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a new novelette by

EDITOR'S FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HUGH PENTECOST**

TITLE: ***Frightened Star***

TYPE: Mystery and Suspense

LOCALE: Lakeview, United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Sandra Crayne (née Sally Crane) had won a beauty contest and become a Hollywood star almost overnight. Now she was returning home for the first time—and something had brought terror into her life . . .*

SALLY CRANE'S RETURN TO LAKEview was an event that passed almost unnoticed. Mr. Thompson, the station agent, saw her get off the late local and walk uncertainly down the rain-swept platform. For a moment he thought it was someone he knew, then he decided it wasn't. In a way he was right: this was not the Sally Crane he had known; this was a fear-ridden ghost of the girl who had left Lakeview less than a year ago.

Two other passengers got off the train that night: two men, dressed for the country, loaded down with duffle bags, fishing tackle, and shotguns in leather cases. They were noisily jovial, laughing at the rain that whipped into their faces. A young man in a yellow slicker, his crew-cut red hair soaked with water, came running toward the two men, grinning.

"A great day for it," he said. "I'm Bob Molloy. My station wagon's right there at the edge of the platform. Get in where it's dry. I'll bring your gear."

The two men ran, laughing, for the refuge of the station wagon. Bob Molloy started to load himself down with bags and tackle when he saw the soaked figure of the girl, standing uncertainly at the end of the platform. He ran over to her.

"You'd better get in my station wagon, Miss," he said. "There's no taxi this time of night. I run a motel here, or I can take you anywhere else in town you want."

The girl turned to look at him, holding herself rigid. "Bob!" she whispered.

The light went out behind Bob Molloy's smile. He stood there, staring at her, and he was wrong about her—just as he had been wrong about her twelve months ago. And again it spelled disaster for her—just as it had on the first occasion.

"Surprise," he said, his tone bitter. He thought the rigid way she held herself was a symbol of her complete withdrawal from his life. He couldn't know it represented a desperate effort to keep from throwing herself into the sanctuary of his strong arms. "You better let me take you some place, Sally. Or should I say, Sandra?" He laughed to cover his hurt.

She spun around like a cornered animal, looking to right and left, and then began to run away, into the darkness, into the storm, leaving her bag where she had put it down on the station platform.

"Sally!" he called after her, sharply. He didn't try to follow her.

"Hey, Molloy! Step on it!" one of the men yelled from the station wagon. "We'll get pneumonia if we don't get into some dry clothes."

Bob Molloy picked up Sally's bag and carried it into the station. He handed it to Mr. Thompson. "Someone left this on the platform," he said.

"There was a girl," Mr. Thompson said.

"Yeah, it's hers," Bob Molloy said.

Pride kept him from saying that he knew who it was, had spoken to her, and that she had run from him as if he were the plague.

The day Sally Crane left Lakeview was in extraordinary contrast to the night of her return. Most of the town turned out to say goodbye and wish her luck. The Firemen's Band serenaded her with *Oh, She's a Jolly Good Fellow*, the singing voices emphasizing the *She*, and *California, Here I Come*. The employees of the Lockwood Insurance Agency, where Sally had worked, had given her a set of airplane luggage. Even the mayor of Clayton was there—he had been one of the judges who had voted for her to win the "Miss Lakeview" beauty contest, sponsored by the Junior Chamber of Commerce, which had led to her winning the "Miss New England" contest, which in turn had led to a Hollywood contract. And Bob Molloy was there, looking a little overscrubbed, overneat, his sun-tanned face set in a mask of stiff formality. He had shaken hands, awkwardly.

"The best of luck to you, Sally," he had said.

That was the first time he had

been wrong. This was the beginning, he thought, of a whole new world for Sally: a magic world, a world of heart's desire for any girl. He didn't know that all she wanted, all she prayed for, was for him to say, "Don't go!" He didn't know that all she wanted was to stay here, to marry him, to mother his children. He didn't know that if he had spoken those two words, right there on the station platform, she would have kicked a hole in the bass drum, thrown her hat over the moon, and stayed close to him forever.

"Goodbye, Sally," he had said, when he should have said, "Don't go!"

Bob Molloy drove his two passengers through the sluicing rain toward his motel, leaning forward to peer through the small area of clear vision supplied by the windshield wipers. Automatically he answered questions about "How they were biting" and "Was there a good entry for the upcoming skeet shooting tournament." He was thinking about Sally, and how things had been with them just a little more than a year ago.

Things had been wonderful. Sally and Bob were considered an ideal match by a supercritical small-town community. Everyone knew that as soon as Bob's motel got going they would be married. People were so convinced about Bob's future that he had been elected president of the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

That was when the trouble had started.

It had been a joke at first. Each year the JCC staged a beauty contest—part of a state-wide and regional affair. By virtue of his office the Lakeview portion of it became Bob's affair. Girls were judged not only on beauty but on personality, educational background, and talent. The judges were to include the High School principal, the mayor of the neighboring town of Clayton, the president of the Lakeview Women's Club, and Jedediah Russell, the local newspaper editor.

The problem was contestants. The local girls were shy of the contest. A little desperate, Bob had suggested to Sally she enter the contest—"just as a favor to me." Sally was dark, with flashing blue eyes and a figure that matched all the required mathematical specifications. She was also a warm, very direct person and the warmth shone through and revealed her as more than just "pretty."

Sally had agreed reluctantly—she would do anything on earth to help Bob. It never occurred to her that it would go beyond the local contest. Then, in a kind of daze, she found herself elected "Miss Lakeview," then winner of the State contest, and finally "Miss New England" with a Hollywood contract in her pocket.

Bob had been pleased with her

first victory—it was a natural pride in his girl. But as the thing went on he began to see it in another light. The world had opened up for Sally and he was now an obstacle to her future. Grimly, he determined not to stand in her way. The more she told him she didn't want a career in films, didn't want anything but him, the further he withdrew. She was just trying to soften the blow, he told himself.

So she went to Hollywood—on the wings of *California, Here I Come*. She made a picture with Marc Williams, top box-office star of the moment. It didn't end there. She was hailed as a discovery. Hollywood gossip columns reported a romance between her and Marc Williams. She wrote to Bob, laughingly describing it as a publicity stunt. But he thought he read a kind of wide-eyed delight between the lines. He stopped answering her letters, and in the end her letters stopped coming. She was announced for the lead in another big picture. They had changed her name to Sandra Crayne. The old Sally was gone from his world.

Now she was back, running into the night like a frightened child, running away from the man who loved her but was too proud to say so . . .

Bob Molloy got his two customers settled, then went to his office and called Mr. Thompson at the depot.

"Girl come back for her bag?" he asked.

"Nope," Mr. Thompson said. "And I'm closing up in five minutes. She'll have to wait till morning."

"I think I know where she is," Bob said. "I'll be over in a few minutes and get it."

"Like I said, I'm closing up in five minutes," Mr. Thompson repeated.

"I'll drive you home," Bob said.

"Well—" Mr. Thompson said.

There was only one place for Sally to go in Lakeview. She had been raised by Miss Isobel Scudder, her mother's sister, and had always lived with her aunt. Miss Scudder was a character, even by local standards. She was a tough old bird, lean, angular, sharp-tongued. She had spent a lifetime trying to conceal the fact that at heart she was a sentimental Pollyanna.

Miss Scudder's hair was done up in curlers and her bony frame was wrapped in a flannel bathrobe when she opened the door to Bob.

"Land sakes," she said, "what kind of a time of night is this to come calling?"

"I brought Sally's bag," he said. "She left it at the depot."

Miss Scudder looked at him sternly. "You drunk, Bob Molloy?"

He answered by holding out the bag.

"Sally's bag! What do you mean, Sally's bag?"

"Hasn't she got here yet?" Bob asked.

"Got here? What on earth are you talking about, Bob? She's in Hollywood!"

He felt his stomach muscles tighten. "You didn't know she was coming?"

"She isn't coming!" Miss Scudder said. "Now whatever kind of a joke this is—"

"It's no joke. She came in on the last train. I saw her. Talked to her. She ran off into the storm and left her bag."

"You'd better come in," Miss Scudder said.

He went into the hallway and stood there, water dripping off his slicker into a pool on the floor. Miss Scudder went straight to the telephone and put in a long distance call to Hollywood. While she waited she looked at Bob through narrowed eyes.

"You don't look drunk—or sick!" she said.

"I was meeting a couple of guys who made reservations at the motel," he said. "Sally got off the train. When I spoke to her she ran away."

There was no answer at Sally's Hollywood apartment. Miss Scudder hung up the receiver. "She wouldn't come home without letting me know," she said. It was meant to be an absolute statement, but it sounded more like a question.

"She did," Bob said. "I offered her a ride and she ran away."

"Now what in tarnation—" Miss Scudder said.

"Maybe she didn't come here because she thought I might try to see her," Bob said.

Miss Scudder gave him an odd look. "You're a nice boy," she said, "but you've never been very bright, Bob Molloy."

Miss Scudder put on a pot of coffee for Sally "when she gets here." It was an automatic action in which neither she nor Bob Molloy really believed. Sally wasn't coming—not of her own free will. Miss Scudder had a more sophisticated point of view about it than Bob.

"If it was the girl next door we'd call the State Police," she said. "But we've got to think, Bob, of what Sally would want. She's a public figure now. She may have a good reason for not wanting it known she's in town. We've got to think what she'd want us to do."

If Sally had walked along the main highway to Elm Street where Miss Scudder lived, Bob would have seen her as he drove here. There was a short cut through the woods that Sally knew well. If she'd started that way—maybe slipped and fallen, hurt herself so she couldn't walk—

Bob scoured the short cut with a flashlight he borrowed from Miss Scudder. The path was wet and muddy, and there was no indication that anyone had used it since the rain started.

After about half an hour Bob returned to Miss Scudder's with a

negative report. He found Miss Scudder peculiarly changed. She was now the stony woman so many people in town thought her to be.

"Well, we've done all we can," she said flatly.

"Celebrity or no celebrity, I say we ought to call in the State Troopers," Bob said.

"No!" Miss Scudder's tone was sharp, commanding.

Bob stared at her a moment. "Look here, Miss Scudder, did she get here while I was gone?"

"Of course not!"

"Because if she did, and it's just that she doesn't want to see me—"

"She's not here," Miss Scudder said. "I don't like your impertinence, but if you want to look through the house—"

"Aren't you even worried about her?" Bob shouted.

The corner of Miss Scudder's mouth twitched. "Sally's a grown woman, living in a different world from ours, Bob. She must have had a good reason for not letting me know she was coming. She must have had a good reason for running away from you. When she's ready to let us know what it is she will."

"For God's sake, Miss Scudder, do you realize what kind of night it is out? Do you realize she's soaked to the skin, wandering around out there somewhere, Maybe hurt, maybe in trouble—"

"Will you *please* go home!" Miss Scudder cried out.

He stood for a moment, a muscle rippling along the line of his belligerent jaw. Then he spoke very quietly. "You know something you didn't know when I went out to look for Sally," he said. "She's been in touch with you and you know where she is. You're not worried about her. You're only worried that I'll bother her. Well, you can be dead-certain I won't, Miss Scudder —dead-certain!" He turned and walked quickly out of the house.

As the door closed behind him, Miss Scudder sank down onto the circular hooked rug in the hallway. She sat there, arms wrapped around her stomach, eyes dry, rocking slowly back and forth.

Bob Molloy walked straight down the path to his car, got in, and slammed the door. He reached forward to put his key into the ignition switch, then he hesitated. His hurt vanity was playing games with him, but over and above that he could not erase the picture of Sally's fear-stricken face as she had confronted him on the station platform. Nor could he shake the feeling that Miss Scudder had changed, in a half hour, from a mildly concerned and cheerfully reasonable friend to a stone-faced conspirator of some sort. There was some kind of real trouble here, he told himself —deep trouble.

Having lacerated himself with the idea that Sally simply didn't want to see him and was doing all this to avoid him, his hurt pride

still didn't let him convince himself that he, Bob Molloy, was the sole reason for her strange behavior.

The rain beat down on the roof of his car. She was out there somewhere, cold, soaked to the skin. Bob's hands gripped the wheel in front of him so tightly the knuckles turned white. There wasn't any use pretending. In spite of her rejection of him, in spite of the fact that her world was no longer his world, he loved the girl, damn it!

Perhaps she wouldn't call on him for help. Perhaps she didn't believe he would respond to such a call. Well, all he could do, without making a further nuisance of himself, was to remain available. So he turned up the collar of his coat and slumped down in the car seat. He would be there if he was needed.

Bob Molloy sat in his car in front of Miss Scudder's house until broad daylight. He didn't sleep. He waited and watched and cursed himself periodically for being an idiot.

Sally never came back.

Gusty winds had blown the storm away by morning, and the sun rose and shone down on the wet, glittering green of a fine spring day. It was the kind of morning when chests expand a little. It was the kind of day when people decide to do that something special. Only three people in Lakeview seemed out of key with the morning.

Bob Molloy, who had returned to his motel after the town began to stir, went about his chores like a man who was angry at the world. The front windows of a house on Elm Street occupied by Miss Isobel Scudder had their shades drawn down to keep out the morning sun. And Mr. Thompson at the railroad depot was his customary grouchy self: no spring morning could reduce the acid content in the milk of Mr. Thompson's human kindness.

"Kind of day that makes you glad to be alive," the fat man said to Mr. Thompson.

Mr. Thompson glared. The fat man had climbed down from the early morning local which seldom carried anything but mail and milk. He was just about the fattest man Mr. Thompson had ever seen. There had been a fellow lived over Clayton way—that was in 1898 or so—who looked as fat as this man, but Mr. Thompson didn't think he really had been.

This man's stomach didn't bulge out over the top of his trousers the way the old-timer's had, but that was because this man's clothes had been expertly tailored. That gray tweed sports jacket wasn't out of any cut-rate wholesaler's stock; and the slacks had been carefully cut to fit neatly over the huge stomach. The pigskin suitcase had cost a good deal more than Mr. Thompson earned in a week.

This fat man's face was round and smooth as a picture postcard

moon, and his eyes, twinkling behind shell-rimmed glasses, reminded Mr. Thompson of an amused owl—until the man smiled. The smile was very wide, and very white, and somehow, Mr. Thompson thought, very cruel.

"Oh, I don't know," Mr. Thompson said, referring to the kind of day it was.

"Pretty countryside," the fat man said.

"Most all country is pretty," Mr. Thompson said.

"Must have rained pretty hard last night," the fat man said.

"Oh, so-so," Mr. Thompson said.

The fat man smiled, and suddenly Mr. Thompson wished he would go. "Do you know if there is some place here I could rent a car?" the fat man asked.

"Might be," Mr. Thompson said.

"Where—for example," the fat man asked, still smiling.

A ghost walked over Mr. Thompson's grave, and he shivered slightly. "Garage—just up the street," he said.

"Thanks." The fat man started to go, then turned back. "You wouldn't happen to know where a Miss Isobel Scudder lives, would you?" he asked. The sun glittered against the lenses of his glasses, obliterating any semblance of humor in the broad, white smile.

Just before nine in the morning a flashy cream-colored convertible drew up outside the Lakeview post office. The driver was a small dark man with a sharp, pointed face like a ferret.

"Hey, Mac!" he called out to a white-haired man who had just come out of the post office with his mail. There was no way the ferret-faced man could know that this was a retired general who was not used to being hailed in that fashion.

"You!" the ferret-faced man said.

The general looked at him with grim astonishment.

"Know where Miss Isobel Scudder lives?" Ferret Face asked.

"I believe," the general said carefully, "that Miss Scudder resides on Elm Street."

"And where would that be, Mac?"

The question was asked of the general's ramrod back, retreating with dignity down the street.

