longer. "Who else," he said sadly, "but the woman who was afraid to let her husband see the child soon to be born? And by killing him in such a way that it seemed an accident, did she not implicate the woman who had knowledge of her unfaithfulness? The murderess is —"

Chafik said, "I do not see it." He was looking into the bowl.

"Sir?"

"I refer to the poison I scattered on the *shineena*. These crystals are almost insoluble, but they have disap-

peared. Their weight has carried them below the surface in a very few minutes. The poison now lurks in ambush, coated with this creamy substance. If I lifted this bowl and drank, as the sheik drank, the crystals would slide like oysters down my throat. It is a cup equaled only by Borgia. But, Abdullah, you have woven the facts into a terrifying design. I do congratulate you. But one thread is left unused —"

"Sir?"

"You forgot the snake, Abdullah."

"The snake?"

"The snake that hissed. Tomorrow we will look for it." . . .

The sky was the hard blue of a Damascus blade. The patches of desert grass had lost their freshness and were beginning to shade to the dull brown of the sun-conquered land.

Within the harem it was cool, but the air had a stale smell. The woman on the divan whimpered; the other rose and placed a cloth dipped in orange water on her sister-wife's forehead.

Inspector Chafik, freshly shaved and mildly perfumed, was apologetic. He had arrived accompanied by Sheik Jabir and the inevitable Abdullah. "I wish to reconstruct what happened here," he explained. He went to the harem door and came back with a bowl. "This is not your delicious *shineena*, Lady. It was made by Ibla, your tiring woman. But favor me by placing it where you put the other bowl."

She took it silently and placed it on the table by the side of Furja. The young woman shuddered and shrank against the cushions.

Inspector Chafik clasped his hands and bowed over them. "But I have set a stage. I ask you to play your parts. Let the Lady Furja try to sleep as she did before. I ask the Lady Mariya to sit in the doorway, and Sheik Jabir will talk with her."

Jabir said, frowning, "You mock God with this play."

"I mock Satan," Chafik corrected in a hard voice. He viewed the scene and nodded. "Excellent. The curtain is about to rise. The impressario leaves the stage to the actors." His right hand quivered in a salaam, and abruptly he left the tent.

Silence reigned in the harem. The pair in the doorway made no effort to exchange words, but Jabir as usual fondled his stick nervously. The woman on the divan, weighted with child and drugged by the stale air, began to drowse; but now and then her eyes opened, drawn to the low table and the earthenware bowl.

Silence.

And then a hiss; faint but sharp, like the tag end of air released from a toy balloon. The younger wife of Ibn-al-Karibi sat upright, hands to her face, screams mounting. "I saw it! The snake — the snake —"

Mariya rose quickly, ran to her and enfolded her in protecting arms. "Hush!" she said. "You saw nothing, my *zaroot*. A shadow perhaps."

"I heard it hiss. I saw it, very thin,

swaying over the bowl. It vanished as before through the partition —"

Jabir came, tall, dignified, pointed beard quivering and knuckles whitened with clenching the camel-stick. He said with anger, "Let there be an end to this thing. The police are without decency. They shall go."

A voice from the doorway said, "The police are ready to depart. The play is ended."

Inspector Chafik entered, stepping as daintily as a cat and equally watchful. He carried a long, dry reed.

He put the reed by the side of the *shineena* bowl and said to Furja, "There is the snake. The deadly poisoned snake."

When he took the bowl between both hands, his actions were nicely timed. When he turned he bowed, and said very softly, "A sheik drank. Let another sheik drink." He offered the bowl to Jabir.

The man stepped back. "Has madness touched you?" he shouted.

"Drink!" Chafik took a following step and offered the bowl again. "Are you frightened because a snake hissed? Do you think the reed *I* inserted through the slit in the harem wall was loaded with strychnine? Do you think *I* blew poison into this bowl?"

"You accuse me —"

"I accuse." Authority gave the Inspector stature. "For 30 years you saw no impediment to ultimate succession to your brother's power. Mariya could give him no child. But then he took another wife. And she carries what may be Al-Karibi's heir."

Furja whispered from the divan, "Because of that he wished to kill me."

"Yes, Lady. And by planting unjust suspicion of the child's fathering, he made your sister-wife act coldly toward you, to give evidence of jealousy and so establish a motive. If you had drunk the *shineena* and died, there would have been overwhelming evidence against Mariya."

"My husband would then have killed me. He was a just man," Mariya said.

The Inspector nodded. "Then we of the police would have come and taken him away, since the Mosaic law is not favored in Baghdad. So by arithmetical progression, Jabir planned to remove all three. Or should I say four? The young wife and the possible heir. The elder wife who wields authority in the tribe; and the brother who ruled too long. But an inscrutable and compassionate God intervened in this diabolical plan, and the sheik died."

Turning suddenly to the man who had edged to the doorway, Chafik's next words slashed like a sword. "I arrest you for the murder of Ibn-al-Karibi. The mark of Cain is upon you."

Jabir dropped the camel-stick and threw back his robe, exposing the holster of a gun. As he felt for it a shadow closed behind him, and Sergeant Abdullah embraced him in a strangler's grip.

Inspector Chafik said in a pitiless voice, "Abdullah, I beg you. Do not cheat the hangman of his fee —"

We suppose that nearly every mystery fan has read Frank R. Stockton's "The Lady, or the Tiger?" at least once in the past. But how long is it since you *last read the story? Five years ago? Ten? Perhaps not since your high-school days? And how long is it since you read Mr. Stockton's sequel to "The Lady, or the Tiger?"?*

You didn't know there was a sequel? Then we have a wonderful treat for you! "The Lady, or the Tiger?" was first published in book form in 1884. The story was an instantaneous and sensational success. It became the most famous riddle story of its day, and it is not stretching the truth to say that it has remained the most famous riddle story ever written. The whole world tried desperately to solve the puzzle of who came out of the opened door — the lady or the tiger? And such a clamor arose that the author was compelled to do something to satisfy his millions of frustrated readers. So he wrote "The Discourager of Hesitancy. A Continuation of 'The Lady, or the Tiger?' " Did that sequel to the original unfathomable mystery satisfy, or even placate, his readers?

Well, we shall leave it to you. First, read (or re-read) "The Lady, or the Tiger?" — it is a very short story, and we guarantee you will enjoy refreshing your memory of it. Then read the sequel — or "continuation," as the author preferred to call it, for good and sufficient reasons. And when you have finished both stories, we will tell you a hitherto unrevealed anecdote about Mr. Stockton which may throw further light on the riddle that has baffled armchair detectives for nearly 70 years . . .

THE LADY, OR THE TIGER?

by FRANK R. STOCKTON

IN THE VERY OLDEN TIME, THERE lived a semi-barbaric king, whose ideas, though somewhat polished and sharpened by the progressiveness of distant Latin neighbors, were still large, florid and untrammelled, as became the half of him which was barbaric. He was a man of exuberant fancy, and, withal, of an authority so irresistible that, at his will, he turned his varied fancies into facts. He was greatly given to self-communing; and, when he and himself agreed upon anything, the thing was done. When every member of his domestic and political systems moved smoothly in its appointed course, his nature was bland and genial; but whenever there was a little hitch, and some of his orbs got out of their orbits, he was blander

and more genial still, for nothing pleased him so much as to make the crooked straight, and crush down uneven places.

Among the borrowed notions by which his barbarism had become semified was that of the public arena, in which, by exhibitions of manly and beastly valor, the minds of his subjects were refined and cultured.

But even here the exuberant and barbaric fancy asserted itself. The arena of the king was built, not to give the people an opportunity of hearing the rhapsodies of dying gladiators, nor to enable them to view the inevitable conclusion of a conflict between religious opinions and hungry jaws, but for purposes far better adapted to widen and develop the mental energies of the people. This vast amphitheater, with its encircling galleries, its mysterious vaults, and its unseen passages, was an agent of poetic justice, in which crime was punished, or virtue rewarded, by the decrees of an impartial and incorruptible chance.

When a subject was accused of a crime of sufficient importance to interest the king, public notice was given that on an appointed day the fate of the accused person would be decided in the king's arena, — a structure which well deserved its name; for, although its form and plan were borrowed from afar, its purpose emanated solely from the brain of this man, who, every barleycorn a king, knew no tradition to which he owed more allegiance than pleased his fancy, and who ingrafted on every adopted form of human thought and action the rich growth of his barbaric idealism.

When all of the people had assembled in the galleries, and the king, surrounded by his court, sat high up on his throne of royal state on one side of the arena, he gave a signal, a door beneath him opened, and the accused subject stepped out into the amphitheater. Directly opposite him, on the other side of the enclosed space, were two doors, exactly alike and side by side. It was the duty and the privilege of the person on trial, to walk directly to these doors and open one of them. He could open either door he pleased; he was subject to no guidance or influence but that of the aforementioned impartial and incorruptible chance. If he opened the one, there came out of it a hungry tiger, the fiercest and most cruel that could be procured, which immediately sprang upon him, and tore him to pieces, as a punishment of his guilt. The moment that the case of the criminal was thus decided, doleful iron bells were clanged, great wails went up from the hired mourners posted on the outer rim of the arena, and the vast audience, with bowed heads and downcast hearts, wended slowly their homeward way, mourning greatly that one so young and fair, or so old and respected, should have merited so dire a fate.