Just before ten, Bob Molloy came for his mail. It so happened that the post office was on Elm Street and that Miss Scudder's house was diagonally across the street from it. Glancing that way, Bob saw the drawn window shades. There was a local joke about Miss Scudder that she kept tabs on the entire community from those front windows. Bob couldn't remember ever having seen Miss Scudder's shades drawn before.

He went into the stationery store next to the post office and called Miss Scudder's number.

Miss Scudder answered so quickly that obviously she must have been standing right by the telephone.

"Hello?" Her voice was breathless, worried.

"Bob Molloy speaking," he said.

"Oh!" All the warmth went out of her voice.

"Is everything all right?" he asked.

"Please, Bob, *please!* Just mind your own business!"

It was almost a cry of despair. The connection clicked off and the dial tone began to sound.

Bob Molloy spent a day such as he could never remember. He was exhausted with the nothingness of it, and the everything of it. So they didn't want him; so let them solve their own problems.

And then he would remember: the high school dance and his first formal date with Sally, lovely, grave and laughing at the same time; the week-end she came to the sophomore prom at State College and stayed in the fraternity house with the other girls and the chaperones; the first kiss, without words, at the edge of the lake and the pine-scented woods around them; the day they talked practically, making a point of sitting apart so that the electricity of touch would not interfere with their clear thinking, and the decision to marry once the motel was going, and that she would keep her job with the Lockwood Insurance Agency until there were children; and the night she had laughingly agreed to enter the beauty contest, only because he had begged her to because he was president of the JCC and had to make a good showing; then the slow drifting apart, knowing that he hadn't the right to stand in her way; and the swallowing up of the girl he loved by a world he didn't know, didn't understand. And now the tortured face on the depot platform, and Miss Scudder turned to stone and urging him to mind his own business. Mind his own business!

Then he began to hear things. He went to the depot for an express package and Mr. Thompson regaled him with the story of the fat man who had asked for Miss Scudder. When he went for the afternoon mail, the town was laughing over the story of Ferret Face and the General. "I believe that Miss Scudder resides on Elm Street!" They doubled up with laughter. Miss Scudder lived right across the way, but no one could call the General "Mac!" And then the laughter stopped and someone said, "What's eating you, Bob?"—because Bob was running for his car, slamming the door, and starting up with a screech of outraged rubber.

Bob was going to *make* it his business!

Jedediah Russell had owned and

edited the *Lakeview Courier* for the last thirty years. He was only just beginning to be considered a permanent resident of Lakeview. People had disliked and distrusted Jed Russell when he bought the *Courier*. He was young then, he was opinionated, and he was a Democrat in a town that had voted solidly Republican since Lincoln's second term. Jed Russell has never hesitated to say exactly what he thought in his paper, and after thirty years people were beginning to believe that he was honest, even if they disagreed with him.

Jed had been tall and Lincolnesque when he first came to Lakeview. He was still tall and hawk-faced, but now he was a little stooped with time. He had a tongue as ironic as his pen, and he was an espouser of underdogs and their causes. His four employees at the *Courier* would, without question, have stretched out in front of the next passing railroad train if Jed had asked them. He had been a bachelor all his life, a chain-cigarette smoker, and he could drink a quart of whiskey at a sitting with no more noticable result than that his language became more vigorously colorful. He was a famous after-dinner speaker, and half the kids in Lakeview had come to him with their troubles in the last thirty years because he treated them like adults and gave a grave and courteous consideration to their small dilemmas.

Jed Russell was sitting at his littered desk in the *Courier* office, cigarette ashes dribbling down his shirt front, stabbing viciously with a stubby red pencil at an editorial he'd just finished, when Bob Molloy stormed in.

"You look as if the motel just burned down," Jed Russell said, his dark eyes twinkling in their deep sockets, "only I happen to know it hasn't."

Bob glanced around the cluttered office, thick with the smells of ink and of hot lead from the linotype machine.

"I've got to talk to you, Jed," Bob said.

"I didn't figure you came in for afternoon tea," Jed said. His eyes narrowed. "You do look as though a couple of fingers of bourbon might not do you any harm." He reached for the bottom drawer of his desk.

"No. Listen!" And the whole story spilled out of Bob. "She's in trouble!" Bob finished. "It's none of my business maybe, but I wouldn't let a rickety calf go without help if I saw it needed it."

"The simile does not seem apt," Jed said. He reached for a crumpled newspaper on his desk. "Take it you haven't been reading today's Hollywood gossip columns?"

"No. Is there something about Sally?"

Jed lit a fresh cigarette and wrestled with the paper for a moment. "Here," he said. Cumma Cropper,

or whatever her name is. I quote: 'Sandra Crayne, up and coming young starlet, has had a row with her studio over a new script. Sandra has refused to do it and the studio has suspended her. Sudden success seems to have made for self-importance.' That might explain why she's come home, Bob."

Bob felt suddenly deflated. It might explain it, and he was back to his original starting point: she simply didn't want to see him.

"But it doesn't explain Isobel Scudder," Jed said, puffing smoke like a steam engine. "Sensible, non-hysterical old Isobel. Doesn't explain her behavior at all. And it doesn't explain why Sally would run off in the rain. And it doesn't explain the two characters who were asking for Isobel. I tell you what."

"What?" Bob asked.

"I got to get this package on the 4:06. Conductor's delivering it for me up the line. After that I'll go see Isobel Scudder. I don't promise to tell *you* what she tells *me*, but I promise to tell you whether its all right or isn't all right. Satisfactory?"

It was satisfactory. Bob knew that Jed could be trusted.

The 4:06 from New York arrived promptly. Jed Russell had stationed himself at exactly the spot on the platform where he knew, from thirty years of experience, the conductor would climb down from the train. Jed passed on his package with thanks for the service.

"No brass band, I see," the conductor said.

"Brass band?" Jed asked, lighting a fresh cigarette from the stub of one that was burning his yellow-stained fingers.

"Welcome home for the girl who made good," the conductor said. He jerked his head toward the front of the train. "I figured the whole town would be here."

Jed looked and his jaw sagged. He dropped both cigarettes on the platform. Standing a car's length away, surrounded by expensive luggage, was Sally Crane. She wore a smart summer suit with a corsage of green orchids pinned casually to the lapel.

(*continued on page 88*)

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **AGATHA CHRISTIE**

TITLE: ***The Man in the Mist***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Tommy Beresford—à la Father Brown

LOCALE: Adlington, England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Mist, soft and white—a cemetery at night—footsteps echoing behind, then in front—a figure looming out of the mist . . . refrain from reading—if you can!*

TOMMY BERESFORD WAS NOT pleased with life. Blunt's Brilliant Detectives had met with a reverse, distressing to their pride if not to their pockets. Called in professionally to elucidate the mystery of a stolen pearl necklace at Adlington Hall, Adlington, Blunt's Brilliant Detectives had failed to make good. While Tommy, hard on the track of a gambling Countess, was tracking her in the disguise of a Roman Catholic priest, and Tuppence was "getting off" with a nephew of the house on the golf links, the local Inspector of Police had unemotionally arrested the second footman who proved to be a thief well known at headquarters and who admitted his guilt without making any bones about it.

Tommy and Tuppence, therefore, had withdrawn with what dignity they could muster, and were at the present moment solacing themselves with cocktails at the Grand Adlington Hotel. Tommy still wore his clerical disguise.

"Hardly a Father Brown touch, that," he remarked gloomily. "And yet I've got just the right umbrella."

"It wasn't a Father Brown problem," said Tuppence. "One needs a certain atmosphere from the start. One must be doing something quite ordinary, and then bizarre things begin to happen. That's the idea."

"Unfortunately," said Tommy, "we have to return to town. Perhaps something bizarre will happen on the way to the station."

He raised the glass he was holding to his lips, but the liquid in it was suddenly spilled as a heavy hand smacked him on the shoulder and a voice to match the hand boomed out words of greeting.

"Upon my soul, it is! Old Tommy! And Mrs. Tommy too. Where did you blow in from? Haven't seen or heard anything of you for years."

"Why, it's Bulger!" said Tommy, setting down what was left of the cocktail and turning to look at the intruder, a big square-shouldered man of thirty years of age, with a round red beaming face, and dressed in golfing kit. "Good old Bulger!"

"But I say, old chap," said Bulger (whose real name by the way, was Mervyn Estcourt), "I never knew you'd taken orders. Fancy you a blinking parson."

Tuppence burst out laughing and Tommy looked embarrassed. And then they suddenly became conscious of a fourth person.

A tall slender creature, with very golden hair and very round blue eyes, almost impossibly beautiful, with an effect of really expensive black, topped by wonderful ermines and very large pearl earrings. She was smiling. And her smile said many things. It asserted, for instance, that she knew perfectly well that she herself was the thing best worth looking at certainly in England, and possibly in the whole world. She was not vain about it in any way, but she just knew, with certainty and confidence, that it was so.

Both Tommy and Tuppence recognized her immediately. They had seen her three times in "The Secret of the Heart," and an equal number of times in that other great success, "Pillars of Fire," and in innumerable other plays. There was, perhaps, no other actress in England who had so firm a hold on the British public as Miss Gilda Glen. She was reported to be the most beautiful woman in England. It was also rumored that she was the stupidest.

"Old friends of mine, Miss Glen," said Estcourt, with a tinge of apology in his voice for having presumed, even for a moment, to forget such a radiant creature. "Tommy and Mrs. Tommy, let me introduce you to Miss Gilda Glen."

The ring of pride in his voice was unmistakable. By merely being seen in his company, Miss Glen had conferred great glory on him.

The actress was staring with frank interest at Tommy.

"Are you really a priest?" she asked. "A roman Catholic priest, I mean? Because I thought they didn't have wives."

Estcourt went off in a boom of laughter again.

"That's good," he exploded. "You

sly dog, Tommy. Glad he hasn't renounced you, Mrs. Tommy, with all the rest of the pomps and vanities."

Gilda Glen took not the faintest notice of him. She continued to stare at Tommy with puzzled eyes.

"Are you a priest?"

"Very few of us are what we seem to be," said Tommy gently. "My profession is not unlike that of a priest. I don't give absolution—but I listen to confessions—I—"

"Don't you listen to him," interrupted Estcourt. "He's pulling your leg."

"If you're not a clergyman, I don't see why you're dressed up like one," she puzzled. "That is, unless—"

"Not a criminal flying from justice," said Tommy. "The other thing."

"Oh!" she frowned, and looked at him with beautiful bewildered eyes.

"I wonder if she'll ever get that," thought Tommy to himself. "Not unless I put it in words of one syllable."

Aloud he said, "Know anything about the trains back to town, Bulger? We've got to be pushing for home. How far is it to the station?"

"Ten minutes' walk. But no hurry. Next train up is the 6:35 and it's only about twenty to six now. You've just missed one."

"Which way is it to the station from here?"

"Sharp to the left when you turn out of the hotel. Then—let me see—down Morgan's Avenue would be the best way, wouldn't it?"

"Morgan's Avenue?" Miss Glen started violently.

"I know what you're thinking of," said Estcourt, laughing. "The Ghost. Morgan's Avenue is bounded by the cemetery on one side, and tradition has it that a policeman who met his death by violence gets up and walks on his old beat up and down Morgan's Avenue. A spook policeman! Can you beat it? But lots of people swear to having seen him."

"A policeman?" said Miss Glen. She shivered a little. "But there really aren't any ghosts, are there? I mean there aren't such things?"

She got up, folding her wrap tighter round her.

"Goodbye," she said vaguely.

She had ignored Tuppence completely throughout, and now she did not even glance in her direction. But over her shoulder she threw one puzzled glance at Tommy.

Just as she got to the door, she encountered a tall man with gray hair and a puffy red face who uttered an exclamation of surprise. His hand on her arm, he led her through the doorway, talking in an animated fashion.

"Beautiful creature, isn't she?" said Estcourt. "Brains of a rabbit. Rumor has it that she's going to marry Lord Leconbury. That was Leconbury in the doorway."

"He doesn't look like a very nice sort of man to marry," remarked Tuppence.

Estcourt shrugged. "A title has a kind of glamor still, I suppose," he said. "And Leconbury is not an impoverished peer by any means. She will be in clover. Nobody knows where she sprang from. Pretty near the gutter, I daresay. There's something deuced mysterious about her being down here anyway. She's not staying at the hotel. And when I tried to find out where she was staying, she snubbed me—snubbed me quite crudely, in the only way she knows."

He glanced at his watch and uttered an exclamation.

"I must be off. Jolly glad to have seen you two again. We must have a bust in town together some night. So long."

He hurried away, and as he did so, a page approached with a note on a salver. It was unaddressed.

"But it's for you, sir," he said to Tommy. "From Miss Gilda Glen."

Tommy tore it open and read it with some curiosity. Inside were a few lines written in a straggling untidy hand.

I'm not sure, but I think you might be able to help me. You'll be going that way to the station. Could you be at the White House, Morgan's Avenue, at ten minutes past six?

Yours sincerely,
Gilda Glen.

Tommy handed the note to Tuppence.

"Extraordinary," said Tuppence. "Is it because she still thinks you're a priest?"

"No," said Tommy thoughtfully. "I should say it's because she's at last taken in that I'm not one. Hullo what's this?"

"This" was a young man with flaming red hair, a pugnacious jaw, and appallingly shabby clothes. He had walked into the room and was now striding up and down muttering to himself as though at odds with all England.

"Hell!" said the red-haired man, loudly and forcibly. "That's what I say—hell!"

He dropped into a chair near the young couple and stared at them moodily.

"Damn all women, that's what I say," said the young man, eyeing Tuppence ferociously. "Oh, all right, kick up a row if you like. Have me turned out of the hotel. It won't be for the first time. Why shouldn't we say what we think? Why should we go about bottling up our feelings and smirking and saying things exactly like everyone else? I don't feel pleasant and polite. I feel like getting hold of someone round the throat and gradually choking them to death. That would be delightful."

"Any particular person?" asked Tuppence. "Or just anybody?"

"One particular person," said the young man grimly.

"This is very interesting," said Tuppence. "Won't you tell us some more?"

"My name's Reilly," said the red-haired man. "James Reilly. You may have heard it. I wrote a little volume of Pacifist poems—good stuff, although I say so."

"Pacifist Poems?" said Tuppence.

"Yes—why not?" demanded Mr. Reilly belligerently.

"Oh, nothing," said Tuppence hastily.

"I'm for peace all the time," said Mr. Reilly, his voice becoming high-pitched. "To hell with war. And women! Did you see that creature who was trailing around here just now? Gilda Glen, she calls herself. God, how I've worshipped that woman! And I'll tell you this—if she's got a heart at all, it's on my side. She cared once for me and I could make her care again. And if she sells herself to that muck heap Leconbury—well, God help her. I'd as soon kill her with my own hands."

And on this, suddenly, he rose and rushed from the room.

Tommy raised his eyebrows.

"A somewhat excitable gentleman," he murmured. "Well, Tuppence, shall we start?"

A fine mist was coming up as they emerged from the hotel into the cool outer air. Obeying Estcourt's directions, they turned sharp to the left and in a few minutes they came to a turning labeled Morgan's Avenue.

The mist had increased. It was soft and white, and hurried past them in little eddying drifts. To their left was the high wall of the cemetery, on their right a row of small houses. Presently these ceased, and a high hedge took their place.

"Tommy," said Tuppence. "I'm beginning to feel jumpy. The mist—and the silence. As though we were miles from anywhere."

"One does feel like that," agreed Tommy. "All alone in the world. It's the effect of the mist, and not being able to see ahead of one."

Tuppence nodded. "Just our footsteps echoing on the pavement. What's that?"

"What's what?"

"I thought I heard other footsteps behind us."

"You'll be seeing the ghost in a minute if you work yourself up like this," said Tommy kindly. "Are you afraid the spook policeman will lay his hand on your shoulder?"