But, if the accused person opened the other door, there came forth from it a lady, the most suitable to his years and station that his majesty could

select among his fair subjects; and to this lady he was immediately married, as a reward of his innocence. It mattered not that he might already possess a wife and family, or that his affections might be engaged upon an object of his own selection; the king allowed no such subordinate arrangements to interfere with his great scheme of retribution and reward. The exercises, as in the other instance, took place immediately, and in the arena. Another door opened beneath the king, and a priest, followed by a band of choristers, and dancing maidens blowing joyous airs on golden horns and treading an epithalamic measure advanced to where the pair stood, side by side; and the wedding was promptly and cheerily solemnized. The gay brass bells rang forth their merry peals, the people shouted glad hurrahs, and the innocent man, preceded by children strewing flowers on his path, led his bride to his home.

This was the king's semi-barbaric method of administering justice. Its perfect fairness is obvious. The criminal could not know out of which door would come the lady: he opened either he pleased, without having the slightest idea whether, in the next instant, he was to be devoured or married. On some occasions the tiger came out of the one door, and on some out of the other. The decisions of this tribunal were not only fair, they were positively determinate: the accused person was instantly punished if he found himself guilty; and, if innocent, he was rewarded on the spot, whether he liked it or not. There was no escape from the judgments of the king's arena.

The institution was a very popular one. When the people gathered together on one of the great trial days, they never knew whether they were to witness a bloody slaughter or a hilarious wedding. This element of uncertainty lent an interest to the occasion which it could not otherwise have attained. Thus, the masses were entertained and pleased, and the thinking part of the community could bring no charge of unfairness against this plan; for did not the accused person have the whole matter in his own hands?

This semi-barbaric king had a daughter as blooming as his most florid fancies, and with a soul as fervent and imperious as his own. As is usual in such cases, she was the apple of his eye, and was loved by him above all humanity. Among his courtiers was a young man of that fineness of blood and lowness of station common to the conventional heroes of romance who love royal maidens. This royal maiden was well satisfied with her lover, for he was handsome and brave to a degree unsurpassed in all this kingdom; and she loved him with an ardor that had enough of barbarism in it to make it exceedingly warm and strong. This love affair moved on happily for many months, until one day the king happened to discover its existence. He did not hesitate or waver in regard to

his duty in the premises. The youth was immediately cast into prison, and a day was appointed for his trial in the king's arena. This, of course, was an especially important occasion; and his majesty, as well as all the people, was greatly interested in the workings and development of this trial. Never before had such a case occurred; never before had a subject dared to love the daughter of a king. In after-years such things became commonplace enough; but then they were, in no slight degree, novel and startling.

The tiger cages of the kingdom were searched for the most savage and relentless beasts, from which the fiercest monster might be selected for the arena; and the ranks of maiden youth and beauty throughout the land were carefully surveyed by competent judges, in order that the young man might have a fitting bride in case fate did not determine for him a different destiny. Of course, everybody knew that the deed with which the accused was charged had been done. He had loved the princess, and neither he, she nor any one else thought of denying the fact; but the king would not think of allowing any fact of this kind to interfere with the workings of the tribunal, in which he took such great delight and satisfaction. No matter how the affair turned out, the youth would be disposed of; and the king would take an aesthetic pleasure in watching the course of events which would determine whether or not the young man had done wrong.

The appointed day arrived. From far and near the people gathered, and thronged the great galleries of the arena; and the crowds, unable to gain admittance, massed themselves against its outside walls. The king and his court were in their places, opposite the twin doors — those fateful portals, so terrible in their similarity.

All was ready. The signal was given. A door beneath the royal party opened, and the lover of the princess walked into the arena. Tall, beautiful, fair, his appearance was greeted with a low hum of admiration and anxiety. Half the audience had not known so grand a youth had lived among them. No wonder the princess loved him! What a terrible thing for him to be there!

As the youth advanced into the arena, he turned, as the custom was, to bow to the king; but he did not think at all of that royal personage; his eyes were fixed upon the princess, who sat to the right of her father. Had it not been for the moiety of barbarism in her nature, it is probable that lady would not have been there, but her intense and fervid soul would not allow her to be absent on an occasion in which she was so terribly interested. From the moment that the decree had gone forth, that her lover should decide his fate in the king's arena, she had thought of nothing, night or day, but this great event and the various subjects connected with it. Possessed of more power, influence, and force of character than any one who had ever before

been interested in such a case, she had done what no other person had done — she had possessed herself of the secret of the doors. She knew in which of the two rooms, that lay behind those doors, stood the cage of the tiger, with its open front, and in which waited the lady. Through these thick doors, heavily curtained with skins on the inside it was impossible that any noise or suggestion should come from within to the person who should approach to raise the latch of one of them; but gold, and the power of a woman's will, had brought the secret to the princess.

And not only did she know in which room stood the lady ready to emerge, all blushing and radiant, should her door be opened, but she knew who the lady was. It was one of the fairest and loveliest of the damsels of the court who had been selected as the reward of the accused youth, should he be proved innocent of the crime of aspiring to one so far above him; and the princess hated her. Often had she seen, or imagined that she had seen, this fair creature throwing glances of admiration upon the person of her lover, and sometimes she thought these glances were perceived and even returned. Now and then, she had seen them talking together; it was but for a moment or two, but much can be said in a brief space; it may have been on most unimportant topics, but how could she know that? The girl was lovely, but she had dared to raise her eyes to the loved one of the princess; and, with all the intensity of the savage blood transmitted to her through long lines of wholly barbaric ancestors, she hated the woman who blushed and trembled behind that silent door.

When her lover turned and looked at her, and his eyes met hers as she sat there paler and whiter than any one in the vast ocean of anxious faces about her, he saw, by that power of quick perception which is given to those whose souls are one, that she knew behind which door crouched the tiger, and behind which stood the lady. He had expected her to know it. He understood her nature, and his soul was assured that she would never rest until she had made plain to herself this thing, hidden to all other lookers-on, even to the king. The only hope for the youth in which there was any element of certainty was based upon the success of the princess in discovering the mystery; and the moment he looked upon her, he saw she had succeeded, as in his soul he knew she would succeed.

Then it was that his quick and anxious glance asked the question: "Which?" It was as plain to her as if he shouted it from where he stood. There was not an instant to be lost. The question was asked in a flash: it must be answered in another.

Her right arm lay on the cushioned parapet before her. She raised her hand, and made a slight, quick movement toward the right. No one but her lover saw her. Every eye but his was fixed on the man in the arena.

He turned, and with a firm and

rapid step he walked across the empty space. Every heart stopped beating, every breath was held, every eye was fixed immovably upon that man. Without the slightest hesitation, he went to the door on the right, and opened it.

Now, the point of the story is this: Did the tiger come out of that door, or did the lady?

The more we reflect upon this question, the harder it is to answer. It involves a study of the human heart, which leads us through devious mazes of passion, out of which it is difficult to find our way. Think of it, fair reader, not as if the decision of the question depended upon yourself, but upon that hot-blooded, semi-barbaric princess, her soul at a white heat beneath the combined fires of despair and jealousy. She had lost him, but who should have him?

How often, in her waking hours and in her dreams, had she started in wild horror, and covered her face with her hands as she thought of her lover opening the door on the other side of which waited the cruel fangs of the tiger!

But how much oftener had she seen him at the other door! How in her grievous reveries had she gnashed her teeth, and torn her hair, when she saw his start of rapturous delight as he opened the door of the lady! How her soul had burned in agony when she had seen him rush to meet that woman, with her flushing cheek and sparkling eye of triumph; when she had seen him lead her forth, his whole frame kindled with the joy of recovered life; when she had heard the glad shouts from the multitude, and the wild ringing of the happy bells, when she had seen the priest, with his joyous followers, advance to the couple, and make them man and wife before her very eyes; and when she had seen them walk away together upon their path of flowers, followed by the tremendous shouts of the hilarious multitude, in which her one despairing shriek was lost and drowned!

Would it not be better for him to die at once, and go to wait for her in the blessed regions of semi-barbaric futurity?

And yet, that awful tiger, those shrieks, that blood!

Her decision had been indicated in an instant, but it had been made after days and nights of anguished deliberation. She had known she would be asked, she had decided what she would answer, and without the slightest hesitation, she had moved her hand to the right.

The question of her decision is one not to be lightly considered, and it is not for me to presume to set myself up as the one person able to answer it. And so I leave it with all of you: Which came out of the opened door, — the lady, or the tiger?

THE DISCOURAGER OF HESITANCY

A Continuation of THE LADY, OR THE TIGER?

IT WAS NEARLY A YEAR AFTER THE occurrence of that event in the arena of the semi-barbaric King, known as the incident of the lady or the tiger, that there came to the palace of this monarch a deputation of five strangers from a far country. These men, of venerable and dignified aspect and demeanor, were received by a high officer of the court, and to him they made known their errand.

"Most noble officer," said the speaker of the deputation, "It so happened that one of our countrymen was present here, in your capital city, on that momentous occasion when a young man who had dared to aspire to the hand of your King's daughter had been placed in the arena, in the midst of the assembled multitude, and ordered to open one of two doors, not knowing whether a ferocious tiger would spring out upon him, or a beauteous lady would advance, ready to become his bride. Our fellow-citizen who was then present, was a man of super-sensitive feelings, and at the moment when the youth was about to open the door he was so fearful lest he should behold a horrible spectacle, that his nerves failed him, and he fled precipitately from the arena, and mounting his camel rode homeward as fast as he could go.

"We were all very much interested in the story which our countryman told us, and we were extremely sorry that he did not wait to see the end of the affair. We hoped, however, that in a few weeks some traveler from your city would come among us and bring us further news; but up to the day when we left our country, no such traveler had arrived. At last it was determined that the only thing to be done was to send a deputation to this country, and to ask the question; 'Which came out of the open door — the lady, or the tiger?' "

When the high officer had heard the mission of this most respectable deputation, he led the five strangers into an inner room, where they were seated upon soft cushions, and where he ordered coffee, pipes, sherbet, and other semi-barbaric refreshments to be served to them. Then, taking his seat before them, he thus addressed the visitors:

"Most noble strangers, before answering the question you have come so far to ask, I will relate to you an incident which occurred not very long after that to which you have referred. It is well known in all regions hereabouts that our great King is very fond of the presence of beautiful women about his court. All the ladies-in-waiting upon the Queen and the Royal Family are most lovely maidens, brought here from every part of the kingdom. The fame of this concourse of beauty, unequaled in any other royal court, has spread far and

wide; and had it not been for the equally widespread fame of the systems of impetuous justice adopted by our King, many foreigners would doubtless have visited our court.

"But not very long ago there ar rived here from a distant land a prince of distinguished appearance and undoubted rank. To such an one, of course, a royal audience was granted, and our King met him very graciously, and begged him to make known the object of his visit. Thereupon the Prince informed His Royal Highness that, having heard of the superior beauty of the ladies of his court, he had come to ask permission to make one of them his wife.

"When our King heard this bold announcement, his face reddened, he turned uneasily on his throne, and we were all in dread lest some quick words of furious condemnation should leap from out his quivering lips. But by a mighty effort he controlled himself; and after a moment's silence he turned to the Prince, and said: 'Your request is granted. Tomorrow at noon you shall wed one of the fairest damsels of our court.' Then turning to his officers, he said: 'Give orders that everything be prepared for a wedding in this palace at high noon tomorrow. Convey this royal Prince to suitable apartments. Send to him tailors, bootmakers, hatters, jewelers, armorers; men of every craft, whose services he may need. Whatever he asks, provide. And let all be ready for the ceremony tomorrow.'

" 'But, your Majesty,' exclaimed the Prince, 'before we make these preparations, I would like ——'

" 'Say no more!' roared the King. 'My royal orders have been given, and nothing more is needed to be said. You asked a boon; I granted it; and I will hear no more on the subject. Farewell, my Prince, until tomorrow noon.'

"At this the King arose, and left the audience chamber, while the Prince was hurried away to the apartments selected for him. And here came to him tailors, hatters, jewelers, and everyone who was needed to fit him out in grand attire for the wedding. But the mind of the Prince was much troubled and perplexed.

" 'I do not understand,' he said to his attendants, 'this precipitancy of action. When am I to see the ladies, that I may choose among them? I wish opportunity, not only to gaze upon their forms and faces, but to become acquainted with their relative intellectual development.'

" 'We can tell you nothing,' was the answer. 'What our King thinks right, that will he do. And more than this we know not.'

" 'His Majesty's notions seem to be very peculiar,' said the Prince, 'and, so far as I can see, they do not at all agree with mine.'

"At that moment an attendant whom the Prince had not noticed before came and stood beside him. This was a broad-shouldered man of cheery aspect, who carried, its hilt in his right hand, and its broad back resting on his broad arm, an enor-

mous scimitar, the upturned edge of which was keen and bright as any razor. Holding this formidable weapon as tenderly as though it had been a sleeping infant, this man drew closer to the Prince and bowed.

"'Who are you?' exclaimed His Highness, starting back at the sight of the frightful weapon.

"'I,' said the other, with a courteous smile, 'am the Discourager of Hesitancy. When our King makes known his wishes to anyone, a subject or visitor, whose disposition in some little points may be supposed not to wholly coincide with that of His Majesty, I am appointed to attend him closely, that, should he think of pausing in the path of obedience to the royal will, he may look at me, and proceed.'

"The Prince looked at him, and proceeded to be measured for a coat.

"The tailors and shoemakers and hatters worked all night; and the next morning, when everything was ready, and the hour of noon was drawing nigh, the Prince again anxiously inquired of his attendants when he might expect to be introduced to the ladies.

"'The King will attend to that,' they said. 'We know nothing of the matter.'

"'Your Highness,' said the Discourager of Hesitancy, approaching with a courtly bow, 'will observe the excellent quality of this edge.' And drawing a hair from his head, he dropped it upon the upturned edge of his scimitar, upon which it was cut in two at the moment of touching.

"The Prince glanced and turned upon his heel.

"Now came officers to conduct him to the grand hall of the palace, in which the ceremony was to be performed. Here the Prince found the King seated on the throne, with his nobles, his courtiers, and his officers standing about him in a magnificent array. The Prince was led to a position in front of the King, to whom he made obeisance, and then said:

"'Your Majesty, before I proceed further ——'

"At this moment an attendant, who had approached with a long scarf of delicate silk, wound it about the lower part of the Prince's face so quickly and adroitly that he was obliged to cease speaking. Then, with wonderful dexterity, the rest of the scarf was wound around the Prince's head, so that he was completely blindfolded. Thereupon the attendant quickly made openings in the scarf over the mouth and ears, so that the Prince might breathe and hear; and fastening the ends of the scarf securely, he retired.

"The first impulse of the Prince was to snatch the silken folds from his head and face; but as he raised his hands to do so, he heard beside him the voice of the Discourager of Hesitancy, who gently whispered: 'I am here, your Highness.' And, with a shudder, the arms of the Prince fell down by his side.

"Now before him he heard the voice of a priest, who had begun the

marriage service in use in that semi-barbaric country. At his side he could hear a delicate rustle, which seemed to proceed from fabrics of soft silk. Gently putting forth his hand, he felt folds of such silk close beside him. Then came the voice of the priest requesting him to take the hand of the lady by his side; and reaching forth his right hand, the Prince received within it another hand so small, so soft, so delicately fashioned, and so delightful to the touch, that a thrill went through his being. Then, as was the custom of the country, the priest first asked the lady would she have this man to be her husband. To which the answer gently came in the sweetest voice he had ever heard: 'I will.'

"Then ran raptures rampant through the Prince's blood. The touch, the tone, enchanted him. All the ladies of that court were beautiful; the Discourager was behind him; and through his parted scarf he boldly answered: 'Yes, I will.' Whereupon the priest pronounced them man and wife.

"Now the Prince heard a little bustle about him; the long scarf was rapidly unrolled from his head; and he turned, with a start, to gaze upon his bride. To his utter amazement, there was no one there. He stood alone. Unable on the instant to ask a question or say a word, he gazed blankly about him.

"Then the King arose from his throne, and came down, and took him by the hand.

" 'Where is my wife?' gasped the Prince.

" 'She is here,' said the King, leading him to a curtained doorway at the side of the hall.

"The curtains were drawn aside, and the Prince, entering, found himself in a long apartment, near the opposite wall of which stood a line of forty ladies, all dressed in rich attire, and each one apparently more beautiful than the rest.

"Waving his hand towards the line, the King said to the Prince: 'There is your bride! Approach, and lead her forth! But remember this: that if you attempt to take away one of the unmarried damsels of our court, your execution shall be instantaneous. Now, delay no longer. Step up and take your bride.'

"The Prince, as in a dream, walked slowly along the line of ladies, and then walked slowly back again. Nothing could he see about any one of them to indicate that she was more of a bride than the others. Their dresses were all similar; they all blushed; they all looked up, and then looked down. They all had charming little hands. Not one spoke a word. Not one lifted a finger to make a sign. It was evident that the orders given them had been very strict.

" 'Why this delay?' roared the King. 'If I had been married this day to one so fair as the lady who wedded you, I should not wait one second to claim her.'

"The bewildered Prince walked again up and down the line. And this time there was a slight change in the countenances of two of the ladies.

One of the fairest gently smiled as he passed her. Another, just as beautiful, slightly frowned.

" 'Now,' said the Prince to himself, 'I am sure that it is one of those two ladies whom I have married. But which? One smiled. And would not any woman smile when she saw, in such a case, her husband coming towards her? But, then, were she not his bride, would she not smile with satisfaction to think he had not selected her, and that she had not led him to an untimely doom? Then again, on the other hand, would not any woman frown when she saw her husband come towards her and fail to claim her? Would she not knit her lovely brows? And would she not inwardly say, "It is I! Don't you know it? Don't you feel it? Come!" But if this woman had not been married, would she not frown when she saw the man looking at her? Would she not say to herself, "Don't stop at me! It is the next but one. It is two ladies above. Go on!" And then again, the one who married me did not see my face. Would she not smile if she thought me comely? While if I wedded the one who frowned, could she restrain her disapprobation if she did not like me? Smiles invite the approach of true love. A frown is a reproach to a tardy advance. A smile ——'

" 'Now hear me!' loudly cried the King. 'In ten seconds, if you do not take the lady we have given you, she, who has just been made your bride, shall be your widow.'

"And, as the last word was uttered, the Discourager of Hesitancy stepped close behind the Prince, and whispered: 'I am here!'

"Now the Prince could not hesitate an instant; and he stepped forward and took one of the ladies by the hand.

"Loud rang the bells; loud cheered the people; and the King came forward to congratulate the Prince. He had taken his lawful bride.

"Now, then," said the high officer to the deputation of five strangers from a far country, "When you can decide among yourselves which lady the Prince chose, the one who smiled or the one who frowned, then will I tell you which came out of the opened door — the lady, or the tiger!"

At the latest accounts the five strangers had not yet decided.

We are indebted to Dr. James A. Brussel of the Willard State Hospital, Willard, New York, for the following anecdote about Frank R. Stockton. To the best of our knowledge this anecdote has never appeared in print before. We give the story almost verbatim from Dr. Brussel's letter.

At the time "The Lady, or the Tiger?" had the literary world by the ears, a dinner was held at which Mr. Stockton was the guest of honor.

When the dessert was served, the waiter set before Mr. Stockton two molds of ice cream. One was in the shape of a tiger, and the other in the shape of a beautiful lady.