Tuppence emitted a shrill squeal. "Don't, Tommy. Now you've put it into my head."

She craned her head back over her shoulder, trying to peer into the white veil that was wrapped all round them.

"There they are again," she whispered. "No, they're in front now. Oh, Tommy, don't say you can't hear them?"

"I do hear something. Yes, it's footsteps behind us. Somebody else walking this way to catch the train."

He stopped suddenly and stood still, and Tuppence gave a gasp.

For the curtain of mist in front of them suddenly parted and there, not twenty feet away, a gigantic policeman suddenly appeared, as though materialized out of the fog. One minute he was not there, the next minute he was—so at least it seemed to the imaginations of the two watchers. Then as the mist rolled back still more, a little scene appeared, as though set on a stage.

The big blue policeman, a scarlet pillar box, and on the right of the road the outlines of a white house.

"Red, white, and blue," said Tommy. "It's damned pictorial. Come on, Tuppence, there's nothing to be afraid of."

For, as he had already seen, the policeman was a real policeman. And moreover, he was not nearly as gigantic as he had at first seemed looming up out of the mist.

But as they started forward, footsteps came from behind them. A man passed them, hurrying along. He turned in at the gate of the White House, ascended the steps, and beat a deafening tattoo on the knocker. He was admitted just as they reached the spot where the policeman was standing, staring after him.

"There's a gentleman seems to be in a hurry," commented the policeman.

He spoke in a slow reflective voice, as of one whose thoughts took some time to mature.

"He's the sort of gentleman always would be in a hurry," remarked Tommy.

The policeman's stare came round to rest on his face.

"Friend of yours?" he demanded, and there was distinct suspicion now in his voice.

"No," said Tommy. "He's not a friend of mine, but I happen to know who he is. Name of Reilly."

"Ah!" said the policeman. "Well, I'd better be getting along."

"Can you tell me where the White House is?" asked Tommy.

The constable jerked his head sideways.

"This is it. Mrs. Honeycott's." He paused, and added evidently with the idea of giving them valuable information. "Nervous party. Always suspecting burglars is around. Always asking me to have a look around the place. Middle-aged women get like that."

"Middle-aged, eh?" said Tommy. "Do you happen to know if there's a young lady staying there?"

"A young lady," said the policeman, ruminating. "A young lady. No, I can't say I know anything about that."

"She mayn't be staying here, Tommy," said Tuppence. "And anyway, she mayn't be here yet. She could only have started just before we did."

"Ah!" said the policeman suddenly. "Now that I call it to mind, a young lady did go in at this gate. I saw her as I was coming up the

road. About three or four minutes ago it might be."

"With ermine furs on?" asked Tuppence.

"She had some kind of white rabbit round her throat," admitted the policeman.

Tuppence smiled. The policeman went on in the direction from which they had just come, and they prepared to enter the gate of the White House.

Suddenly a faint muffled cry sounded from inside the house, and almost immediately afterward the front door opened and James Reilly came rushing down the steps. His face was white and twisted, and he staggered like a drunken man.

He passed Tommy and Tuppence as though he did not see them, muttering to himself with a kind of dreadful repetition.

"My God! My God! Oh, my God!"

He clutched at the gate post, as though to steady himself, and then, as though animated by sudden panic, he raced off down the road as hard as he could go in the direction opposite that taken by the policeman.

Tommy and Tuppence stared at each other in bewilderment.

"Well," said Tommy, "something's happened in that house to scare our friend Reilly pretty badly."

Tuppence drew her finger absently across the gate post.

"He must have put his hand on some wet red paint somewhere," she said idly.

"H'm," said Tommy. "I think we'd better go inside. I don't understand this business."

In the doorway of the house a white-capped maid was standing, almost speechless with indignation.

"Did you ever see the likes of that now, Father," she burst out, as Tommy ascended the steps. "That fellow comes here, asks for the young lady, rushes upstairs without how or by your leave. She lets out a screech like a wildcat—and what wonder, poor pretty dear—and straightway he comes rushing down again, with the white face on him, like one who's seen a ghost. What will be the meaning of it all?"

"Who are you talking with at the front door, Ellen?" demanded a sharp voice from the interior of the hall.

"Here's Missus," said Ellen, somewhat unnecessarily.

She drew back and Tommy found himself confronting a gray-haired, middle-aged woman, with frosty blue eyes imperfectly concealed by pince nez, and a spare figure clad in black with bugle trimming.

"Mrs. Honeycott?" said Tommy. "I came here to see Miss Glen."

Mrs. Honeycott gave him a sharp glance, then went on to Tuppence and took in every detail of her appearance.

"Oh, you did, did you?" she said. "Well, you'd better come inside."

She led the way into the hall and along it into a room at the back of the house facing on the garden. It was a fair-sized room, but looked smaller than it was, owing to the large number of chairs and tables crowded into it. A big fire burned in the grate, and a chintz-covered sofa stood at one side of it. The wallpaper was a small gray stripe with a festoon of roses round the top. Engravings and oil paintings covered the walls.

It was a room almost impossible to associate with the expensive personality of Miss Gilda Glen.

Tommy went straight to the point. "I understand, Mrs. Honeycott, that Miss Glen is in this house."

"She is. Mind you, I don't approve. Marriage is marriage, and your husband's your husband. As you make your bed, so you must lie on it."

"I don't quite understand—" began Tommy, bewildered.

"I thought as much. That's the reason I brought you in here. You can go up to Gilda after I've spoken my mind. She came to me—after all these years, think of it!—and asked me to help her. Wanted me to see this man and persuade him to agree to a divorce. I told her straight out I'd have nothing whatever to do with it. Divorce is sinful. But I couldn't refuse my own sister shelter in my house, could I now?"

"Your sister?"

"Yes, Gilda's my sister. Didn't she tell you?"

Tommy stared at her open-mouthed. The thing seemed fantastically impossible. Then he remembered that the angelic beauty of Gilda Glen had been in evidence for many years. He had been taken to see her act as quite a small boy. Yes, it was possible after all. But what a piquant contrast. So it was from this lower middle-class respectability that Gilda Glen had sprung. How well she had guarded her secret!

"I am not yet quite clear," he said. "Your sister is married?"

"Ran away to be married as a girl of seventeen," said Mrs. Honeycott succinctly. "Some common fellow far below her in station. It was a disgrace. Then she left her husband and went on the stage. Play acting! I've never been inside a theater in my life. I hold no truck with wickedness. Now, after all these years, she wants to divorce the man. Means to marry some bigwig, I suppose. But her husband's standing firm—not to be bullied and not to be bribed. I admire him for it."

"What is his name?" asked Tommy suddenly.

"That's an extraordinary thing now, but I can't remember! It's nearly twenty years ago since I heard it. My father forbade it to be mentioned. And I've refused to discuss the matter with Gilda. She knows what I think, and that's enough for her."

"It wasn't Reilly, was it?"

"Might have been. I really can't say. It's gone clean out of my head."

"The man I mean was here just now."

"That man! I thought he was an escaped lunatic. I'd been in the kitchen giving orders to Ellen. I'd just got back into this room, and was wondering whether Gilda had come in yet—she has a key—when I heard her. She hesitated a minute or two in the hall and then went straight upstairs. About three minutes later, all this tremendous rat-tatting began. I went out into the hall and saw a man rushing upstairs. Then there was a sort of cry upstairs and presently down he came again and rushed out like a madman."

Tommy rose.

"Mrs. Honeycott, let us go upstairs at once. I am afraid—"

"What of?"

"Afraid that you have no red wet paint in the house."

Mrs. Honeycott stared at him. "Of course I haven't."

"Please let us go to your sister's room at once," said Tommy gravely.

Mrs. Honeycott led the way. They caught a glimpse of Ellen in the hall, backing hastily into one of the rooms.

Mrs. Honeycott opened the first door at the top of the stairs. Tommy and Tuppence entered close behind her.

A motionless figure in black and ermine lay stretched on the sofa. The face was untouched, a beautiful soulless face like a mature child asleep. The wound was on the side of the head—a heavy blow with some blunt instrument had crushed in the skull. Blood was dripping slowly onto the floor, but the wound itself had long since ceased to bleed.

Tommy examined the prostrate figure, his face very white.

"So," he said at last, "he didn't strangle her after all."

"What do you mean? Who?" cried Mrs. Honeycott. "Is she dead?"

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Honeycott, she's dead. Murdered. The question is—by whom? Not that it is much of a question. Funny—for all his ranting words, I didn't think the fellow had it in him."

He paused a minute, then turned to Tuppence with decision.

"Will you go out and get a policeman, or ring up the police station from somewhere?"

Tuppence nodded. She, too, was very white. Tommy led Mrs. Honeycott downstairs again.

"I don't want there to be any mistake about this," he said. "Do you know exactly what time it was when your sister came in?"

"Yes, I do," said Mrs. Honeycott. "Because I was just setting the clock on five minutes as I have to do every evening. It gains just five minutes a day. It was exactly eight minutes past six by my watch, and

that never loses or gains a second."

Tommy nodded. That agreed perfectly with the policeman's story. He had seen the woman with the white furs go in at the gate, and probably three minutes had elapsed before he and Tuppence had reached the same spot. He had glanced at his own watch then and had noted that it was just one minute after the time of their appointment.

There was just the faint chance that someone might have been waiting for Gilda Glen in the room upstairs. But if so, he must still be hiding in the house. No one but James Reilly had left it.

He ran upstairs and made a quick but efficient search of the premises. There was no one concealed anywhere.

Then he spoke to Ellen. After breaking the news to her, and waiting for her first lamentations and invocations to the Saints to have exhausted themselves, he asked a few questions.

Had anyone come to the house that afternoon asking for Miss Glen? No one. Had she herself been upstairs at all that evening? Yes, she'd gone up at six o'cock as usual to draw the curtains—or it might have been a few minutes after six. Anyway it was just before that wild man came breaking the knocker down. She'd run downstairs to answer the door. And him a black-hearted murderer all the time.

Tommy let it go at that. But he still felt a curious pity for Reilly, an unwillingness to believe the worst of him. And yet there was no one else who could have murdered Gilda Glen. Mrs. Honeycott and Ellen had been the only two other people in the house.

He heard voices in the hall and went out to find Tuppence and the policeman from the beat outside. The latter had produced a notebook, and a rather blunt pencil which he licked surreptitiously. He went upstairs and surveyed the victim stolidly, merely remarking that if he was to touch anything the Inspector would give him beans. He listened to all Mrs. Honeycott's hysterical outbursts and confused explanations and occasionally he wrote something down. His presence was calming and soothing.

Tommy finally got him alone on the steps outside, before he departed to telephone headquarters.

"Look here," said Tommy. "You saw the deceased turning in at the gate. Are you sure she was alone?"

"Oh, she was alone all right. Nobody with her."

"And between that time and when you met us, nobody came out of the gate?"

"Not a soul."

"You'd have seen them if they had?"

"Of course I should. Nobody came out till that wild chap did."

The majesty of the law moved portentously down the steps and

paused by the white gate post which bore the imprint of a hand in red.

"Kind of amateur he must have been," he said pityingly. "To leave a thing like that."

Then he swung out into the road.

It was the day after the crime. Tommy and Tuppence were still at the hotel, but Tommy had thought it prudent to discard his clerical disguise.

James Reilly had been apprehended and was in custody. His solicitor, Mr. Marvell, had just finished a lengthy conversation with Tommy.

"I never would have believed it of James Reilly," he said simply. "He's always been a man of violent speech, but that's all."

Tommy nodded.

"If you disperse energy in speech, it doesn't leave you too much over for action. What I realize is that I shall be one of the principal witnesses against him. That conversation he had with me just before the crime was particularly damning. And in spite of everything, I like the man, and if there was anyone else to suspect I should believe him to be innocent. What's his own story?"

The solicitor pursed up his lips.

"He declares that he found her lying there dead. But that's impossible, of course. He's using the first lie that comes into his head."

"Because, if he happened to be speaking the truth, it would mean that our garrulous Mrs. Honeycott committed the crime—and that is fantastic. Yes, he must have done it."

"The maid heard her cry out, remember."

"The maid—yes—"

Tommy was silent a moment. Then he said thoughtfully.

"What credulous creatures we are, really. We believe evidence as though it were gospel truth. And what is it really? Only the impressions conveyed to the mind by the senses. And suppose they're the wrong impressions?"

The lawyer shrugged. "Oh, we all know that there are unreliable witnesses—witnesses who remember more and more as time goes on, with no real intention to deceive."

"I don't mean only that," said Tommy, "I mean all of us—we say things that aren't really so, and never know that we've done so. For instance, both you and I, without doubt, have said some time or other 'There's the post,' when what we really meant was that we'd heard a double knock and the rattle of the letter box. Nine times out of ten we'd be right, and it would be the post, but just possibly the tenth time it might be only a little urchin playing a joke on us. See what I mean?"

"Ye-es," said Mr. Marvell slowly. "But I don't see what you're driving at."

"Don't you? I'm not sure that I

do myself. But I'm beginning to see. It's like the stick, Tuppence. You remember? One end of it pointed one way—but the other end always points the opposite way. It depends whether you get hold of it by the right end. Doors open—but they also shut. People go upstairs, but they also go downstairs. Boxes shut, but they also open."

"What *do* you mean?" demanded Tuppence.

"It's so ridiculously easy, really," said Tommy. "And yet it's only just come to me. How do you know when a person's come into the house? You hear the door open and bang to, and if you're expecting anyone to come in, you will be quite sure it is them. But it might just as easily be someone going *out.*"

"But Miss Glen didn't go out?" asked Tuppence.

"No, I know *she* didn't. But somone else did—the murderer."

"But how did she get in, then?" persisted Tuppence.

"She came in while Mrs. Honeycott was in the kitchen talking to Ellen. They didn't hear her. Mrs. Honeycott went back to the drawing-room, wondered if her sister had come in, and began to put the clock right, and then, as she *thought,* she heard her come in and go upstairs."

"Well, what about that? The footsteps going upstairs?"

"That was Ellen, going up to draw the curtains. You remember, Mrs. Honeycott said her sister paused before going up. That pause was just the time needed for Ellen to come out from the kitchen into the hall. She just missed seeing the murderer."

"But Tommy," cried Tuppence. "The cry she gave?"

"That was James Reilly. Didn't you notice what a high-pitched voice he has? In moments of great emotion, men often squeal just like a woman."

"But the murderer? We'd have seen him?"

"We *did* see him. We even stood talking to him. Do you remember the sudden way that policeman appeared? That was because he stepped out of the gate, just after the mist cleared from the road. It made us jump, don't you remember? After all, though we never think of them as that, policemen are men just like any other men. They love and they hate. They marry . . .

"I think Gilda Glen met her husband suddenly just outside that gate and took him in with her to thrash the matter out. He hadn't Reilly's relief of violent words, remember. He just saw red—and he had his truncheon handy . . ."

a new story by

EDITOR'S FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **FREDERICK NEBEL**

TITLE: ***Killer at Large***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Duke, wanted for murder, wouldn't have minded killing again. But he had only three bullets left—and those had Jake Birch's number on them . . .*

MOST OF WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON Duke lay in the thickets at the edge of the woods and watched the farmer he hoped he would not have to kill. The farmer looked young—say, thirty; but more important, he was just about Duke's size—five eight, a hundred and forty. The others in this valley of truck farms had been too big or too fat; or there had been too many possible witnesses. Here there was no one but the young farmer, busy overhauling his tractor engine, getting ready for spring plowing. Duke hoped he wouldn't have to kill him because he had no bullets to spare.

Every time the farmer went into the house for something, Duke edged a little closer through the woods toward the barn. A little after five, when the farmer started the engine, left it running and walked toward the house, Duke got ready. As soon as the back door closed, Duke broke from the woods and in less than a minute was inside the barn. He found a pick handle and was ready, waiting, behind a couple of cider barrels.