Everyone present watched with bated breath what Mr. Stockton would do. Would his choice of the two desserts indicate his own personal solution to the immortal riddle?

Mr. Stockton calmly devoured the tiger.

Cries of triumph arose from those guests who had bet on the animal-solution; groans of despair came from those who had championed the human-solution.

Then to the dismay of all present Mr. Stockton proceeded to consume the ice cream lady!

"And so I leave it with all of you: Which came out of the opened door, — the lady, or the tiger?" And which lady did the Prince choose — the one who smiled, or the one who frowned?

In real life as well as in fiction, Mr. Stockton proved himself a modern Solomon — after his own fashion.

NEXT MONTH . . .

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GOODBYE, NEW YORK

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

I'D ALREADY SMELLED GAS ON THE floor below, but didn't think anything of it. When I got up to our floor it was more noticeable still. Somebody's oven was defective, I thought. They'd better report it to the company before they go boom. It wasn't overpowering, just gave an acrid edge to the air.

I had my latchkey in my bag, but couldn't get it out on account of the big brown-paper sacks weighing down each arm. I knew Rafe must be home by now anyway, it was after seven. I wangled my thumb free and stuck it on the flat nacre bell. The smell of the gas gave each of my nostrils an acid little stab, as though it were coming through our door-crack. I suddenly pushed my face close. It was! It was strongest up against the seam.

I could feel the blood go funneling down through my neck. "Rafe!" I shouted, once. The brown-paper bags gave a *plop*, one on each side of me. I was driving the key into the lock with both hands, one kneecap pointed up against the door as if to steer me in.

I got the door out of the way with a lurch, and the sickly sweet gush of the gas bloomed around me. I could see him from where I was. He was on the kitchen floor, lying flat on his back, his face turned up to the ceiling. His head was facing my way, but his eyes were closed. He'd brought in two pillows from the bedroom and they were under him for a mattress. Newspapers folded lengthwise were jammed around the kitchen window. His coat and tie were over the back of a chair. The piece of white notepaper — the inevitable piece of white notepaper — was on the seat of the chair.

I wasn't standing there sizing him up, I was bolting toward him, then past him, to get to that window. I think I jumped over him, I'm not sure. The kitchen was pretty small and he was in the way. I pushed a chair-back at the window and one of the little panes fell out, with little more than a snap. The putty was old. I tore at the catch, shoved the whole sash up. Then I ran to the stove, shut off the burners. It was one of the old-fashioned kind without a pilot light, luckily. I was starting to get a headache.

But there wasn't very much of it yet, he'd only got started. I clumped down on my knees beside him. His face wasn't blue, he was just a little dizzy. His eyes opened of their own accord at the jar I made.

"*You* hadda come back," he was muttering. "I don't have any luck in anything, do I?"

He got up on one elbow and felt his throat absent-mindedly, and then

he wiped his mouth, and then he felt the back of his neck, as if he wondered what it was. And then his mouth gave a crooked little smile. I hope you never see your husband smile that way. It isn't good for you.

Our faces were only inches apart, and we were looking into each other's eyes. It was raining on my side of the look. I took my hand and slapped him stingingly on one side of the face, then on the other. He only blinked and gave that off-center smile again.

"You damned fool!" I choked. "Trying to run out on me! You doublecrosser! You welsher!"

And then we went into a clinch. That was all we had.

We must have looked funny from the open door, sitting opposite each other on the kitchen floor, holding on tight.

He got up first, leaned on one elbow against the sink, stood looking down at me. I stayed where I was, backed up my knees, wrapped my hands around them.

"Nothing today again," he said, after a while. That was his way of telling me why. That was all the talking we did about it. It had been too close a shave.

I gave him the smile that meant, "What do we care?" I knew how by heart, by this time.

He reached in his pocket — the one on the left side that didn't have a hole in the lining — and got a cigarette out that he'd already smoked once before earlier in the day and put out halfway down. He got out a match and sniffed the air. "Think I can take a chance on this yet?" That should have been very funny, I don't know why it wasn't.

"I guess it's all right now," I nodded. It was all right — the gas was gone by now.

He was looking at my interlocked hands. "Where's your wedding ring?"

"Out there in two bags of groceries."

He blinked again, the way he had when I'd slapped him. That was all. "Guess I'd better bring them in before someone picks them up," he said quietly, and went out to get the brown-paper bags.

He tried at first, then quit in the middle of the meal. "I can't," he said, "I keep chewing on our marriage vows."

There wasn't anything I could say to that.

He got up and put on his coat and tie. Then he stuck his hands in his pockets and started to walk. He just walked from one wall as far as the other and turned each time. It was a small room. He'd walked like this nearly every night for weeks past. But tonight, when he'd covered about two miles that way, he finally reached for his hat and got ready to let his walking get him somewhere.

But I was at the door, ahead of him. "You're not going to —" I bobbed my head toward the kitchen, "try any more funny business, are you?"

"Forget it," he said gruffly. Meaning he was ashamed of it himself by

now. So that was going to be all right.

"Then where you going, all of a sudden, at this time of night?" He didn't have a dime on him, even to get a drink, and I knew it.

His eyes wouldn't stay on my face. "I just thought of someone who might lend me a little something."

"Who?" I insisted. "Who is there we haven't tried already, and mortgaged our hides to, or been turned down flat? Who?"

"You don't know him," he said lamely. "Someone I — used to know." He tried to pry my arm down from across the door, but I held on.

"I know everyone you do. There isn't anyone you know that well, that I don't," I said. "Freund, your old boss? The man that was the cause of the fix we're in today? The man that kicked you out like a — You wouldn't go to him and you know it. You hate his guts."

"I'd go to anyone by now. He's under moral obligation to me, isn't he?" But he hadn't meant Freund, I could tell that by the surprised look in his eyes, almost as though I'd put the idea in his head. And I knew Freund'd be the last one he'd go to, anyway; men are that way when they've got a grievance against somebody. He was proud as Lucifer. That was why he'd dragged those two pillows into the kitchen; it's only the proud ones who do.

I finally took my arm down. All the blood in it was running backwards. "Rafe, I don't like the way you're acting. Don't do anything you shouldn't. Please, Rafe, be careful."

He gave that smile again. "Rafe, don't do anything you shouldn't," he repeated. "Let your wife serve up her wedding ring with ketchup. Let her eat her dreams." He opened the door and went out into the hall. "Don't wait up for me tonight," he said. His voice was strained and bitter.

"Rafe!" I called after him. I ran in, snatched up my hat and coat, but by the time I got back he was gone. I went down as far as the street, but I couldn't see which way he'd gone.

I didn't hear his key in the door until the night was over. It was twenty to five in the morning. I'd done what he told me, I hadn't waited up for him. But that was about all. He hadn't told me not to stay awake, and it wouldn't have done any good if he had. I lay there in the dark and listened to him come in. I heard him close the door after him. Then he came into the room and undressed without putting the lights on, so he wouldn't disturb me. I kept my eyes closed and followed his actions by the quiet sounds he made.

He went into the bathroom, and I could hear him washing his hands. He stayed an awful long time washing them; he kept it up and kept it up till I thought he'd never quit. Usually he hardly bothered with them — just gave them a quick rinse and blackened up my towels. And while he was washing I heard him make a funny sound in his throat. It might

have been a kind of despairing groan.

Finally he came in and lay down. At that, he fell asleep sooner than I did. After he'd been asleep some time, and the room was light, I went over to where he'd left his coat, and put my hand in that pocket that had the good lining. Five hundred dollars came out in my hand, folded over into a flat oval, a short little tube. They were all fifties; I counted them. The top one had a stain of red ink on it.

Five hundred was the exact amount we needed to pull us out of the hole we were in. We'd figured that out so many times that we had it down by heart, to the last penny. It had given us something to do in the evenings, in place of a radio. But, of course, that was taking in everything — rent and bills and long-standing loans; that was wiping the slate clean and starting over again from scratch. We'd never hoped to have that much at one time; the very people we owed didn't expect us to. Even 200 would have been a Godsend. Even 50 would have come in handy. And here was the whole amount.

Freund hadn't lent him that; nobody had.

I put it back where I'd found it, and crawled over and got into bed again. I might have been dead, I lay so still. I couldn't move.

It was high noon when we got up, and we didn't say anything to each other. The milk had been cut off long ago, but because the morning paper only came to a few cents a day, and he'd needed it for the want-ads, that was still coming. It was jammed around the doorknob and I brought it in.

We sat there with it, between us on the table, unopened. Both our eyes kept straying to it when we thought the other wasn't looking. It was as though we were trying to pretend to each other it wasn't there.

"More coffee?" I said.

He nodded. Finally I reached out slyly for the paper, not with one clean sweep but notching my arm forward a little at a time as though it worked on a belt. That was a dead give-away in itself; I'd never been afraid to open a morning paper until now.

He made a quick, almost unnoticeable pass with his hand, as though to pin it down where it was. It never got all the way to it, he pulled it in again. I'd seen it, but I pretended I hadn't. I had my hand on the paper now. He got up and left the room.

The paper weighed a ton. My cup was too heavy to hold with one hand, and it clattered back on its saucer. There it was — right there on the front page, under a heavy black headline. It was as if I were focusing some kind of a high-powered reading lens on it; it shot out at me, grew bigger while the adjoining print grew smaller until it seemed to stand by itself.

Anton Freund, a retired business man, was found murdered on the ground floor of his house at

. . . the early hours of this morning. A neighbor who knew Mr. Freund's frugal habits noticed that the lights had been left burning after daylight, and upon investigating . . . Robbery was apparently the motive for the attack. The sum of $500 was missing from the large amount of ready cash Mr. Freund habitually kept about him in the house. One of the puzzling features of the crime is that a far larger sum was left untouched in full sight in Mr. Freund's open cashbox, the murderer evidently contenting himself . . . All the evidence points to the fact that the attacker was someone known to the dead man, who unsuspectingly admitted him of his own accord when he called some time during the evening. . . . Mr. Freund had been struck on the head by a heavy andiron taken from before the fireplace in the living-room, and died of a compound fracture of the skull. There were no evidences of a struggle. . . . The police are inclined to suspect some disgruntled former employee of Mr. Freund, a number of whom were abruptly discharged several years ago when he retired from business. . . . An arrest is expected within twenty-four hours. . . .

When I got through reading it I held my head in both hands, elbows planted on the tabletop, and just stared. You'd think I'd never seen that blank wall opposite me before in my life. He wasn't making a sound in the other room, must've been just standing still. After a while, when my heart had slowed down enough to let me breathe right, I carefully folded the paper back the way it had been and replaced it with *that* side of it face down.

He was standing by the window, looking down, when I went in. Even the sight of his back, sloping a little at the top with the inclination of his head, did something to me. And anyone that can love a back, can love.

"Don't you think," I said as quietly as I could, "we'd better get out of here?"

He whirled as though I'd hit him. We just looked at each other a long time, without a word. And that way, he knew that I knew. I could see that he knew that I knew. Oh, there wasn't going to be any *talking* about this; I couldn't have stood it.

Finally I broke the grip that seemed to hold us both frozen. "Don't stand over by the window — too much," I said quietly, and went into the bedroom. He came after me as far as the door.

"What do you think I should do?"

"*We*, I said!" I corrected him sharply, hustling into my dress.

"Oh, no — !" he sort of whimpered, and put out his hands toward my shoulders.

They never got there. The doorbell clammered in the stillness, like a fire alarm. We went rigid again, like a pair

of newly-cast statues freshly poured into their molds. *An arrest is expected within twenty-four hours*, flashed into my mind. Already?, I thought sickly. Oh, not already — give us a chance! It rang again, and then again, commandingly.

I motioned back toward the closet, "I'll go," I whispered. "If one of us don't, they'll come in."

He came after me, I couldn't shake him off. We both walked across the floor toward the door without making any sound, like two reflections cast on water.

The door had one of those little openings with a hinged flap, an interviewer. I pushed him back with one hand, cautiously opened the flap. A side of the superintendent's face showed. He was standing there. He didn't see my eye.

"Mason," I motioned with my lips, "for the rent again."

His hand inched downward toward his left pocket.

"No," I whispered, terrified, "not that money! Yesterday we didn't have a cent. Don't you understand?"

Again I waved him back, and this time he went out of the radius of vision of the door. I opened it just the width of my cheekbones.

"Can you do anything for me yet, Mrs. Burns?" the man began, sort of hopelessly.

I found I could smile, by trying hard. "My husband isn't in right now. I'll have something for you by the end of the week."

He wasn't insolent, just dejected. We'd worn out his insolence long ago.

"But you've told me that so many times. I can't go back and tell Mr. Krafft that any more. He won't take it from me, he's heard it so often."

Something was being edged into my hand from behind me; something spongy, papery, folded. I rejected it with a panic-stricken fling.

"Well, maybe later in the day then. I'll see what I can do. I can't promise you." I ended the torture by closing the door on him.

I was all in. I turned limply, leaned my shoulder blades against the wall. Rafe started to say something, but I covered his mouth with my hand, and we moved away from the door, out of earshot.

In the bedroom I said, "Put on a clean shirt." I held it open for him, then when he had it on, buttoned it for him, from the collar clear down to the waist. It was like the time I used to send him out looking his best, to try to find a job. Oh, what a screwy thing to do at such a time. Then I said, "You can't go out in those clothes. Did anybody see you?"

"I don't know," he said.

I put up my hand — not so much because I was in a hurry as to keep him from talking, telling me anything, anything at all. "Quick," I said, "give me one of those fifties. Stay here. Promise you won't move out of here, promise you won't answer the door."

"Hey!" he called after me, "don't do that! Where you going?" But I'd already opened the door, slipped out,

and closed it hurriedly after me.

I hurried down the stairs to the street, my handbag tightly under my arm. Once I was out on the sidewalk, I didn't hurry so noticeably, just moved briskly along, the way I did on other days when I was trying to keep from being insulted by the tradesmen over how much we owed them.

There was a men's clothing store on the next corner. It could have been a jewelry store, for all the good it had done us for the last couple of years. But today I was thankful it was that near. I knew what a risky thing I was doing, but it would have been riskier still, I felt, to let him show himself—*An arrest is expected within twenty-four hours.*

I knew what size he took, so that didn't worry me. A salesman came up to me and I said, "I want a dark blue suit, size 38." There wasn't time for alterations, anyway.

He looked surprised at this buying sight unseen. Said something about they could not send things out on approval.

"I'm paying for it here and now," I snapped. "My — brother's graduating today and we've been caught short. He didn't know until the last minute if he was going to make it or not. He couldn't come out himself, has a speech to memorize —" I went through motions of testing the quality of the material he showed me, while he ran through the usual salesman's patter. If he could have read that slightly unconvinced look in my eye, he would have known it meant, "Hurry up, for God's sake, hurry up! Let me get out of here!"

I bought a hat to go with it, with a good broad brim that would snap down over his eyes. Size 7⅛. He did them both up for me, with a crackle and hiss of needless tissue paper that was like a nail on glass to my nerves. I took a deep breath like a high diver about to go off a springboard, fumbled in my bag, handed him the 50 Rafe had given me. It was the one with the colored ink fleck; I turned it quickly over on the other side. It *would* be that one out of the ten.

He looked at it, of course. They look at anything over a five nowadays. But he took it over to the cashier without any change of expression. I was aging a year a minute while I stood there, negligently waiting for the long-drawn-out procedure to end.

You know, when someone's eyes are on you, when someone is looking at you steadily, even though you are unaware of their presence, how you feel it, how you sense the look. I felt that then, as I stood there waiting. And there was no one else near me in the store. The other salesman had gone back into the stock room. There were no customers, nobody but my salesman and the cashier, whom I was covertly watching.

It drew my head and eyes away from them in a complete half-circle, and I was looking out through the plate-glass showcase of the store, and there was a man standing out on the

sidewalk staring in. Staring at me.

Something went down my spine.

It would have been all right; men do stand and look into men's clothing store windows — that's what they're for: but the two nearest dummies in the window were just a little too far off on either side of him — he was looking straight between them, in the direction of me!

He had on a derby hat and there was a sort of leer on his face, and his face was pushed forward pretty close to the glass. "Detective!" I thought, and I reached out to grip the edge of the counter to keep from falling. Then I turned my eyes away from him. But the blur of his presence, there outside the glass, filled my eyes. The man stood immovable, waiting for me to come out.

The salesman returned with the change and a receipt and a thank-you. I stalled all I could, fumbling with my bag, putting the money away in it, waiting for him to go away — and knowing he wouldn't. The salesman stood courteously by, waiting to escort me to the door. That shadow on the glass, like a stalking animal, wouldn't budge, wouldn't even shift position.

Finally I raised my head despairingly, to the salesman. "Is there — have you a ladies' room here?" If there was, and it had a window —

He looked, properly embarrassed. "I'm sorry — we don't have many lady customers —"

I said a very foolish thing. "Is there any other way out of here?" As though that would have helped any; I was like a goldfish in a bowl, with that glass front running around two sides of the store.

He began to look a little suspicious for the first time. "No, there isn't — is something the matter?" He glanced at the store entrance, but he noticed nothing. The man at the window was, for the first time, looking at the dummies and not at me, as the salesman's head turned that way.

"No," I said, slowly, "nothing's the matter. I just asked, that's all. I said to myself, "If this is it already, lurking in here won't help any; he'll only come in and get me finally. And if it isn't — but what else can it be? I can't stay here all day, I've got to get back to Rafe. Every minute counts. Maybe by this time they've been there already —"

I picked up the large flat box and the crumply paper hat bag and started down the aisle. His eyes — through glass — were on me as I came nearer to him. He didn't move from where he was, but his body started to turn in line with my approach, as I drew abreast, passed through the store entrance, and came out onto the sidewalk. His back, now, was to the show window, and he was looking squarely at me.

I thought, Do they do it that openly? But then what technique does it require, when I'm walking right into his arms? I didn't have sand enough to pass him and turn the corner. And there was another reason — I wasn't going to lead him

back with me where he wanted to go. That might be what he was after; maybe they weren't sure yet. I turned up the other way, toward the next street — and my heels didn't make much noise, but my heart sure did.

I didn't look over my shoulder; there wasn't a sound behind me on the pavement, but I knew he was coming slowly after me. The crawl of the skin up and down my back told me. Little needles of warning that gathered at the back of my skull told me. I'd never known until then that the jungles aren't so very far behind us, after all, and tails, and four feet instead of two. Where else did those symptoms come from?

I thought in despair, I've got to get rid of him, I've got to shake him off! If I don't I'll be cut off from Rafe! I won't be able to get back — It was clear that for the present he was just going to stalk, not jump. Running wasn't any good — you can't outrun a man's flat heels. A taxi might do the trick, if there was just one and not a second one hanging around, too. I got to the corner, but there wasn't even one in sight.

Then, just as I stopped, he finally closed in. There was a single footfall directly behind me, and a muffled voice came across my shoulder. "Wanna take a little ride in my car, sugar?"

I let my reflexes act for me; I was incapable just then of using my head. My head would have tried to tell me, you're being pinched, and I would have done all the wrong things. My reflexes seized on the endearment-tag he'd thrown in and acted accordingly. I whirled, sliced my free hand at him in what was meant to be a good hearty slap. He pulled his face back out of the way and it missed him. "I'll call a cop!" I yelled — with fantastic inappropriatness. Then I went skittering up the street parallel to ours. And he didn't come after me.