He sure hoped he would not have to shoot the farmer—there were only three bullets left in his gun. About five miles south—he had been able to see some signs at a backwoods crossroad that morning—was the town of Studfield. And in Studfield was his prison pal, Jake Birch. He wanted all three

bullets, every last one, for Jake. Duke had come two thousand miles and he wanted to make sure —dead-sure.

He crouched down, lower, when he heard the tractor's gears mesh. Then the tractor loomed in the wide doorway, with the farmer on the seat, backing it in. Duke waited until the farmer shut off the engine and climbed down. Then he rose, aiming the gun, hoping grimly he would not have to fire it.

"Keep facing the door, farmer," he said. "One move and I'll blow your back apart." He stepped swiftly forward, hefting the pick handle. "Anybody in the house, farmer?"

"No. I live alone here. You want my car, it's in the lean-to. Keys are in my pocket."

Duke swung the pick handle. He took his time binding the unconscious man's hands and feet. He found a roll of friction tape in the tool box on the tractor and pasted it down tight across the man's mouth and eyes. He found a ring of keys in the farmer's pocket and then hauled him far back, behind the cider barrels.

He stood for a minute in the barn doorway peering at the house, his left hand, from habit, rising to conceal the large Y-shaped scar on his cheek. On Monday afternoon, only twenty miles north, a man had looked at that scar and died for it. And yesterday, only ten miles away, another had died for the same reason. He couldn't risk Jake Birch reading in the papers or hearing on the radio that a man with a Y-shaped scar on his left cheek was wanted for murder and car theft.

The trouble was, Jake had got religion. He had been released from prison a year earlier than Duke, for good behavior. He had, damn his soul, turned in the eighty grand they'd hidden away before they'd been sent to prison for the bank stick-up. The dirty, reformed double-crosser!

Duke moved, heading across the two hundred feet of open yard, with the last rays of sunlight glinting on his face. For almost three full days he'd been in the woods, kept there, off the roads, by the roving sirens of police cars. His clothes were torn and spattered with mud and mud was caked in the stubble on his face. He was hungry and his stomach growled with emptiness.

The back door was solid wood. He flung it open with his left hand and stood there, his gun ready. But he saw no one, heard no movement anywhere. He stepped in and closed the door. And then, staring at the kitchen table, he felt the back of his neck crawl.

The table was set for two.

"Come out, come out!" he bellowed in rage. "Wherever you are, come out—out in the kitchen!"

"Who's there?" a woman's voice said.

Duke roared, "Out—out here in the kitchen! Quick—and with your hands up!"

It was almost a minute before she appeared—her hand first, feeling its way round the edge of the doorway. She was a small woman, young, with a pale, drawn face.

"Who are you?" she said. "Where is my husband?"

Duke had the gun leveled on her but she did not seem to notice it. She seemed to be peering at the wall up behind him. He moved a step closer, waving the gun at her.

"See this, missus? You see this?"

"What?" she said. "See what?" Then she cried out, "What's going on here? Where's Tom? Where's my husband? Who are you?"

She gripped the edge of the sink and moved along it. She knocked a glass off the drainboard. Her eyes peered wildly around the room.

"Tell me," she sobbed. "Tell me what's going on. Can't you see I'm blind?"

In his great relief, in his upsurge of exultation, Duke found himself speechless. He watched, in his wonder and good fortune, as the woman felt her way from one familiar object to another—until she reached a rocker and let herself down into it.

"That's right, missus," he said, softly now. "You just sit right there. Your husband's trussed up in the barn, is all."

"God help us," she murmured, "Please, God, help us."

He found some heavy twine in a kitchen drawer and bound her arms to the chair. He didn't want her stumbling outside and screaming and attracting the attention of some chance motorist. Then he ate —quickly—stew meat and mashed potatoes and coffee, watching her as she rocked in short rigid movements, her eyes hunting frantically along the walls.

In the bedroom closet he found a brown suit, a tie, a pair of shoes that were only a little too large. From a chest of drawers he took a shirt, socks, clean underwear. There was a small radio on the bed table and although he was desperate for news of the police activity in the area, he did not want to waste time sitting and waiting. He took the radio along to the bathroom. By then the dusk was deepening fast and he had to turn on the light in order to shave.

By ten to six he was finished shaving, all spic and span. But there was still no news on the radio, only music. So he brought all the clean clothes to the bathroom and dressed there. And at six, just as he was tucking a handkerchief into his breast pocket, the news came on. Except for the scar, a memento of a prison brawl, he now looked like the old Duke; and if it weren't for Jake Birch, he'd have the money he needed for the plastic job a crooked surgeon could do on his face. The way it was, with the scar, he'd always be a marked man.

"The unknown killer is still at large," the newscaster was saying. "But it is known that bullets from the same gun killed Walter Murray on Monday and George Cutler yesterday. In both cases, evidence indicates that an attempt was made to steal a car. The attempt on Murray's car failed because it was out of gas. Murray had parked off the highway near Blue Falls and asked a passing motorist to have a garage send some gas. The probability is that Murray strolled away a hundred feet or so to watch the falls, saw someone in his car, and, coming back, was murdered. Cutler apparently was killed in the State Park picnic grounds at Bent River. His glasses, camera, and hat were found on a picnic table fifty feet from his car. The theft apparently failed there because, although the key was in the ignition, the car, of a foreign make, had a starter button not easily discoverable by the average American. Since in neither case was there any evidence of struggle, the police believe that the killer bears some physical mark or characteristic that would make him easy to describe and identify. As we have repeated many times, both yesterday and today, residents of this area should beware of strangers who come to their door for any reason whatsoever. To simply lay eyes on the unknown killer, even to give him food or drink, might cost you your life."

Duke held his breath. He snapped off the radio, some vague and dread suspicion starting under his heart and fluttering up fast, then faster, to his throat. He wheeled and sped down the short hallway to the kitchen, dim and obscure now from the dusk outside.

"Right there—hold it," a man's voice barked. "State Police. Raise both hands and turn and press your hands against the wall—and raise 'em high."

The lights in the kitchen came on. In less than a minute Duke was disarmed, turned around, handcuffed. He stared stupidly at the woman, who still sat in the rocker, her arms bound, as he had left her. She stared back at him with a twisted, sad, bitter smile.

"Blind!" Duke croaked on a rising accent of hysteria.

She shook her head. "No. But all day the radio was saying that just to lay eyes on the killer might cost you your life. I went to the window because supper was ready and my husband hadn't come in. I've been ill, and I guess I'm fidgety. I saw you come out of the barn. I just had time to phone the police and hang up. I was sure my husband was dead."

"He's all right," the trooper said. "My partner's out there with him. But one thing, lady—playing blind that way, you sure did save your life."

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**CARL HENRY RATHJEN**
TITLE:	***Touch and Blow!***
TYPE:	Detection and Suspense
DETECTIVE:	Kinkaid
LOCALE:	United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Mr. Rathjen has a wonderful "knack" for portraying unusual and uncommon investigators. Here is the story of an explosives expert who works for the police crime lab.*

JEFF KINKAID delayed hanging up the bedside phone after he got the four A.M. call. He needed time to think before stabbing into his clothes. A fine way to go out to a job where one slip of a finger or tool, one wrong move, could be your last.

But at this hour Bea would know it could only be the police department crime lab. needing their explosives expert, the man who could deactivate war souvenirs, safecracking set-ups, bombs, though he couldn't prevent his marriage from blowing up. No, he'd better come right out with it and hope that this scene wouldn't be their final one.

"Something up in the Seventy-seventh Precinct, no details," he said truthfully, wondering if it concerned the man they called "The Double Bomber." But it was best not to mention that terror to Bea. Turning on the lamp, he peeled off his pajama top. "It's probably something harmless the boys are afraid to touch. People," he added lightly, "collect the darndest things."

Bea, dark-haired as the night, propped on an elbow. "Of course, just a paperweight, a live hand grenade. Or a homemade rocket. Perhaps a shell for a lampbase." Kinkaid felt the sweat start as her voice rose. "Nothing to worry you. Never mind how anyone else dreads it."

He forced a laugh, despite the shaking she caused. "If I had a safe

desk job, we'd worry about an ulcer or a heart attack. Bea, anything can be turned into a nightmare. For our own good, let's try to take it in stride."

She looked hurt, frightened, and her voice was accusing. "Haven't you asked Captain Davis about a transfer?"

He guiltily snarled a shoelace, but let it go.

"I will," he said, reaching for his shirt. "As soon as we're not so short-handed. Vail needs more experience, and since Lane isn't coming back from sick leave—"

"He's got sense," Bea declared. "Or his wife had it for him."

She hit close there. A wife could make or break a guy in any job. Kinkaid fumbled with the shirt buttons.

"Jeff,," Bea pleaded. "Look at you."

He didn't have to be told about his shaking lately. Was it because of her? Was it being teamed with Vail, an eager but very raw beginner? Or was he really losing his nerve? Such thoughts started a fuse sputtering on his temper.

"Cut it out, Bea. I'll never live to confine myself to ballistics, chemical analysis and such if you don't stop nagging—"

"Jeff, don't!" she cried. He sat beside her and took her in his arms. She sobbed against his chest. "You don't know what it's like. Afraid every time the phone rings. Afraid I'll never see you again."

He kissed her, still quivering. "All right," he said. "But I can't quit just now. I'll speak to the skipper if I see him up in the Seventy-seventh. And . . . I should be back soon. It's my day off. What would you like to do?"

She looked a little relieved, but spoke in mock, wifely miff.

"Have you forgotten already? Kay and Howard's plane arrives this morning. We're showing them the town."

"Oh, yes. Swell." He wanted to say it through his teeth. Howard Griswald, husband of Bea's girlhood chum, was a guy he didn't want to meet, but was still itching to, belligerently. Bea had visited them last year on money he had borrowed, hoping a trip would ease her tension. But Howard Griswald, chemist for a big western outfit, had bolstered his own ego by telling Bea all the things that could go wrong working with explosives. Howard's work dealt with cosmetics.

So Bea had come home more terrorized than ever—just in time to attend the funeral of Delaney, who had encountered a war souvenir which deactivated him first.

Then "The Double Bomber" started his crusade of horror.

Jeff Kinkaid put on his coat and kissed Bea again.

"If I'm delayed, I'll meet you up at the airport."

"Jeff," Bea pleaded. "Call me here, or have me paged there—"

"As soon as I finish the job. It's a promise."

"And, Jeff, don't forget about Captain Davis."

He hesitated. "All right. Chin up, Bea."

But as soon as he closed the door behind him and punched the button of the self-service elevator he swore under his breath. A fine state of mind and body. Nerves and shakes. Well, maybe he'd better quit. But how could he, when the entire Department was temporarily depending on him alone for jobs like this?

He still didn't know the answer, pacing the dark chilly sidewalk, when a panel truck—painted police black and white—wailed around the corner with flashing red light. Vail, leaning from the wheel, swung open the door. Dashlights caught freckles vivid with boyish excitement. Vail was twenty-four, already good on ballistics and crime chemistry, willing to stand corrected, not a smarty-pants. But where explosives were concerned, he was too energetic for comfort.

"Hope you're wide-awake," he grinned.

"I will be in about two blocks, kid," Kinkaid remarked, getting in. "Take it easy. They want us to get there."

Vail laughed. "They never say anything about coming back." Kinkaid bent down toward the shoelace he had snarled. Then Vail's voice sobered. "They told me to tell you. They got the Double Bomber."

Kinkaid forgot the shoelace. The Double Bomber had been raising hell for four months. The police and the F.B.I. knew plenty about him but had never been able to track him down. Foreign-born, a topnotch tool and diemaker, during the War he had seen his family tortured to death and suffered horrors himself before he unwillingly cooperated with the Axis powers. Afterward, he had come to this country and remarried. A year ago he and his wife, and a seven-year-old son, had been in a train wreck. The boy had been killed instantly, and his wife had died in his arms two hours later at the wreck scene because ambulances and doctors couldn't get through the jam of sightseers in time to save her. The poor guy had cracked and had been committed for psychiatric treatment. But then he had escaped . . .

He had earned his nickname, the Double Bomber, because that was how he got back at sightseers—making them pay for his loss. He always used two bombs. A little one first. It made a lot of noise, did little damage, but it attracted a crowd. Then, three minutes later, the big one went off. In the first carnage, at a railway depot, he had killed eight people and injured thirty-one. The next time, aboard an ocean liner at sailing time, he had made it twelve dead and forty injured. Then a bus

depot. Then a subway station. And by now, whenever people heard a car backfire, they ran the opposite way.

Detective bureaus worked feverishly on clues, knowing their man and how he operated, but they could never catch up to him. Now they had him, and Kinkaid wondered if it might ease some of Bea's tension. He doubted it. She'd been winding up her nerves long before the Double Bomber went berserk.

"How did they get him?" Kinkaid asked, as Vail took the truck uptown at what he evidently thought was a more sedate speed.

"The landlady tipped off the Seventy-seventh Precinct. Why, I don't know. They saw enough to be suspicious, staked out, and nabbed him when he came home about half an hour ago. So now they want us to clean up his room. It's loaded."

Uptown, frightened-looking people in various stages of dress jammed the street outside the area roped off by police. A traffic officer waved the truck through, toward the clutter of police cars and the group of uniformed and plainclothes brass before a shabby three-story house.

Kinkaid spotted Captain Davis, head of the crime lab., moving out to meet the truck. A gray, short, paunchy man who had obtained his post before the days of stiff Civil Service exams, the skipper hadn't personally kept up with scientific developments in crime detection. On the other hand, he knew how to get what his technicians wanted, how to give them a free hand, how to keep them on jobs that should have paid more.

"Jeff," he inquired, "did Vail tell you?" Kinkaid nodded. The captain lowered his voice. "I thought it best for your wife not to know until it's cleaned up."

"Thanks." Kinkaid frowned. "Has she been talking to you?"

"No, Jeff. I just know."

Kinkaid hesitated, turned to Vail. "Get the kits." Then he faced the captain again. He had his opening, but was this the time or place? "Where's the Bomber now?"

"Headquarters. His room is third-floor rear. He said it wasn't booby-trapped, but he had a smug air I don't like. There are a lot of things I don't like. Want me to stand by, Jeff?"

Kinkaid's thoughts, remembering his promise to Bea, urged one thing, his tongue said another. "I'll manage. Ready, kid?"

Vail followed him in, lugging a heavy case, and grunted on the second-floor landing. "Why do you always let him off?"

"For the same reason," Kinkaid snapped, "I tell you not to touch anything until I okay it. And that goes double now."

"If that's a pun," Vail quipped, "it's bad humor."

In more ways than one, thought

Kinkaid, climbing toward the third floor. Bea had been at him also about his touchy disposition. Why didn't she iron out her own?

He nodded to a uniformed lieutenant, who pointed to a doorway. Kinkaid looked in, with Vail breathing over his shoulder. Bed, chair, tissue-thin rug. A bureau beside a solid-looking workbench under a powerful extension-cord lamp. Both were littered with tools, jars, bottles, wiring, pipe, a half-eaten sandwich, and a Mason jar with some white fluid that might have been milk. There was also a disturbing acrid odor.

Nitroglycerin!

The lieutenant spoke tersely back in the hall. "The landlady says he's lived here only two weeks. She didn't like the special lock he put on the door, or the smell. They had a row about it again tonight before he went out. He got so wild it frightened her. Anyway, she stayed awake, listening for him to come in. Then, wondering if she'd dozed off, she got up to listen at his door, and discovered he'd probably been so mad he'd forgotten to lock it."

Vail laughed. "She couldn't tell that just by looking."

"Lucky for her," Kinkaid remarked, "he didn't have the door rigged."

The lieutenant went on. "When she saw a lot of newspaper clippings about the blasts, she called us. We nabbed him when he drove in."

Kinkaid studied the room minutely. "Kid," he asked, "if you were on your own, what would you do first?"

"You mean after I decided not to become a file in the Missing Persons Bureau?" Vail laughed. Kinkaid whipped around irritably. Vail pointed quickly toward a partly opened closet door. "When it was safe to get in there, I'd remove and deactivate the fuse of that 105 millimeter howitzer shell."

Kinkaid went rigid, not daring to comment. He hadn't spotted the shell in the dim closet. Maybe he needed glasses. Or maybe that's what happened when a man got too tense. "Take care of it," he told Vail, and moved shakily toward the workbench. Then he remembered Captain Davis's uneasiness about the Bomber's smug secretiveness. "Wait," he barked, and checked the closet himself for a booby trap.

The liquid in the Mason jar turned out to be milk. Kinkaid also found a box of electric blasting caps, but there were too many missing for comfort. He was puzzled by a couple of blanks for making thin keys. He worked gingerly, hunting for traps and hidden explosives, becoming more and more on edge. He still smelled nitroglycerin, which the Bomber always used in his diabolical devices, but Kinkaid couldn't find it—not even when he and Vail carefully took up the flooring, the baseboards, and sounded the walls.

They searched the rest of the premises, inch by inch. No nitro. But in a trash barrel they found the casings of two clocks, minus the works. The landlady, called in by a police sergeant, knew nothing about them. The Bomber must have put them there.

"He was coming from out there," she said, nervously indignant, "when I spoke to him about eleven o'clock last night. He got furious, saying I'd been spying on him. How could I, when he'd been locked in his room all afternoon and evening?"

"And the keyhole plugged," Vail suggested.

Kinkaid gave him a look "Figure out what he was doing and you won't think it so funny." He turned to the landlady. "Where's your phone?"

He called Headquarters. Waiting for them to locate Captain Davis, he realized it was now daylight, after eight o'clock. He should call Bea, too. But she was probably on her way to the airport, and in a bad state if she'd heard about the Bomber's arrest on early morning newscasts.

"Yes, Jeff?" Captain Davis came on.

"Is the Bomber still smug?" Kinkaid inquired, afraid of the answer because he was certain now what it would be.

"Yes, he is," said the skipper. "Why?"

"Maybe I'm getting out of line," Kinkaid said slowly. "But you'd better tip off the boys in the interrogation room. I think he planted another pair of bombs somewhere last night *before* they nabbed him."

Captain Davis gasped, but he trusted his technicians.

"Can you give me any details, Jeff, to help them?"

"The smell of nitro, but no nitro here. Two empty clock cases. Wire that looks freshly snipped." Kinkaid interrupted himself irritably. "I'll tell you more downtown. Start them hammering that angle."

He and Vail gathered their gear fast while the rest of the lab detail got to work in the room for additional evidence.

"Headquarters," he told Vail, getting in the truck. "Make it on the double."

Vail grimaced. "Let's stop using that word."

Sirening downtown, Kinkaid thought aloud tensely. "I wonder where that cracked so-and-so planted them this time."

Vail took the truck around a corner, then inquired, "I've been thinking, but am I allowed to make a suggestion?"

"If it doesn't take too much of your mind off driving."

Vail became serious. "Look, this guy seems to have a phobia for transportation. In a way, you can't blame him. That's how it all started. He's hit a railroad, shipping, a but depot, the subway. But he has yet to blast—"

"The airport!" Kinkaid exclaimed, then felt a deep, twisting stab of panic. Bea was meeting Kay and Howard Griswald there. Kinkaid tersely radioed Headquarters, then added, "We're just a mile from there now. We'll head over, just in case . . ."

Bea, he thought miserably, *please be still at home, waiting to hear from me . . .*

Suddenly the radio, dispatching units to the airport, went silent. And then . . .

"This is *it!* The Bomber just admitted it's the airport. He won't tell how much time we've got. Get everybody out!"

Kinkaid swore. Bad enough if they knew the exact location of the bombs. But not knowing, it was going to be suicide. They'd *have* to risk looking for those bombs before the big airport was completely evacuated.

"Stop dragging your feet," he barked at Vail.

They got to the airport just behind the first wailing police car. Kinkaid's gaze swept the line of buildings. Waiting rooms. Gift shops. Restaurants. Parking lots and gas stations. The Bomber would have chosen some central point to draw a large crowd with his first blast, then to be cut down by the second, the big one.

"Let me out midway," Kinkaid ordered. Vail killed the siren and stopped. More police and fire sirens sounded in the distance, a screaming converging parade of them that would draw mobs of sightseers to join the crowd already normally at the airport. Just what the Bomber wanted.

Ahead of the truck, a sergeant and his partner piled out of their car.

"Get out of here," the sergeant shouted. "All of you. It's the Double Bomber." Kinkaid reached back in the truck for his kit as the sergeant bellowed. "Not that way, lady. Come back. Get out. *Lady!*"

Kinkaid kept his mind on his own job. "Take the waiting room beyond the service station," he told Vail. "Keep away from me. One of us has to stay alive. You're on your own, kid, watch yourself."

Turning toward the nearest waiting room, he saw Bea coming with the police sergeant in pursuit. That pain hit him again as he waved the sergeant back to the growing crowd. No margin of terror in Bea's eyes now—they were staring horror.

"Jeff!" she cried. "Don't—"

"Bea!" Strangely, his voice didn't shake. Just calm, with an undertone of sadness. "It can't be any other way."

"Please, Jeff." Her arms linked around his neck with a strength he had never known she possessed. He wanted to linger in it. But Kinkaid freed himself.

"Go home, Bea. You'll get the usual call . . . when it's finished."

He went around her, ready to

hold her off if necessary, as Captain Davis swung out of a police car. And then a trash barrel to his left, by the service station, tore apart with a metallic blast. The lid sailed up, turning over lazily in a fluttering cloud of burning papers. Women screamed. Men shouted. Kinkaid whipped a glance back at Bea. She was standing petrified, staring at him. Captain Davis, motioning people back, grasped her arm. Kinkaid shoved his way through others crowding hesitantly toward the barrel with the sergeant bellowing at them. "Stay back, you fools. There's another blast coming. Get out before you're blown out!"

Vail came ramming through the mob. "We got to work it together," Vail yelled. "The other one's around here. Close."

Kinkaid nodded, his eyes darting. "Less than three minutes to find it, kid." They had to find it before it ripped loose in the flood of curious humanity swamping Bea, Captain Davis, the few police who had gathered.

A harried lieutenant in uniform shouted to Kinkaid. "Can't you drop explosion mats over it until we get this mob moving out?"

Kincaid didn't bother to answer in the bedlam of voices and the scream of police and fire sirens closing in. Sure, there were steel mesh mats in the truck. A couple of men could handle them without the aid of a crane. But they were light, too light for nitroglycerin. And what good were they until the bomb was found?

He jostled through milling people to search the service station's racks of oil and accessories. Then the flower boxes on either side of the doorway. Geraniums, pungent as he parted them. Bea loved flowers, hoped for a place of her own some day where she could raise them along with the family she refused to have now.

Nothing among the flowers. Nothing on the shelves of batteries and polishes and other accessories inside the station. Firemen, armed with crowbars and axes, ran toward parked cars with a battalion chief ordering them to force open doors and trunks.

"Easy," Kinkaid shouted. "Don't bang around. This guy uses nitro."

Vail came out of the lubrication alcove, slipping on grease, his face and clothes smudged.

"It's got to be around here," he insisted. "It's got to be. And if it touches off the gasoline, too—"

Kincaid winced. Nitro plus gasoline! It would be hell with that mob still not back far enough. What the devil ailed the harness bulls? Why didn't they get them out? Then, thinking of gasoline, dashing to the island of pumps, he glimpsed a lieutenant barking into a car mike. And the sergeant, climbing to the prowl car's hood, gesticulating to squads farther back to break up the crowding sightseers.

Out at the island, Kinkaid thrust his hand into a receptacle for rags and paper towels. How much of those three minutes remained? An airplane roared overhead. *Don't let any land,* he thought. He froze, his hand among the papers and rags. He withdrew it slowly, staring at a small cylinder lock, remembering the thin key blanks he had seen on the Bomber's workbench.

"Kid," he yelled to Vail, who stood bewildered. "The pumps!"

He didn't hunt for keys inside to open the panel on the side of each gasoline pump. Time, time was slipping away too fast. He grabbed a long screwdriver from his kit to jimmy the panel.

Not too hard. Don't slip. Remember it's nitro.

The panel wrenched open. He sucked his breath. No explosion. Inside, the motor, the pump, gasoline piping, and plenty of space to plant a bomb. But it wasn't there.

He darted to the middle pump, colliding with Vail working from the opposite end of the island. Again he pried with the screwdriver. Vail hooked fingers into the opening and ripped the panel back.

And there it was!

A shoe box. On end on top of piping that would shatter under the nitro blast. Thousands of gallons of gasoline in the storage tank would go up. Other tanks would let go, too. The surrounding area, a shambles of destruction and fire. Sightseers, police, firemen burned, maimed, killed. A jackpot for the Bomber.

"How the devil," Vail panted, "did he plant it without being seen?"

"Wee hours. Probably sent the attendant out back for a special grade oil and then with a key he'd made from a wax impression— Kinkaid swore. "Never mind. Get the mats."

But he couldn't let the bomb rip loose that close to gasoline. Sweating, he studied the box while seconds raced away and vanished forever. No, there probably hadn't been time for the Bomber to booby-trap it.

Kinkaid reached in, sweat streaming from his armpits. Delicately he removed the box, carried it more gently than a baby out to the street, set it down. Getting his breath back, blinking, he looked around.

Vail and a couple of police were just scrambling into the truck for the mats. And beyond them, much, much too close, other bluecoats still tried to push the mob farther back.

Kinkaid shook his head. He'd better not wait. There might not be time to get the mats in place.

He locked his teeth, working fast, mainly by feel, with less than his usual caution. Gingerly he lifted the box lid at last. A clock mechanism, the alarm release poised on the edge of the long notch, though he couldn't hear the ticking with all the commotion in the background.

But when it dropped into the

notch, any split-second now, it would trip a hair-triggered switch linking batteries and a detonator taped to a milk bottle full of viscous, yellowish fluid. Nitroglycerin. That explained the Mason jar of milk, and why the Bomber didn't need lead pipe or any other metal container. Not with this much nitro planted inside a metal pump, close to gasoline . . .

All this flashed through Kinkaid's mind as he quickly, softly, jabbed his finger to stop the clock's escapement. He didn't dare let go, not with that alarm poised to blow up the neighborhood and everyone in it.

"Kid!" he called in a strained voice. "*Kid!*"

A policeman shouted to Vail, who came on the run, then slowed abruptly, turned to his kit, extended a thin rod.

"Dammit," Kinkaid whispered with his hand on that tricky bomb. "Use your head. Deactivate the current."

With his free hand, Kinkaid carefully thrust the rod into the bomb, jamming the clock mechanism. But there was still the touchy switch, the wired detonator, the nitro . . .

Vail reached with wavering side cutters, steadied as he snicked a wire, then the other. He bent the severed ends well back so they couldn't make contact. Then he pulled in his breath. Kinkaid stared at the nitro, still a threat, still touch and blow. Too dangerous to move through this crowd area.

"Sawdust," he muttered, sweating.

Vail dashed to the truck.

Kinkaid steadied the bottle, removed the detonator, then worked on the big cork. No force. Just feel and a prayer. It loosened with a protesting squeak. Or was that his nerves? He waited as Vail spread sawdust in a wide pile. Then, slower than the sands of time, trying not to wheeze in the acrid fumes, he poured the nitro on the sawdust.

He straightened, a muscle throbbing in his leg. "All right, kid, take it from here."

Upwind, Vail struck a match, touched it to the sawdust. With furiously hissing, yellowish flames the nitro burned itself away.

Vail grinned. Kinkaid wanted a cigarette. Someone cheered. Others joined in. It swelled back into the crowd. People broke through the police lines. Captain Davis barked. A cordon of police formed quickly around Kinkaid and Vail. But Bea got through, tears streaming down her face. Kinkaid caught her, held her close.

Bea trembled in his arms. "Jeff, you're needed by people. I'm so proud of you . . . Jeff, I was like this, learning to handle a gun, learning to swim—afraid of the water. Couldn't you try to show me about this, too?"

He couldn't believe it. "Don't you want me to speak to the skipper?"

"Don't you dare," she whispered. "He made me feel so ashamed. He said I was as brave as you. I'm not."

"Careful," said Kinkaid. "You're talking about my wife."

Then he saw Captain Davis standing by, eavesdropping, and looking very pleased with himself.

"Well done, Jeff."

"Thank you, Skipper." He looked at Vail. "That goes double, Vail."

"There's that word again," said Vail, grinning.

Kinkaid heard a plane coming in. The one bringing Kay and Howard Griswald. He'd take them down to the lab. with Bea. He was itching to show Howard a few things.

Meanwhile, he kissed his wife with everybody looking on and grinning.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **WILL SCOTT**

TITLE: ***The Shabby Man and the Nabob***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The house next door had become an evil place, sinister and frightening. We kept asking ourselves: "When will it happen? Will it be tonight?"*

I WAS TRIMMING THE HEDGE. IT WAS late April and the hedge was looking like the cuffs of last summer's coat. It was a high hedge and I had to stand on a chair. The shears scattered the clippings like green snowflakes, and when the man unexpectedly spoke from somewhere below me and I looked down to see why, the green clippings were all over his hat and even one or two on his face. Like myself, he held shears in his hands.

"Don't suppose you want any help, sir?" he said, with just a hint of hope in his voice. It was a baking afternoon and I have what my friends describe as *miles* of hedge.

He was a shabbyish fellow with no collar, and it must have been two days since he had last shaved. I didn't quite like the look of him; but then I have met those who didn't quite like the look of me. It takes all sorts to make a world, and the sorts have to live. In a way I was sorry for him.

"You may not believe me," I said, "but this is all I have to do. If I did not myself look after my garden I'd go to seed. Sorry."

"Nobody wants nothing," he murmured, half to himself.

"Why not try next door?" I suggested. "You might have a chance there. My neighbor has no help and you can see he needs some."

Next door was the Nabob. We didn't know his name at that time. We called him the Nabob. He looked like a Nabob. A solitary sort of man, speaking to nobody if

he could help it, but pretty well off if you could go by appearances. The sort of man who *ought* to pay to have his hedges clipped.

"Thank you very much, sir," said the shabby man. And next door he went.

I heard the Nabob's gate creak as it closed behind him. And then nothing happened. I went on clipping the hedge.

But after a few minutes I found I was asking myself what *should* have happened. Yes, of course—the gate should have creaked again when the shabby man came out.

I clipped on, wondering. No, that wasn't right. Not exactly. He wouldn't come out if he'd got the job. That was it. He had got the job.

Again I clipped. And presently stopped. That wasn't right, either. If he'd got the job of clipping Nabob's hedges I ought to be hearing the sound of it, as everybody within a hundred yards must have heard me clipping for the last hour.

I stood quite still on the chair, listening. Not a sound. Queer, I thought. He hasn't got the job, but he hasn't come out. What is he doing? Can he have dropped dead on the Nabob's front path? And doesn't the Nabob know?

I mentioned it to my wife at teatime.

"If somebody has dropped dead in the Nabob's garden we shall soon know," she said.

"Yes," I agreed. "I suppose so."

"And I don't imagine for one moment that anybody has done anything so stupid."

"No," I agreed again. "No. I suppose you're right."