I went all the way around the block and came warily back to our flat from the opposite direction to which I'd left it. Fifteen or twenty precious minutes gone, all on account of a masher! Murder in a family, it seemed, didn't change one's appearance much to a casual roving eye.

"Put these on," I said, as soon as I'd closed the door after me. I took his old coat, trousers, and hat, wrapped them up in newspapers, carried them out to the incinerator, and dropped them down the chute. He was in the new ones by the time I got back. I stood up to him and bent the brim of the new hat even further down than he had it, all the way over his eyes.

"Not too low," he warned. "That's a dead give-away too."

There was a picture of him in a frame on my dresser. I lifted it out, tore it into tiny pieces, crammed them in my pocket. "Mason and all the neighbors know what I look like, even without that," he said.

"Anything to make it a little tougher for them," I said. I stuffed a pair of roll-up stockings into my

pocket. I wasn't leaving much behind at that, we'd been pretty down on fancy clothes lately. We started toward the door together, my left hand loosely clasped in his right one. We stopped there again, a minute. "Where — ?" I said.

"What's the difference?" he said sombrely. "We can't stay in any one place very long — from now on. We may hold out a year, or it may be all over in an hour — but there won't be any rest for us, no place we can call home, no one we can call our friends —" He looked at me in an odd sort of way. "Honey, it's going to be tough sledding — I guess I haven't got any right to ask you — are you sure you want to string along? Why don't you just sit pat and let me take my own chances —"

All I said was, "What d'you take me for?"

And he took me in his arms and we both hung on tight, and I thought, Till death do us part, baby, till death do us part.

That was still all we had.

The hall was empty. We closed the door quietly after us, and left the place we'd lived in, forever. I had my arm curled tight around his as we soft-shoed down the stairs, and came out into the street. My bag was tucked under my free arm, he had his wallet stuck in the pocket of his new suit. Negligent, jaunty, just a young couple coming out for an afternoon airing. But our eyes told the story, would have if anyone had looked. They darted everywhere, up and down that old, familiar street.

"Relax, don't look scared, don't give it away," he cautioned out of the side of his mouth nearest me. And he pressed the arm I was holding against his side for a minute, squeezing my hand, then let it out again.

A little kid on roller skates veered out of our way, stiff-legged, trying to balance himself. On the opposite sidewalk a woman was walking along carrying two big brown-paper parcels, the way I used to — and never would again. Being broke didn't seem so awful as it had yesterday, being broke but being at peace with the world.

An icicle suddenly stabbed at my heart. "My God, there's Mason at the basement door ahead, and you in a new suit!"

I tried to retreat, in a panic, but he held me steady with his arm, kept me facing the way I was. "Too late, he's seen us already. It'll look worse to duck back inside again. You can tell by his face he doesn't know anything yet." Even at this crisis, that same embarrassment about it, that attempt to keep up appearances — just between the two of us.

"But *after*, don't you see, *after* we've gone, when they ask him —"

"They won't have to ask him — much," Rafe said grimly.

I got my second wind, slowly unwound my coupled arm as we drew nearer. Mason was standing with his feet below sidewalk level on the basement steps, one knee tilted before him. "Keep walking slowly toward the corner, don't *you* stop, I'll catch

right up with you," I told him. "I've got a ten-spot now, I'll give it to him and shut him up. I can handle him for the time being, I've been handling him all year." I started to diverge from him, went off at a slant toward Mason.

"Here, I told you I'd have something for you," I chirped sunnily. But his eyes were on Rafe, on the new suit. Even the ten-spot wasn't enough to shut him up. "I thought you told me your husband wasn't home."

"He wasn't. He came back to tell me the good news. Isn't it wonderful? He finally got something and — and he looked so shabby they gave him an advance on his salary, made him buy himself a new suit to go to work in. He starts Monday — now, don't forget, that's ten I've given you, you can put the receipt in our mailbox —"

Dear Lord, I thought, chasing after Rafe with little staccato toe-pecks, this is going to backfire in no time now. We're sewed-up pretty already. And he doesn't start a fire in that incinerator until after twelve tonight; if they get here before then, the first thing they'll do is go down there and take a look —

I rejoined him just as we both came abreast of the long clothing-store show window, but around the corner from the entrance. You could look clear through the triangle formed by the two sheets of plate glass to the other sidewalk, where the doorway was.

He felt my grip suddenly tighten on his arm. He looked covertly all around us, but without turning his head much. "What's the matter?"

"Don't look. Let's cross over to the other side quick before we get all the way to the corner! This is where I bought it for you — and there's a cop in uniform talking to the salesman at the door!"

"He'll spot his own suit a mile away, I know those guys." He swore a little, in a low whisper, but with unhappy bitterness. He managed to glance behind us, without seeming to move his head at all. "We can't head back, either. Mason's still out there in front of the house. He'll head us off if they yell to him!"

We stepped over the curb, crossed diagonally to the opposite sidewalk, and got around that corner. We were now flush with the front of the store back there, but on the next block over, and every step was taking us farther away. Two blocks ahead there was a railed-off gap in the sidewalk between a couple of blue lights. The subway — and sanctuary! Or at least a hole over our heads. But never before had I seen two such long blocks; they seemed to stretch before us to infinity.

Rafe said out of the corner of his mouth, "Keep your eyes front, don't look back!" The invariable rule of the fugitive.

I threw up the flap of my envelope-bag with one hand, without slackening, and raised it to eye level. The street behind us was focused in the

little mirror pasted onto the lining, as in a periscope. Both faces, the salesman's and the cop's, were turned down our way, looking after us. I saw the salesman's arm go up, indicating, then it dropped again.

"They've spotted us," I groaned. "It's all over."

I could feel his body tense itself alongside mine. "We can make it — come on!"

I hung on like a leech, trying to pull him back. "Don't run! Don't run! He's coming up too fast and — he's armed."

Some kind of rigor, like in a pursuit-nightmare, had me; I couldn't unbend any of my muscles. I was sick, and the street was all blurred around me. Flat board-like feet were slapping after us on the run. The last thing I said was, "Don't raise your hands to him, Rafe! Please, for my sake, don't raise your hands to him! Remember, he's got a gun!"

We didn't turn, even at the very last minute. The cop came up to us with a rush of air, got around in front of us. His gun wasn't out. He was sore for a minute. "Hey, are you two deaf! Di'n you hear me hollering at you?"

I said something inane, like, "Oh, was that for us?"

"Yeah, I wanted to talk to you a minute, lady."

Me, he wanted to talk to! If you know women, you won't find it hard to believe that a vast relief, instead of personal fear, was all I felt at this passing of the buck from Rafe to myself — even without knowing what it was about. It steadied me a lot, this switch to myself. I managed to get my face back into working order. "Yes, officer?" I said crisply polite.

"Was there a man around here just now annoying you?"

"Yes, there was," I said unhesitatingly, "I didn't want to tell my husband — but there was."

"Salesman told me he saw him follow you, from the window. Two other ladies came up to me just now and told me he tried to bother *them*. Couldje gimme an idear what he looked like?"

I couldn't remember for the life of me. Oh, yes, just one thing — "He had on a derby hat and was smoking a cigar. He gave me the fright of my life, I ran like —"

Rafe took up the cue. "Why didn't you tell me? I'd like to get my hands on him!"

"Maybe *I* wouldn't," said the cop grimly, twirling his nightstick. I became suddenly aware that I'd slipped up, and got a little frightened again. I'd told the salesman I was buying the suit for my brother. Now I'd identified the man wearing it as my husband.

He didn't seem to notice the discrepancy, so evidently the salesman hadn't given him the connecting link. But nine chances to one he'd go back to him as soon as our backs were turned, and resume comparing notes where he'd broken off — and then it would be bound to come out. And then he'd wonder. And then when

the real news came, he'd remember and he'd understand. And he'd be able to give them an up-to-the-minute description of what Rafe was wearing that would make his having changed clothes just a waste of time. He might as well have stayed in his old ones, now.

He wanted to hang on, this cop. He wanted to chin a while and tell us at great length just what he was going to do if he got his hands on that masher, and give us his experiences with other mashers since he'd been on the Force, but we started to pull away, a step at a time, so he said, "All right, lady, if you happen to see him again — even if he don't bother you — you just lemme know. You'll always find me around here —"

He turned his back on us and started off to where he'd come from — where the salesman was still loitering in the doorway, waiting to gossip some more with him.

As we hurried on toward the subway entrance, Rafe with his head up, me with mine down watching my feet flash in and out of my skirt hem, I told him, "I got my wires crossed — told the salesman the suit was for my brother. Now he saw it on you. We might as well be wading through snowdrifts, the traces we're leaving behind us —"

He sensed my wanting to look back and he threw in his clutch on my arm warningly, "Eyes front," he said.

That familiar sign — INTERBOROUGH RAPID TRANSIT, TRAINS TO PENNSYLVANIA, TIMES SQUARE, THE BRONX AND VAN CORTLANDT — had never seemed so welcome as it came flush with our eyes, roofing the sidewalk-shaft. Our two pairs of heels clicked down the steel-rimmed steps. Then at last, when I was down to the shoulders, I turned and took a good, long, hard look back.

Bad news again. A little green beetle-shape had nosed up alongside those two on the sidewalk back there.

"Rafe, a police car!"

Before and below us a gush of warm fetid air and a receding roar through the tunnel warned that we'd just missed a train, and we had a five to ten minute wait ahead of us — tiled concrete walling us off on three sides, a high-voltage rail hemming us in on the fourth.