And since really there was nothing to be done about it, the matter dropped. In fact, by the next day I had forgotten all about the shabby man who went in through the Nabob's gate and didn't come out again.

But on the day after that I got a shock.

I was standing at my gate, whistling the dog, when the Nabob's gate opened and the shabby man *did* come out.

Only now he wasn't a shabby man any more!

He was wearing a gray lounge suit of excellent cut, though obviously it had never been cut for him, a gray soft hat and gray gloves. A diamond stickpin shone in his tie, and he was smoking a cigar of a brand which I could not afford to buy.

It was not the most dramatic moment of my career, by any means, but I do not think that in all my life I have been more astonished.

He nodded to me as he passed and said, "Good morning." Not "Good morning, sir"—just "Good morning." And I said "Good morning" back. I didn't know what else to do.

When he was out of sight I went indoors and told my wife.

"How extraordinary!" she exclaimed. "Can he be staying next door? What does it mean?"

"I suppose he hasn't murdered the Nabob and walked off in his best suit?" I said. A ridiculous explanation, as I knew. If the once-shabby man had murdered the Nabob he wouldn't let me see him walking away from the scene of his crime in broad daylight; and he would have taken more than a suit and a cigar.

But then, what explanation was there which was not ridiculous? A vulgar hedge clipper, living in the Nabob's house, wearing his suit and smoking his cigar!

"After all," I said, "our Nabob *is* a nabob. You've only got to look at him. This fellow can't be a long-lost brother suddenly turned up from Australia or from twenty years in prison. Nor even a distant cousin by marriage."

"But there must be *some* reason for it," said my wife.

"There must be," I agreed.

And of course there was . . .

Being the Nabob's only immediate neighbors, we were naturally more interested in the affair than the other residents in the suburb. Indeed, it was not until considerably later that the others were interested at all. But we speculated on the thing all day and every day; and in so far as we could over a high privet hedge, we did a bit of spying all day and every day, too.

For, you see, the once-shabby man came back to the house next door that day, as he came back from all his other walks every other day; and whatever might be the reason for the unusual state of affairs, there was no doubt at all that this vagrant gardener was living in the Nabob's house permanently, with the Nabob.

I clipped the hedge again, taking at least two feet off the top this time so that we could see more. And from the bathroom window we could now see quite a lot. But not of the Nabob.

Just once or twice we saw him. Not so frequently as in the old days before the once-shabby man came trimming hedges down our street, but just once or twice. And it was almost with a shudder that we realized there was a change in the Nabob, an awful change, since those old days.

"He looks—he looks—" said my wife.

"Haunted," I said.

She nodded.

"Something like that."

I sat on the edge of the bath and thought hard. The Nabob certainly *did* look haunted: it was no exaggeration. I have never seen such an awful expression on a man's face. He moped about his garden as though he had no longer any interest in life. He had never been what is called a mixer, but now he was something worse than a hermit.

On the other hand, the once-shabby man was growing quite

plump and spent most of his time in a deck chair on the lawn. The world appeared to be a good world to the once-shabby man.

"It's blackmail!" I said suddenly.

"Blackmail!" my wife echoed. "How?"

"That day when he came clipping hedges," I said, "he came back into the Nabob's life. From how long ago and from *what* we don't know; but he did. By accident, no doubt, but that's what happened. They recognized each other, and the clipper simply invited himself in and has 'lived on the land' ever since. 'Keep me, feed me, clothe me, and I'll say nothing. But if you don't—' You can almost hear him saying the words. And the Nabob just daren't turn him out. I've no doubt he makes the fellow's bed and prepares all his meals for him. Has to!"

"It sounds rather mad," said my wife.

"I quite agree," I said. "It does."

But it wasn't. As it happened. I had hit the right nail on the head. It *was* blackmail, and the hedge clipper *was* "living on the land." But we didn't find that out until later. And it wasn't the most important thing, after all.

Weeks went by with a sort of brooding monotony. We caught only an occasional glimpse of the Nabob, and not particularly pleasant glimpses, either. He was shrunken, and his once-pink face was gray.

He was like a man who had wakened out of a nightmare to find the nightmare still going on. And after all, it was a nightmare. To live day after day, week after week, with an Old Man of the Sea forever on your shoulders, a detestable man like the Nabob's Old Man of the Sea, and to know that, barring luck or accidents, that state of affairs must persist until one or the other passed away—well, nightmare is putting it mildly, I think.

"Why doesn't he run away when the man's out one afternoon?" said my wife.

I explained that running away isn't so easy.

"The Nabob has a good bit of money invested in that house and grounds and the furniture, as well as in other property in the suburb," I pointed out. "You can't pull up all your roots in an hour, especially when they are financial roots and fairly thick. There are all kinds of things to do and people to see. Solicitors and valuers and others have to call and you have to call on solicitors and valuers and others. He couldn't get things moving very far without that fellow finding out. It sounds easy, but in practice it's one of the most difficult things. He *might* walk out and leave everything, but I scarcely think the Nabob is the kind of man to spend the rest of his days tramping the lanes and the rest of his nights sleeping in workhouses. No—about the only way he can get rid of his

Old Man of the Sea—if we're right about what's going on next door —is to—"

And then I broke off and looked at my wife, and she looked at me.

"Is to *what?*" she asked.

"Well . . ." I said.

"I know what you mean. Kill him!"

I nodded. I could not say even one word.

But from that very moment, whenever my wife or I looked at the house next door, it was furtively—and it was expectantly. The house next door, which had been merely mysterious since the coming of the shabby stranger, was now become sinister; and by night it was positively evil.

Although neither of us again referred to my solution of the Nabob's troubles, I know that it was never out of our thoughts; and whenever we peeped over the hedge that separated us from the Nabob's garden we were thinking something like: "When will it *happen?* Will it be *tonight?*"

The nightmare was spreading from next door and beginning to take a hold on us.

Our state of mind and the steady deterioration in the Nabob's morale apart, outward events were pretty much as they always had been. Tradesmen's vans came along the street; postmen called; policemen passed; dogs slept in the sun. We were at that time, I think, the only people who suspected the abnormal. So far as appearances went, every day was like every other day. It seemed that nothing would happen because nothing *did* happen.

In the early days my wife wanted me to go to the police, but when I wanted to know what *about* she had to admit that I should look silly, and that nobody could move if the Nabob wouldn't.

Some time in August I had the luck to meet the Old Man of the Sea and speak to him. It was in the bar of the Railway Hotel where, I was given to understand, he spent a good bit of his time, doing himself well, for he never seemed to be short of money in his pocket now.

It was the first time I had actually spoken to him since that morning he came out of the Nabob's gate dressed in the Nabob's gray suit. We found ourselves alongside each other and I suppose he felt he had to speak.

He was pleasant about the weather, as one neighbor to another. He even got to know my name, somehow, and told me his. It was Buntley, which seemed to fit him. He referred to the Nabob as his "friend," and said he had not been too well lately. But he did not go into details. In fact, he did not stay very long after I got there. He wasn't giving any game away.

By this time we had noticed he had a kind of daily program. Every morning at eleven he went out (no doubt to the Railway Hotel) and every morning at twelve thirty he

came back again. Every evening at six he went out and every evening at eight he came back again.

We began to look for him coming out through the gate next door. What we always thought (although we never said it to each other) was, "Well, he's still alive . . ." Not a nice thought to put into words, but an even worse one to keep out of words. Unspoken thoughts are no help in counteracting a nightmare.

September came along, a dampish, cold September. And one morning that which we had been anticipating for weeks happened.

Buntley did not appear at eleven o'clock, nor in the evening at six.

My wife was very quiet that day and I was restless. In turns we kept going to the window and watching the house next door. We were thinking, *"Did it happen* last night?"

I prowled about the garden, and found I was actually missing Buntley's complacent whistling and the smell of his expensive cigar. It was an awful day and it was followed by an awful night. I very nearly *did* go for the police.

The next day I was glad I had not done so . . . in a way. We saw Buntley.

But a terribly altered Buntley . . . The man was ill, as ill as a man could be if appearances went for anything. He was sitting in a deck chair in the garden, too weak (it seemed to me) to walk.

"By Jove, that fellow's in a bad way," I said. "He needs a doctor!"

"What's the matter with him?" my wife wondered aloud.

"Heaven knows," I said. "Unless it's—"

I was thinking of poison. I couldn't say so. But there was no need to say so. One glance at my wife told me that she knew what it was I hadn't said.

"Why doesn't he have a doctor?" she whispered.

"If the Nabob won't let him—" I said.

"They're on the telephone," she reminded me. "Is he so ill he can't reach the telephone?"

But apparently he did telephone —for the next day we saw our own man, Dr. Cobb, get out of his little blue car at the gate of the house next door and go inside. He stayed more than twenty minutes, and he came, in all, three times that day.

"Looks serious," I said. "And if there *is* any hanky-panky I'm sorry for the Nabob. Cobb's a darned clever chap at spotting things." And after a moment, "I'm not sure I'm not sorry for the Nabob in any case. Whatever I might have done, *I'd* feel like poisoning the fellow!"

For several days Dr. Cobb came twice daily to the house next door, and after that once daily. Buntley was seen no more sitting in the garden, nor was there so much as a glimpse of the Nabob. What shopping they did must have been done by telephone.

After a week or so of this kind of thing a late bee decided to sting

me and I had to go to Cobb myself for treatment. I was rather grateful to that bee. *I wanted to know*—although I wasn't at all sure as to how I was going to put it to the doctor.

I plotted various ways and means as I sat in his waiting room, but I need not have troubled. After my treatment he sat back and lit his pipe, his duties over for the day.

"Queer man, Cavern," he said, looking at me through the smoke.

"Cavern?"

"Your neighbor."

"Oh!" I said. "Cavern? So that's his name? We always call him the Nabob. Queer? Well, I can't say I've ever spoken to him. Cavern . . . Queer name."

"Suits him, somehow," said Cobb. And then he looked at me again. "He's got a fellow there—" And when he broke off I thought, "Now it's coming!"

"Man named Buntley," Cobb added.

"I know him," I said. "At least, I don't exactly *know* him."

"Roughneck," Cobb grunted. "Well dressed and all, but about the roughest neck you could meet. What's he doing there? Do you know?"

"No," I answered. "Do you, Doctor?"

Once more I thought, "Now it's coming!" But it wasn't. At least, not what I expected.

"I haven't the foggiest," replied Dr. Cobb. "But although Cavern is the real thing—old school tie and everything—and Buntley is a roughneck of the roughest, I do believe it would break old Cavern's heart if the fellow died. And die he nearly did, this week."

I just sat there and gaped!

Break his heart if the fellow died? Break the *Nabob's* heart? But it was incredible! I was as certain as certain could be, and my wife with me, that if poison or anything else could have put Buntley out of the Nabob's way without leaving traces, Buntley would have been a dead man weeks before. And yet here was Dr. Cobb saying it would break the man's heart . . .

"What's wrong?" Cobb asked quietly.

"Nothing," I said. "Er—what's been the matter with Buntley?"

"Chest," Cobb answered. "He's missed double pneumonia by the closest I've seen for years. He's chesty anyway. He ought to look after himself. Why? What did you think was the matter?"

"I don't know that—" I left it at that, feeling I wasn't making a good job of it. Five minutes earlier I would have told everything we suspected; but now, after the doctor's firm assertion that the Nabob was nothing more terrible than a loving nurse, I felt I should have to be careful how I trod.

"What puzzles me is how a man like Buntley comes to be there," said Cobb. "Cavern doesn't try to explain him. But he couldn't be in

better hands, and that's a fact. The old man's looking after him like a mother. *Worried* about him."

I felt uncomfortable, and Cobb would keep looking at me. I turned the talk to weather and got back home as quickly as I could to tell my wife Cobb's extraordinary news.

"Then it can't be blackmail after all," she said. "It can't be anything wrong."

"If it's nothing wrong why does he keep the chap in the house another minute?" I asked. "He doesn't *want* him there. You've only got to look at his eyes. He's been haunted ever since Buntley came. But he not only keeps him there, he nurses him! I give the whole business up!"

The next day there was a knock on my door. I opened the door myself. On the step was Dr. Cobb.

"Hello!" I said. "Come in."

"Can't stop a minute," said Cobb. "I've just been next door. I thought I'd look in and let you know. You're wrong."

"Wrong?" I said.

He fixed his eyes firmly on mine.

"It's a perfectly natural illness."

I'm afraid I flushed up at that.

"Oh, I know you didn't say anything last night," Cobb hastened on. "But I could tell from your manner—"

Well, we couldn't leave things *there*. I had to tell him everything, and did. He was interested; more than that; and he admitted it looked strange, to say the least. But he assured me again that Buntley's illness was a perfectly natural illness and that he could not be better looked after by anybody than he was by the Nabob.

"We'll have a talk one night," he said as he went away, thirty minutes overdue for his next appointment.

And so matters stood for perhaps four days. Then, one night, quite late—after midnight—I was feeling restless and could not sleep. I got up and went to the window. I could see nothing—there wasn't even a star in the sky—but I know there are times when you can *sense* things, and I could tell there was something wrong next door. I didn't know what it was: something.

I put on my dressing gown, went downstairs, let myself out of the house without a sound, and tiptoed down the garden. For a few moments I stood there, no wiser than when I was at the window above; then, with a shock which made my scalp tingle, I heard it.

Somebody was digging in the Nabob's garden.

Digging!

I don't know how long I stood there. Half an hour, perhaps. I know I remained a long time after the sounds stopped, and when they were not resumed I went indoors again. But not to sleep.

I said nothing to my wife the next morning, but when, from the bathroom window, I had seen where

the digging had been done, and the size and shape of it, I went round to see Cobb and told him what had happened the night before.

"I don't like it at all," I said. "Somebody ought to do *something*."

"I'll call and see how Buntley's getting on," Cobb promised. "And if I see the two of them—well . . . Possibly somebody was burying a dead dog."

"By night?" I said. "And taking all that time over it?"

"Well, I'll call," said the doctor.

And he did. But he didn't see Buntley.

Buntley, the Nabob informed him, was now better and had gone away for a long holiday. He wasn't expected back for at least a month.

"A lie!" I exclaimed when Cobb told me.

"I'm wondering," he confessed.

"Then what do we do?" I asked.

"Leave it to me," said the doctor.

That night there was digging again in the garden of the Nabob's house—digging behind canvas screens; and before the dawn broke the body of Buntley was disclosed and the Nabob was in a local cell, charged with "concealment of the death of Thomas Buntley, aged forty-seven, of the same address."

An unexpected charge, but it appeared you had to find out first if the man *had* been murdered. At first it was only certain he was dead and buried.

The case created a stir, of course —especially when it became known that the Nabob had been making feverish attempts to sell all his possessions in the suburb. He had told the story that he was going abroad, but it came out that he had purchased a small property on the south coast, in readiness for his flight.

"Why," everybody was asking, "did he kill Buntley? What was the story behind it?"

Crowds of people who gathered to see "where it had happened" made life on the street unendurable for some days, but it was in these crowds that I first saw the man who was to lead me to the end of this fantastic affair—if end you could call it. 1

I noticed him first, I think, because he was taking such obvious pains not to be noticed. He never came out from the very back of the crowds. He was a wide man, quite bald, as I saw when he took off his hat to stroke his head, and he wore glasses of extraordinary thickness. Like the dead Buntley, he was what Dr. Cobb had described as a roughneck. There was absolutely no expression on his face.

I might have thought no more about him, but he turned up at the police-court hearing when the Nabob was first charged, sitting in the back row of the public gallery, very anxiously trying to keep himself out of sight. I pointed him out to Dr. Cobb and Cobb mentioned him to Langley, the police superintendent in charge of the case, and

within a minute or two the stranger, without knowing it, was "under observation."

The court proceedings were over in the briefest time. The Nabob pleaded not guilty as a matter of course, said nothing else, and was remanded for a fortnight.

Meanwhile, the expressionless stranger (who *was* a stranger) did not leave the district. I found out through Cobb, who had found out through the police, that his name was Connor, and that he was staying in a cheap hotel across the railway, drinking whiskey most of the time and apparently waiting for something. For *what,* wasn't clear.

And then came one of those strokes of luck which so often happen in cases of this kind. Connor drank too much whiskey one night and the police had to take him in. And when they got him in they searched him and found a letter.

It was only a short letter:

DEAR JIM,

"I shall write to you on the 10th of every month, regular. If I don't it means I have been done in by the man I am staying with. You can get my address from Charley, but don't try as long as I keep on writing, or all this stops. I'll send you a pound a week as long as you agree to this, but keep away unless I stop writing. Then get my address and go to the police. I shall have been murdered.

Yours,
THOS. BUNTLEY

The resumed hearing was, needless to say, sensational. Connor was a witness and the letter was an exhibit.

And the letter made it clear to everybody that the Nabob *had* been blackmailed by Buntley.

But though Connor was a witness, he was almost next to useless. He swore he knew nothing about anything. He had received Buntley's letters monthly and had abided by the terms, and so long as he received a pound a week for doing nothing he was satisfied to ask no questions.

When he read in the papers about the finding of Buntley's body he had come down to see what was what; but since the police had got their man he saw no sense in butting in on what did not concern him. And that was, in effect, all they ever got out of him. He got a fortnight for being drunk, and after that he was a free man.

But useless though Connor proved to be, he was a model by comparison with the Nabob. The Nabob flatly refused to say a word. Every possible attempt was made to find out *why* he had been blackmailed by Buntley, but the Nabob kept as close as an oyster. He sat in the dock and stared at the floor and let the magistrate's court get on with it. And again he was remanded.

Walking home with Cobb, I asked, "When is the charge going to be altered to one of murder?"

"Never," he said.

I stopped and stared at him.

"Never? What do you mean?"

"It's unofficial, but it will soon be common knowledge," said Cobb. "They're playing for time, in order to find out who the Nabob is and what he did in the dear days gone by; but the P.M. has cleared one thing up beyond doubt. Buntley died a natural death."

"Then—?"

"Oh, there's no doubt the Nabob knew about Buntley's monthly letters to his pal. He knew that if Buntley got himself murdered, or died a natural death, and the monthly letters ceased the fat would be in the fire for *him*. He wasn't risking even an obscure newspaper announcement of Buntley's death. He buried him, and so gained breathing space of perhaps no more than a day or two, *but* breathing space. The probability is that he didn't know on which day of the month Buntley's letter was sent. It might have meant as much as three weeks' breathing space, but he couldn't tell. He got busy. But if he had not concealed the death he could not have got busy without exciting a lot of suspicions."

"I don't see," I said, "why, since he *hadn't* murdered Buntley—"

"The Nabob," Cobb interrupted, "has been a very naughty boy in the past. He wasn't risking things coming out."

"But nothing *has* come out," I said.

"As luck had it," said Cobb.

And the luck held.

Records were searched, fingerprints compared, photographs scrutinized by the thousands, but the Nabob's past was not unearthed. Murder it might have been; probably was; but it never came to light.

Cobb and I were talking about it on the night before the trial.

"Somebody knows," said Cobb. "Connor, possibly. Probably, indeed —which is why Buntley would not let him have his address. Buntley wasn't sharing the gold mine. Yes, I should say Connor knew the Nabob well once, and knows everything about him now. But how can you make him *tell?*"

"How long do you reckon the Nabob will get?" I asked.

"Concealment," replied Cobb, "is more of an offense than a crime. I should say twelve months."

And twelve months it was.

After which everybody settled down to forget. As everybody always does.

Do *you* remember the particular murder case (or any other kind of case) that you were discussing with everybody a year ago? Exactly. Within six months nobody could remember the Nabob's name. Much less what all the bother had been about.

The house next door was sold, and the rest of the Nabob's property in the suburb. And the suburb never saw him again.

But a couple of years later I was motoring on the south coast and came to a little town. I had myself forgotten all about the Nabob by this time, but the name of the town brought him back to my mind. It was to this place, I remembered, he had intended to retire just before the finding of Buntley's body. I wondered if he had done so.

I searched the local directory in the post office, but there was nobody down under the name of Cavern. If here, he must have changed his name. But in the afternoon, by the merest chance, I saw him.

He was walking down a quiet street, tree-shaded and very respectable. He passed my car without seeing me and I pulled up and looked back.

He looked ten years older and more haunted even than when he lived in the house next door. He was thinner and frailer and quite hopeless-looking. He carried a shopping bag and as I sat there watching him he turned in through the swinging gate of a bungalow.

Curiosity, I suppose, took me out of my car and down the quiet street. I had never spoken to him, yet I would have spoken to him now. He seemed to need somebody to speak to.

But when I reached the gate and looked over it, the Nabob was not to be seen; he was already inside the house and the door was closed.

Not that the garden was empty. In a bright red hammock slung between two apple trees, tastefully dressed, happy and smoking an expensive cigar, was a bald man, wearing glasses of extraordinary thickness. There was absolutely no expression on his face.

Connor!

I came away.

After all, what was to be done about it? Nothing.

What *can* be done about it? Nothing.

We can only sit round the fire on a winter's evening and when we remember the affair at all, wonder.

That's all—wonder.

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Few better books have ever been written on the intelligent understanding and enjoyment of murder than E. Spencer Shew's A COMPANION TO MURDER (Knopf, $4.50). Here, superbly indexed and cross-referenced, are 108 English and Scottish murder cases, both famous and obscure, from 1900 to 1950, along with illuminating notes on British law and biographies of 58 celebrities of bar and bench. At once concise and precise, Shew's brief accounts excel in wisdom most versions ten times their length.

★★★★ **COURT OF CROWS, *by Robert A. Knowlton*** (Harper, $4)

Transferring the Rattenbury-Stoner case (England, 1935) to the Carolina coast today makes a deeply understanding novel of murder which is also a notable "straight" novel of emotions and manners.

★★★★ **OLD HOUSE OF FEAR, *by Russell Kirk*** (Fleet, $3.95)

Grand vigorous story, which the author calls "unblushing Gothick," of adventure and menace in the Hebrides——as rousing as Stevenson or Buchan.

★★★ **THE SLEUTH AND THE LIAR, *by John Sherwood*** (Crime Club, $2.95)

English boy learns the terrible two-facedness of events and people in a subtle, deftly plotted story of love and murder.

★★★ **ONE FOR MY DAME, *by Jack Webb*** (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $2.95)

Bright, fresh, somewhat mad suspense thriller, as lively as it is unpredictable and individual.

★★★ **CLOSE HIS EYES, *by Olivia Dwight*** (Harper, $3.50)

Witty literate writing and shrewd insight into academic men and mores compensate nicely for lack of action.

The 16th annual BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR (Dutton, $3.95), now edited by Brett Halliday, deliberately excludes stories from EQMM—understandably, because of EQ's own two annuals. I fear that this unsalted stew of trivia may indeed represent precisely the best-of-1960-outside-of-EQMM—in which case the American detective short story is in a sad decline.

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 222nd "first story" published by EQMM . . . a tale of the Philippines, of the rebellion there after World War II, of the conflict between the Huks and the law—and especially of a Huk chieftain and his suspicion of an informer . . .

The author was born in Ermita, Manila, and was only 19 years old when he wrote "The Traitor." He has an A.B. degree from the University of St. Thomas and is "a product of the Ateneo de Manila, a private university for boys run by American Jesuits." Mr. Guerrero writes short stories "partly to pass the time away and partly because I'm seriously interested in the craft."

The author's grandfather, Fernando Ma. Guerrero, was a famous poet (in Spanish) and patriot. "The Guerreros," the author tells us, "are one of the oldest clans in Manila, and we have always been addicted to the world of letters."

Mr. Guerrero closed his biographical note as follows: "I think what made me screw up enough nerve to send my 'first story' to EQMM was Ellery Queen's constant assertion that their editorial doors are never locked to a newcomer." Readers everywhere: our assertion remains, and will remain, constant.

THE TRAITOR

by AMADIS MA. GUERRERO

THIRTEEN MEN MADE CAMP HIGH in the Kaikulan Mountains. They were fugitives from justice, men hunted down relentlessly for their repeated acts of violence and murder, men hated for their threat to peace and democracy.

Luis Gonzaga, a big sun-darkened man in his late forties, looked around to survey the dark faces of his men, and the uneasiness that had been in him for weeks increased. They were all tried and true fighters, his men—they ambushed and killed without batting an eyelash. And yet he could not rid himself of the feeling that one of them was an informer, a traitor . . .

Take their last raid at Barrio Ilinga: they had been surprised there by an armed and waiting Philippine Constabulary.

That had caused him the loss of seven good men.

How could the PC have known they would strike next at Ilinga? That barrio was remote and isolated, a full three days' journey from the nearest PC outpost and a full day's journey from where they were reported to be in the Manila newspapers. And no one but his twelve men had known of his plans to sack Ilinga. He had not even told the head Huk up in Lumpa of this.

Therefore one of his men had informed the PC. One of his tried and true fighting men had been responsibe for the death of seven of his comrades.

And that was not all.

Even before the fiasco at Ilinga there had been signs, little signs, that he had first passsed over but now viewed with growing suspicion and alarm—little things like the frequent unexplained absences of a few of his men, the constant pursuit of PC men who seemed to guess his little hideouts . . .

Luis Gonzaga got up slowly to replenish the fire, the fury within him masked. The dying light of their campfire flamed anew and threw into bolder relief the dirty, unshaven persons of his men.

He asked himself: Who among them is the informer?

Could it be the wild-eyed youth known only as Gimenez? The mad boy of the Luzon forests whose idea of fun was to capture PC officers alive and hang them head down on a fire?

Could it be José Lopez, who was now reclining on the grass staring moodily at the fire? He claimed he had studied at the best schools in Manila, but Gonzaga did not believe him.

Or maybe it was Miguel Valerio . . . or Pablo Vero . . .

Suddenly Gonzaga could stand it no longer. He spoke out harshly, suddenly, startling them all: "One of us is a traitor!" And he told them of his suspicions that had grown into certainty with the disaster at Ilinga.

When he had finished, Miguel Valerio asked quietly, "Why do you look at me like that, Chief? Surely you don't think it's me."

And José Lopez grinned sickly, "Surely you don't think it's me, Chief?"

And Gimenez was smiling as he asked, "And Chief, surely you don't think it's me?"

After a half hour of waiting, Gimenez glimpsed the small cloth-roofed jeep and was relieved. A few minutes later its brown-uniformed driver could be discerned faintly in the slowly moving vehicle. Gimenez came out of his hiding place behind the trunk of a tree and sat down leisurely on the ground as the jeep halted some thirty paces away. The man got out slowly and advanced toward him.

"You made me wait for thirty minutes," Gimenez lisped carefully to Commander Dionisio Elvirio. "I don't like that."

The Commander flung him a cold look. "I got your signal," he said tonelessly, and gestured toward the smoking ashes to their right. "What is it now?"

"Poor Commander Elvirio. He is angry with me because he failed to catch Gonzaga at Ilinga. Poor stupid, blundering Commander Elvirio."

"What do you want now, Gimenez?" There was no visible expression on the Commander's face.

The youth continued to address no one in particular. "I offered him a chance to have a name all over the Islands. I offered him a chance to be a national hero. I told him where the great Huk Chief Gonzaga would strike next. All I asked in return was the three thousand pesos' reward on Gonzaga's head and a chance to start a new life. But like the witless, hopeless bulldog he is, PC Commander Elvirio let Gonzaga slip through his fingers."

The Commander smiled, "I can still hang dozens of murder charges on you, Gimenez. I suggest you shut your mouth and tell me what you want."

"You suggest I shut my mouth. Well, I suggest that you open up that object you call a brain and examine what's inside it. And while you're at it, don't bother to mend it back."

"Know what it feels like to see the world from behind bars, boy?" the Commander asked.

Gimenez laughed scornfully. "Sure, you could arrest me and shut me up forever in Mutinglupa—but you won't. You're greedy, Elvirio, and you're ambitious. You don't bother with small fry like me. You want Gonzaga and I'm the only one who can lead you to him. So don't ever make the mistake of threatening me with arrest. It doesn't scare me at all."

"All right," the Commander grunted, the pulses in his forehead the only indication of the tremendous effort it took him to hold his temper. "You have got that off your chest, Gimenez. Now get down to business."

Gimenez took a deep breath. The fun was over—even Elvirio could be pushed only so far. He said quietly, "Okay, listen. Here's my plan . . ."

Gonzaga was daydreaming.

And as it always was in his dreams, images of his childhood and youth would come flashing back to him. He saw once again the small gray-walled church where he had been baptized. He remembered the simple one-story structure that was the school, the barrio fiestas—annual religious events in which barrios all over the Philippines celebrated the feast days of their respective patron saints. His adolescence had not been different from that of any other provincial youth. He had gone to the small barrio parties, had occasionally serenaded the lasses in the company of friends.

And then the Second Global Conflict came and with it the emergence into power of a fiery faction that leaned toward a Classless Society. At first they had had the sympathy of the rural folk. They were good guerrilla fighters, and Gonzaga, fired with patriotism, had joined them to halt the advance of the Japanese. He soon learned that these Classless Society men were murdering their own enemies under the guise of Nationalism.

And then the War ended and it became open rebellion against the Government. They became known simply as the Huks, and the struggle of the young Philippine Republic against Communism began. Violence, murder and death were the order of the day. Public sympathy changed to public fear and hate.

After long and bloody years of fighting, the Huks were defeated in 1953. For seven years they lay licking their wounds. Now they were renewing their nefarious activities, and Luis Gonzaga, Huk Supremo of Central Luzon, was in the midst of them all . . .

And suddenly his thoughts turned to the betrayer in his camp. How had he informed the PC of their raid at Ilinga? By a secret meeting with them? It was possible. The Kaikulan Mountains were strewn with hidden canyons, byways, and isolated spots. A clandestine meeting with the law (possibly by a smoke signal) could be arranged without too much difficulty.

But who? Who among the twelve would sell out their leader? José Lopez? Miguel Valerio? Gimeniz?

Gonzaga began to sweat.

Gimenez had another meeting with Commander Elvirio the next day and they put the finishing touches to their plan.

"It's too dangerous, Gimenez," the Comander balked. "I don't like it."

"Coward."

Elvirio flushed. "I have had enough of your insults, Gimenez! What makes you so sure I won't go straight to your hideout with an army of PC men and hand you, along with Gonzaga, to the law?"

"Oh, many reasons." Gimenez said carelessly. "Reason Number One: you couldn't possibly find our hideout. Gonzaga was born and raised here and he knows every gully, every treacherous ravine and cliff—which you and your men don't—and he can easily lead you into a trap. Reason Number Two: even if you have the luck to flush out Gonzaga it will be too costly. He's a madman when aroused and you'll never catch him alive—you know that. Reason Number Three: you love your skin too much to risk it . . ."

The Commander's heavy hand lashed out and struck the youth's cheek. Gimenez grunted, fell back a step, and his hand flew with snake-like speed to the inside of his dirty shirt. The Commander's service pis-

tol appeared with startling speed.

"Go ahead," Elvirio said. "Bring out your gun and see where it will get you."

Gimenez stared at the towering armed figure in front of him, then shrugged and holstered his weapon. "All right, Elvirio. Nothing would be gained by a fight with you." But the devil-light remained in his eyes.

"Good boy," the Commander said caustically, but he was satisfied. He returned his gun. "Now let's go over your plan again."