"That masher, that's all it's about," he said. "They're on the lookout —"

"No, us," I insisted. "They get their orders by radio from headquarters. And their faces were turned *our* way again —"

We were at the bottom of the steps, but still shielded by the indentation of the station walls from the sight of the agent in his booth. "Get out there on the platform a while," he said, quickly. "Go all the way down to the end, as far as you can get, and stand close behind one of the pillars. No, better yet, duck in the women's rest room and stay there until you hear the next train coming. I'm going up again and take a look, watch what they do —"

"No, don't go back and show your-

self! Don't leave me down here alone!"

"It's all right, I'll be right with you." He jogged me roughly forward. "Go on out there, I tell you! It's better if we go through the turnstiles separate, anyway."

He didn't have a penny change on him, just the 450 — in 50-dollar bills.

"I'll leave a dime in for you, in the one on this end, Rafe. Be careful, don't let them see you —" But he was already sidling back up the steps again.

You know how those things work; automatic control; you can put in two coins at a time and the second one doesn't drop through until the turnstile's been revolved a second time. I put in two, passed through, gave a sidelong glance at the agent in his lighted booth. He was going over some ledger, and didn't look up. Why should he — that was all he heard all day long.

I slunk out of sight, went in the rest room, and stayed close up against the door. The train we had just missed (thanks to that cop) had cleaned the platform. Nobody on it but a collector removing the pennies from the chewing-gum machines, and he was way off at the opposite end. I heard a distant pounding, like a heavy surf coming through the tunnel-bore, and edged nervously out again. But an outbound train swept in on the other track. No sign of Rafe; I went back inside again, leaned limply against the metal door.

After about two minutes a turnstile cracked and I eased the door partly open and peered out. It still wasn't Rafe, it was someone else. I saw him looking quizzically back at the turnstile he'd just passed through, but didn't think anything of it. I lay low again.

What was taking him so long? He should have been down in no time! Had they grabbed him off at the top of the steps when he showed his face again? I didn't think so, or they would have been down here after me by now. He had no business *standing* there staring, if that's what he was doing — and yet there must be a sort of fatal fascination in watching a net being drawn around a fugitive's supposed whereabouts — when you're that fugitive, only they don't know it yet, and you're still outside the radius of the net.

Again a warning hum started up through the long shaft, and by the time I was outside the door it was already a full-bodied booming, and scraps of paper were beginning to stir along the platform, as if in the path of an oncoming storm. A pair of red embers winked through the tunnel blackness, and then the whole works came cometing in, a long Morse Code of lighted dots and dashes, that spelled "On your way" to me. It slowed to a stop and the doors slapped back all up and down the train.

I was out in mid-platform. I was nearly going insane by now. We had to make this train! If we skulked around here another ten minutes we were goners! And then I saw him come flashing down those outside

steps. Something about the way he was coming down told me I'd been right. It *was* us. That police car up there had been after *us*. I didn't stand there waiting for him. I dove for the nearest car-vestibule to hold it open for him, and the doors were already ebbing remorsely back.

Everything went wrong at once, as though the gods of personal chance were already sick of us. Nine times out of ten, the pneumatic rubber-sheathed type, you can hold open indefinitely by just pushing back each time. Only when I was in myself, and had whirled around to try to hold back the doors for him, did I realize that *this* pair operated by the direct control of the conductor. Something sliced past my back, there was an iron-bound clang of finality behind me as he finished bearing down on the control-levers between cars, and before I could grab his arm, he'd jerked the overhead signal-cord and relayed the message to the motorman to go ahead. A sickening sensation of motion swept through me from the car-floor. "Open! Wait — open!" I turned to hammer at the thick dusty glass.

Outside on the platform something worse had happened. I caught sight of Rafe momentarily folded limply across the immovable turnstile-arm, all the wind knocked out of him by the sudden resistance he'd met. Somebody else had come through that particular one just ahead of him, using up my second dime. He not only didn't have another dime, but it was too late anyway. He and the turnstile and the station were dropping behind as we picked up momentum.

He straightened up, ducked, bolted under it, and came at the door. Like a flash the agent was out of his booth, had let down a chain, and was coming after him with outstretched arm. I was leaping up and down there on the inside of the glass like a suffocating fish in a murky tank, whacking at it with my bare hands. "Lemme out! My husband!"

Rafe had to keep running to stay abreast of the door. "Penn Station!" he boomed through the glass and train roar, "Wait for me — Penn Station!" His cupped hands megaphoned it my way. He turned to swing vaguely at the pursuing agent, backhand, to rid himself of him.

I gestured, "Don't hit him, Rafe! Don't hit him!" That would mean a row, arrest, hours of detention . . .

The platform narrowed treacherously to extinction, and husband, agent, and lights were all swallowed up in the darkness and left behind. I turned and staggered in and slumped down on the straw-backed seat and cried a little with fright and helplessness. Separated! The one thing I'd been dreading all along, the one thing we should have avoided at all costs!

That fool conductor followed me in and now that the damage was done, tried to reassure me, as though I was just some hick who had lost her way in the tubes! "Don't get excited, lady. It's all right — you can get off the next stop, cross over, and ride

back one station. It'll be all right —"

"Get away from me!" I lunged out at his shins with one sharp-pointed shoe. He jumped back out of range, gave me a white, startled look, and let me severely alone.

I couldn't get out and go back, now; if I did, we'd only pass each other on the way, we'd never get together again. I had to go all the way in and hang around Penn Station waiting for him — the worst place in town we could have picked, lousy with dicks at all times, crawling with them night and day.

The car started filling up around me as the stations ticked past one by one; I kept my head down — and not because I didn't want anyone to see I'd been crying, either. Any woman gets more than her share of stares riding a subway car; from the other women to see what she's wearing, and from the men — just to keep their minds busy, I suppose. Finally someone got up and left a newspaper behind them, and I grabbed it and held it up for a screen. After a while I began to read and some of the print soaked through to my inattentive eyes. On one page, there it was again:

> . . . a milkman whose route lies along the same street Mr. Freund lived on reported noticing a seedily-dressed individual loitering aimlessly on the sidewalk outside the house at about the time the murder is thought to have occurred. He rounded the corner, and reappeared from the opposite direction a few minutes later, as though he had circled the block. He was wearing a shabby gray suit, and was of medium height, thin and. . . .

It must have been a later edition than the one we'd got at the flat that morning. How weird, to read about your own husband in a stray paper you pick up on a subway car!

"Pennsylvania," called the conductor.

I got out. I walked through the long arcade that leads into the main wing of the station from Seventh Avenue; down the steps to the main waiting-room level, and out into the vast amphitheatre that is the hub of the station. I felt very small, very alone, very helpless. I fought it down, drove it out of my mind.

The Information Desk, of course. He hadn't said for sure — there hadn't been time — but it must've been there that he meant. Everyone always meets everyone there, and we were too new at this business of being fugitives to stray very far from the norm yet.

I went over to it, stood beside it, picked up a folder at random, hid my face behind it. I had the big station clock in front of me, over the top of the folder, the way I was standing. It was 3:25 when I first looked at it.

I knew I mustn't watch it too much, I knew what it could do to my self-control, my sanity. And yet my eyes kept coming back to it, coming back to it. 27, 28, half-past. Minutes

seemed so long, seemed to *hurt* so.

He should have caught up with me inside of fifteen minutes at the outside, if he'd been able to get on the next train after mine. But then there was that station agent to be considered. And Rafe didn't have a solitary dime on him; he'd have to break one of those fifties. I now remembered something that I'd been noticing half my life and that had never meant anything to me until today — a little sign outside each subway change booth, advising the public that the agent wasn't obliged to make change for anything bigger than $2. Never get mixed up in a murder, flashed through my mind insanely, unless you've got plenty of small change.

I don't think it was particularly cold in Penn Station that afternoon, but my hands were like ice, and my stomach, and my heart. The various schedules and brochures I picked up one after another shook in my hands, and I had to stretch them tight to keep them steady. Twenty-four to four, twenty-three, twenty-two.

Finally the Information Clerk was right behind me. "Anything I can do for you?"

I was grateful to him, in a way. It helped a little, his talking to me, took a little off the strain. Not very much, just a little.

"My husband told me to meet him here. He should have been here by now."

"Little vacation?"

"Well, no — we haven't even decided. We're just thinking about it."

Ten to four. "Don't trip him up," I prayed. "Let him get here!" I don't know to whom, maybe the vaulted station dome over me, sending down light.

He'd gone on talking.

"Where did you say?" I said abruptly.

"Atlanta, and then you can change there for —"

I shuddered slightly. "How far away that is!"

He gave up after a while; I was too inattentive. And then I turned to him, stretched my hand out along the counter, "Keep talking to me, will you? Keep talking to me!"

He looked startled.

"I mean — what other places are there we could go to?" I wanted to scream, "Rafe! Don't leave me alone here! I can't stand it!" I ground my hand across my mouth, rubbed the urge away.

Four o'clock. Three-quarters of an hour since I'd left him.

My face, in my handbag mirror, was a strange gray color. "Send him on. Oh, have a heart, send him on."

"What'd you say?" the clerk asked.

"I said it's very tiresome waiting."

Four-five. "You don't look well," he said anxiously. "Are you ill? Why don't you go into the waiting-room and sit down?"

I was supporting myself on the corner of his counter with one hand. "I'm all right. No, I'll stay here. I might miss him."

"Guess he couldn't get away as soon as he thought. Probably busy."

"Yes," I breathed, "I guess he must be — pretty busy."

Then at last I saw him. I hadn't thought I would ever see him again, but there he was. He was coming down the long flange of steps from the Seventh Avenue side, just as I had. He was coming down them slowly, as though he had all the time in the world. He wasn't looking around for me, he wasn't trying to find me. Almost, he seemed to be trying *not* to find me.

I was in full sight there before him; it would have been hard not to see me. And yet he didn't seem to. His face was held stiffly off to one side, as though to avoid seeing me if he possibly could.

My knees flexed to start toward him, my hand to make a gesture meaning, "Here I am." And then something held me back. Something warned, "Look out. Stand still, don't move. He could see you easily — if he wanted to."

I reached behind me, picked up one of those brochures again, did away with my mouth and nose and chin. "See him yet?" the clerk asked helpfully.

"No, no sign of him."

As he got down to the bottom of the steps, he veered off so he'd miss me when he came out into the middle of the floor. And he did something else. Or at least he seemed to, but I couldn't be sure. He made a quick little pass with his hand, close up against his body. Just a sudden spading motion, edgewise. "Don't come near me." You could see it from in front where I was, but you couldn't see it from behind him.

I couldn't see anything wrong. There wasn't anyone at all near him, or close behind him. The few people that were about were minding their own business. No one was staring at him. He turned off to his left, ignoring me completely, and went up to the long row of ticket windows.

I turned around slowly, so that I could keep his movements in front of me. He was buying something at the third ticket window from the end. His back was to me, but I saw his elbow move in and out, passing something across the shelf.

It was hard to keep my eyes on him without seeming to be staring too hard. I had to keep them down on the pamphlet I was holding, flick a glance over it now and then. That way, all I got was a jerky, disconnected series of snapshots.

He was through buying the ticket now. His coat flared out, then in again, and he'd put something away in his pocket. They come in little oblong envelopes. He'd stripped that off and kept it in his hand. He crumpled it and looked around for some place to throw it, as per those sanitary regulations that New Yorkers never pay any attention to.

Opposite there was a drinking basin, a glass cylinder holding paper cups, and a waste receptacle below it. He went over and threw the thing in,

and as he did so, looked at me for the first time. Just for an instant, but directly, searchingly at me. Then he turned, went through the open doorway into the men's waiting-room, and from where I was, I couldn't see him any more.

I thought, What made him look over like that when he threw away that envelope? A porter nerved me to action. He was moving toward the waste-bin dragging a rubbish-sack after him.

I managed to get there before he did without seeming to hurry too much. I put a penny into the patented cup-holder, drew down the knob. "Just a minute," I ordered brusquely. "Wait until I get through." He stood by uncertainly, over-awed at my tone.

I made quick motions of filling the cup, swallowing from it, crushing it. I pushed open the swinging lid of the container. The crumpled envelope was right there on top, within reach of my hand. I placed the cup inside and walked away with the balled-up envelope in my hand.

I went all the way over to the far side, smoothed it out, looked down at it surreptitiously. One of the fifties was in it. And on the underside of the flap he'd somehow found time to pencil almost illegibly: *2 to Miami, leave mine at gate.*

I knew then there must have been somebody following him, so he couldn't buy them himself. He'd bought a dummy ticket for somewhere else, knowing they'd ask the minute he left the window. I looked over at it, and there was a man in a tweed suit standing before it now. Still, that's what ticket windows are for, to sell transportation to the public.

I had to do what he told me. Maybe he just wanted to get me safely aboard, then turn back and give himself up. I dreaded that worse than arrest. But we were down to bedrock, there was no time to waste on doubts or self-sacrifice frills.

As soon as the man had gone away, I went back to the ticket window myself. I pushed the fifty under the grill.

"Two coach seats to Miami. When does the next train leave?"

"Ten minutes. Track Five."

I left one ticket in the envelope and sealed the flap. I showed my own at the gate, and gave the envelope to the gateman. "Give this to my husband. He'll be along any minute, but I'm afraid we won't get a seat if I don't go down right away."

"How'll I know him? I'm not supposed to —"

"He'll ask for it. Please, won't you?"

He stuffed it unwillingly into the breast-pocket of his uniform.

I moved down the steps to the lower track level, alone, reluctantly. There was a terrible finality about the lighted train standing down there in readiness. It was like taking a trip you're never coming back from. It was a little like death. Yesterday, and all the other yesterdays, seemed so far

away now — part of another life.

A line of conductors passed me along from car to car until I came to where the day coaches were. The first two were too full. I climbed in the last one, moved down the aisle to the very back of it, took the last seat on the side facing the platform ramp. The car was still fairly empty, it made me feel somehow cut off. Two doomed things, running away. From nothingness, into nothingness . . .

I couldn't sit still long. The windows were too milky and opaque to give a satisfactory view, and they were tightly shut because of the river tunnel ahead. I got up and went out again, leaving my coat on the back of the seat to claim it. I stood peering out of the car vestibule, straining my eyes toward the steps from above.

The group of conductors were separating, closing it on their posts now. The few last-minute arrivals were hustling down. I saw a man handing a girl some flowers one car ahead. I envied them their peace of mind. I thought, what will the world be like, without New York? What other world is there but New York? I thought, isn't it a good thing we haven't a baby! I thought, oh, every time I'm in his arms — if I ever am again — I'll think of *it*. It'll be a ghost lying with us. I'll think, you're kissing my face, but you killed a man! I thought all sorts of crazy things.

A knell-like "All aboard!" sounded somewhere up front, came traveling back by relays, echoing harrowingly along the roofed vault the train was in. The conductors swung inward out of sight, one by one.

The one beside me was saying, "Stand back, lady, I'm closing the door."

I tried to hold it open, folded back the way it was. "No, wait! Wait, I tell you —!"

Someone flashed out around the steps ahead, which faced forward the way the train was headed.

I reached in and out with both arms as though I were pulling him toward me through the air. He came running, bent so far over that he seemed to stumble continuously forward. We got him in, between us, the conductor and I, and the door banged safely in back of him. The train began to slip forward; you couldn't feel it yet, but you could see posts losing ground.

He had a slight cut over one eye, and there was dust all down the side of his new blue suit. His tie was on the outside of it, flapping loosely, and he'd lost his hat.

The conductor stared, and Rafe panted, for him to overhear, "I took a terrible fall up there just now, in my hurry."

But the bruise was on one side, the dust on the other. The conductor turned and left us, went into the car ahead. I got as much of the dust off as I could, and some of the blood off his eyebrow with a handkerchief. I tucked his tie back in, and straightened his hair with the flats of my hands. I didn't ask him what had really happened upstairs. I was afraid

of what it might have been. I put my hand on the inner door leading to the car aisle. "Keep your head down so they won't notice the bruise."

We moved down the lighted aisle, pressed closely together, swaying in unison. There wasn't anyone in the seat in front of ours. We got down in it as low as we could, and the green plush rim of the seat ahead came up to our eyes, nearly.

"We'll be all right now," he said, when he'd got his breath back, "until tomorrow night — I think."

Until tomorrow night, to live, to be together! Stolen time, borrowed time that didn't belong to us any more. It was going to be like that from now on.

Then when he saw me lean over suddenly in the seat, hold my head, then straighten up again, he said, "Try not to care. That's the one thing we've both got to learn, from now on. We'll go insane otherwise."

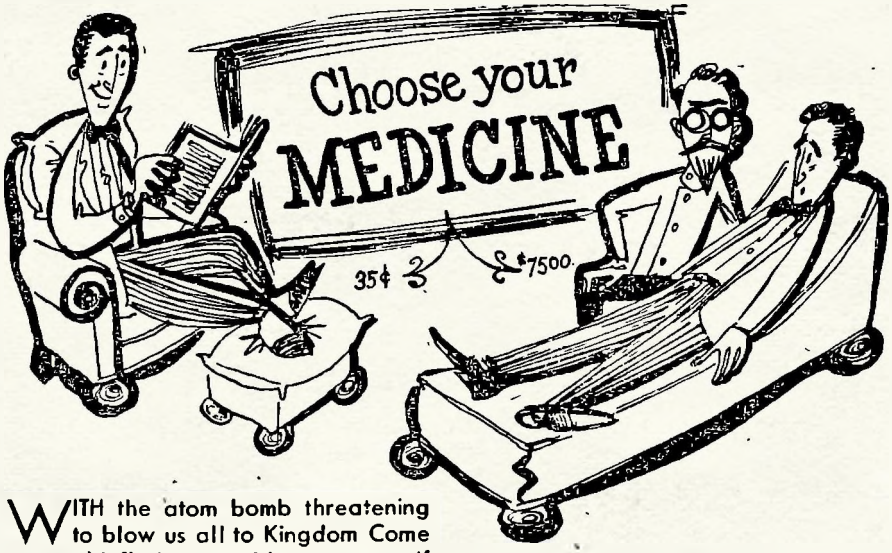
I didn't know how yet! I might learn in time, given time enough, but I didn't know how yet. And that was the most terrible part of all; he and I, we'd both learn how. It would happen again. Almost certainly it would happen again, when the five hundred was gone. We'd be driven to it. Every man's hand was against us, everyone was our enemy.

The door ahead opened suddenly, and a man in a tweed suit came into the car. The same one that had been at the ticket window after Rafe had left it. We both stopped breathing. He came halfway toward us, then suddenly dropped down in one of the seats, with his back to us.

Our breaths came slowly back again, while we stared at the back of his head. It was going to be like this from now on.

The blank tunnel-wall went whirring by outside, pitiless concrete, leading blindly onward into the dark. We were under way, now, and I hadn't wanted us to be. And God help him, neither had he. Turn back we dare not, stand still they wouldn't let us, and to go forward was our destruction at our own hands. I wanted to scream out frightenedly in that humming, vibrating car, "Where are we going? Where are we being taken?"

Goodbye, New York — and goodbye to us too. . . .



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