Gimenez was silent for several seconds, then began to talk unemotionally: "Tomorrow at noon will be the best time. He assigns every one of us to different lookout posts and then he's alone in camp. I'll arouse his curiosity—never mind how—and lead him to that secluded spot overlooking the two giant mango trees, where the old Cipriano well is. Know the spot?"

The Commander nodded.

"Can you get there by jeep?"

"I know the trails."

Gimenez continued in the same unemotional voice: "Be there by one. Hide your jeep and yourself among the trees. When we arrive there, I'll give the call of the Maya. Can you imitate that?"

For answer Commander blew on his lips and the sound was not unlike that of the call of the Philippine bird.

Gimenez nodded. "I'll give the call twice. You answer me at least once so that I'll know you're there. And then," his voice dropped to a whisper, "I'll shoot my unsuspecting chief with my silencer on my gun and you'll come out of your hiding place and give me three thousand pesos. Then you'll get out of here as fast as you can, with Gonzaga's body in your jeep, claim the three thousand pesos' reward money, and make a big splash all over the national papers for having captured —" his voice took on a jeering note," —at the risk of your own life one of the Big Three Huks of Luzon."

"And what happens to you?" the Commander asked.

"With your three thousand pesos safe in my pocket, I'll be making for the province boundary as fast as I can."

"Alone?"

"I've always been alone—ever since my mother ran out on me ten years ago."

"I still don't like it," Elvirio reiterated. "It's too risky to kill your chief right under the noses of your companions."

"I'll be taking all the risks," Gimenez said coldly. "And with as little noise as possible, there will be no danger from my comrades. Besides, they're all beginning to think Gonzaga's too weak and soft to remain a Huk chief. Just be at the Cipriano well as early as you can, so as not to be spotted by one of our lookouts."

"What if they spot me on the way back—with Gonzaga's body in the

jeep? That will surely be a fine fix."

"So what the hell. They're afoot and you'll be driving away as fast as you can."

Indecision still stamped the Commander's heavy features. The youth leaned forward, "The plan is simple —that's why I know it will succeed. Will you go through with it?"

A pause. Then, "I'll go through with it."

"Good. Tomorrow then. Be ready."

Gonzaga was annoyed.

The hours after lunch were the only ones he had in which to be alone. Shortly after the meal he would assign his men to different posts to scan the terrain for possible signs of PC. Each man was equipped with small but powerful binoculars. Each had a deadly automatic not unlike the service pistol of the lawmen, and an M-I rifle as well.

Now, less than an hour after sending his men off, he spied Gimenez hurrying down the slope toward him, waving his hands frantically.

Gonzaga cursed and rose, his annoyance not yet giving way to alarm. What did the young devil want?

When Gimenez reached him, he was out of breath. Sweat stains showed all over his ragged shirt. "Chief," he managed to gasp out, "I think I saw some PC men!"

Excitement suddenly coursed through Gonzaga's veins.

"I tell you I saw them!" Gimenez continued. "Flashes of brown in all that green wilderness! What else could they have been?"

Gonzaga looked hard at his young henchman. Gimenez breathed urgency, even terror. His face was pallid and his hands shook. Gonzaga had never seen him like this. He rasped out, "Where did you see them?"

"From the site of the old Cipriano well. It's the most elevated place around here and I could see for miles."

Gonzaga's eyes narrowed slightly. "That wasn't where I assigned you."

"I passed it on the way! And with the glasses I could see them clearly —specks of brown that could only be the Constabulary."

"How far off?"

"There's no immediate danger," Gimenez said. "That's the roughest terrain in Central Luzon and they were several miles away."

"All right, lead me to the well and let me see for myself. Then we'll call the men and decide what to do."

Their camp in the mountains was hidden by a canyon that few men had trod before. It was well camouflaged by trees, shrubbery and underbrush. And it was through these that the two passed on their way to the well. They had been born and raised in this hard environment, and they knew every inch of the way—the treacherous falls, the deep inclining cliffs and ravines.

When they reached the Cipriano well, Gimenez suddenly gave an imitation of the Maya call. Somewhere to their right the call was echoed. Gonzaga asked curtly, "What was that for, Gimenez?"

The eyes that the youth turned toward his chief were wide with innocence. "Why, nothing. I just saw some Maya birds."

He handed over his binoculars to Gonzaga, bade him follow, and climbed the small protruding ridge a few paces away from the well. A vast panorama spread before them. Trees, small rivers, and lowlands were in evidence from their elevated position. And rising before them, like huge and tall sentinels, were the blue and cloud-covered tops of the Imus Mountains.

Gimenez pointed to the right as his chief began to scan the scene. "There—just there was where I saw them."

"I don't see anything."

Gimenez moved back a step and brought out his gun.

"A little over to this side, where the streams are."

"I still don't see anything."

"I would be very much surprised if you did."

Gonzaga swung around just as the first shot came. He staggered, caught hold of his chest where the bullet had pierced it. He was like that when the second shot found its mark. And the third bullet shattered his hand, digging down into his side for his own weapon.

He crumpled to the ground.

Commander Elvirio looked down on the prone body of the Huk Chieftain. A faint roaring sounded in his ears as he visualized the headlines in the Manila papers: *PC Commander kills Dissident Chief in gun duel! Luis Gonzaga felled by the hand of Commander Elvirio! Commander Elvirio slays Huk head in gun battle!*

Admiration, fame, and national publicity. All for him, for him, for him!

His exultant gaze traveled from the dead Huk chief to the impassive young killer before him. "That was well done, Gimenez," he said.

"Where's my three thousand pesos?"

"I couldn't have done it any better myself."

"Where's my three thousand pesos?"

"Right here, Gimenez." His right hand went toward his breast pocket and then with blurring speed flew to his hip and came up with his service pistol. Gimenez saw the fanatical expression on his face, saw the small round hole of the service pistol pointing at him.

He saw death before him and knew that he would not be fast enough to draw his own weapon. He screamed and swerved aside—just as the bullet split the air an inch away from his hair. He dove to the ground as the gun roared a second time. And before the Commander's

third shot sounded, Gimenez drew and shot him in the neck and saw the blood spurt from the corded arteries.

Gimenez searched the Constabulary Officer's body methodically for his blood money. First the breast pockets—nothing there. Then the trouser pockets—nothing there, either. The wallet contained nothing of value—it was empty except for an ID card and some pictures. A few seconds more of fruitless searching and he knew the truth. There was not one centavo on the Commander's person. In his fury and frustration Gimenez began to kick at the dead PC officer's face.

Gimenez flung himself to the grass and began to cry. What to tell his companions now?

And the image of Luis Gonzaga rose up in him. It was to be the first of many such visitations. He remembered his Chief's kindness to him. He remembered his courage, his integrity, his absolute fairness with his men.

And Gimenez sobbed . . .

THE ADVENTURE OF THE EMPTY CUPBOARD

A Sherlockian Sonnet

by VINCENT STARRETT

The burglary occurred, it can be shown,
Sometime between the hours of four and six.
The Hubbard woman, while a bit prolix,
Is certain of the times. The stolen bone,
Which at the stroke of four, was plainly seen,
At six o'clock had vanished from its place;
Thus, it is clear, a prima facie case
Rests against someone in the hours between.

This is our problem. Let us now assume
Some of the data to have been suppressed.
This was an inside job, as you have guessed—
There was no strange intruder in the room.
In the bare cupboard certain prints were found:
They were the footprints of a gigantic hound!

Do you enjoy solving puzzles? Are you a riddle fancier? How long is it since you tried your wits at an old-fashioned rebus? Well, here is one of the most delightful rebuses we have ever encountered. You will find it fascinating, we guarantee—and wonderfully good fun!

THE ITALIAN TILE MYSTERY

by JAMES HOLDING

IT WAS RAINING IN POSITANO. THE rain bounced off the red-tile roofs, spattered in the gutters of the golden cathedral dome, turned the steep narrow streets into sluiceways. And with the onslaught of the rain all the quaint sunshiny charm that endeared this cliffside village to tourists immediately deserted it, leaving behind an atmosphere of wintry cheerlessness. The pervasive dampness penetrated not only the public rooms of the Savoia Hotel but the very bones of the hotel's guests.

Martin and Helen Leroy sat with King and Carol Danforth in wing chairs before a tiny fire in the lounge. Bundled in bulky sweaters and sports jackets, they stared bleakly through the rain-stippled window to the sullenly breathing Mediterranean below.

"We should have stayed on the *Valhalla,*" Helen said, "where it was warm."

"Or the bar of the Excelsior Hotel in Naples," her husband said wistfully. "There's the place to spend a rainy afternoon."

Yet it was this very rain that led Danforth and Leroy into one of the most challenging mysteries they encountered during their cruise around the world on the ship *Valhalla,* now tied up in Naples just a few miles away. The two mystery-story writers (known to their legion of fans by their collaboration team-name of "Leroy King") especially relished the Positano affair because it made more stringent demands on their ingenuity than had even the notable adventure of the African Fish Mystery.

The old-fashioned clock on the wall whirred, preparatory to striking four. Mrs. Cardoni, who owned and managed the small hotel, bustled into the room. She held a large tray before her like an offering. "Tea," she announced cheerfully. "Hot tea. Good for rainy afternoons and depressed people."

They welcomed her. They would have welcomed anything at that point except more rain. "Where will you have it?" Mrs. Cardoni asked.

"Right here in front of the fire,"

Helen suggested. "Is there a table?"

Her hands being occupied, Mrs. Cardoni pointed with her chin. "There," she said, "by the window."

Leroy rose and went to the window. He lifted a low, tile-topped coffee table and brought it over before the fire. "Just the ticket," he said. "Gather round, people. Put down the free lunch, Mrs. Cardoni, and we'll pitch in. Join us?"

Mrs. Cardoni was pleased. "I hoped you'd ask me," she said. "I brought an extra cup."

Carol Danforth said warmly, "Pour for us, Mrs. Cardoni, please." They liked their landlady very much. She was a plump, amiable widow with a heart as big as her impressive bosom. She treated them, mere guests in her hotel, like members of her own family.

After tea Mrs. Cardoni removed the tray and Carol Danforth sighed. "Still raining," she said lugubriously. Her eyes passed lightly across the table before her. "My word!" she said. "Look at the table you brought us, Martin."

"What about it?" Leroy asked.

"Take your feet off it for a minute, King," Helen directed, "so we can see all of it."

Danforth, complied.

"Just a tile table, darling," Helen said after giving it a brief glance. "Rather interesting tiles, I'll admit, and quite attractive."

Danforth lit a cigarette. "Charming," he said lazily.

Carol raised a hand to her short dark hair. "I've never seen a more peculiar collection of tiles in my life," she said with more animation than she had exhibited all day.

For the first time, all four really focused their attention on the low coffee table before them. Its top consisted of four rows of tiles, four tiles to a row—sixteen tiles in all—surrounded by a molding of painted wood. Each tile was about six inches wide by nine inches deep, so that the full table top was approximately twenty-four inches by thirty-six inches—two by three feet.

The background color of all the tiles was white and each tile contained a scene or an object obviously hand-painted on the clay before the tile had been given its final ceramic glaze in the kiln.

There was nothing unusual about the construction of the table or its overall decorative effect. Indeed, the white backgrounds of the tiles gave the table top a simple harmonious unity. But when one examined the scenes depicted on the individual tiles, one saw what Carol Danforth meant when she called them a "peculiar collection."

For the pictures seemed to bear no relationship to each other whatsoever. One was of a mountain top; another of a large figure 7 with olive leaves floating across it; a third showed a staff of music; a fourth, a wall with a hole in it. Viewed separately, the sixteen tiles formed a mélange of subjects and colors that might well have been

the product of a demented mind.

Danforth stretched his lanky figure in his chair. "This table top could set the tile industry back a thousand years," he remarked.

"It isn't that bad," Leroy protested. The dark eyes in his Indian-like face flashed. "It's an unholy mess in an artistic sense, but it looks pretty attractive at that, just as Helen says."

"Like a wife after you've been married for a while," said Helen with a side glance at her husband. "Usually a mess, but occasionally quite attractive." Helen was blonde, statuesque, and lovely. She grinned impishly.

"You're fishing for compliments again," Leroy said. "I wonder who made this table top? It must be unique. There can't be two like it in the whole world."

Mrs. Cardoni passed through the lounge on her way to check on the dinner. Danforth hailed her. "Mrs. Cardoni, we're admiring your beautiful tile table. Where did it come from, if I'm not being impertinent? Is it Italian?"

"In a way," Mrs. Cardoni said, smiling. "It was made right here in Positano especially for me—but by an American gentleman."

Helen said, "We thought some of the pictures on the tiles seemed a little . . . well, odd."

The landlady flapped her apron with the air of a woman who is about to enjoy a good gossip. "I'll tell you about that table," she said, resting one hip on a chair arm. "One of my guests in the hotel made it. He had a permanent room here for several years until he became ill and died. He was an American like you, but he lived in Italy almost all his life."

"What was his name?" Carol asked. She had a passion for names.

"Lemuel V. Bishop," Mrs. Cardoni replied. She paused a moment, her eyes blank with memory. "His only relative was a brother—a famous lawyer in America, he told me, who did not approve of him because he was an impractical, absent-minded professor who loved Italy more than the United States. He was a lonely man while he lived here at the hotel. He didn't make friends with anybody else, not even the other guests. He'd been a teacher in Ravenna, he said, and now he was old and tired and wished to spend the rest of his life in Positano, where he could see the sea and the golden dome of the cathedral and the fishing boats overturned on the black beach."

They listened sympathetically. "But what about the table?" Leroy prodded gently.

"Oh, yes, the table. After Mr. Bishop became seriously ill, he began to make the table. He got clay and paints and all the materials to make the table itself in the village. And he amused himself for several months up in his room, cutting the tiles and painting them, and putting the table together. He got Gio-

vanni Polito, our local tile maker, to fire his tiles after he'd painted the designs on them."

"But you said he made them for you," Carol said, scenting a faded romance.

"He did. But just as a personal gift for me, because he thought I'd been kind to him while he was sick."

"No wonder he wanted to show his appreciation," Leroy murmured. "It *is* a handsome table."

"I think so, too," she said, "although Mr. Bishop always made a joke about it."

"A joke?" asked Danforth curiously.

"Sometimes I'd go into his room when he was working on his tiles and he'd laugh and say this would be one will his stuffy brother might have trouble reading."

Danforth and Leroy exchanged glances. "You say he called the table a *will?*" King asked.

"Yes. In a joking way. He told me it was his last will and testament, and he was going to leave it with me. And when he died, his brother in America would come and get it." Mrs. Cardoni paused. "He was, of course, joking. No brother ever came."

"How would the brother know he was dead?"

"Mr. Bishop said he wrote his brother a letter several weeks before the end," she explained, "and told him he was dying and that I had his will. And he asked his brother to come here and handle things for him. He also said he told his brother in the letter that he wanted to be buried in Italy—in Ravenna."

"But no brother came."

"No."

"Are you sure he mailed the letter?"

"I mailed it for him myself—airmail. That's when he told me what was in it."

"What did you do when no brother showed up?"

"I used what money he had left to bury him in Ravenna as he asked."

They regarded her in silence for a moment. This was a service above and beyond the call of duty from a hotelkeeper to a guest. Mrs. Cardoni smiled and said, "Mr. Bishop was a fine man. So kind and scholarly and gentle. And a very good guest. He stayed here many months and never complained once about anything. And he always paid his bills promptly."

"Thanks, Mrs. Cardoni," Helen said. "We didn't intend to remind you of what must have been a painful incident. We're sorry."

The *albergatore* waved a hand and rose. "There are all kinds of problems in our trade," she said. "One does one's best." She disappeared into the kitchen.

Carol frowned at her husband and said, "All right, now, darling, I can see the wheels going around in that inquisitive head of yours."

"Why not?" Leroy said. "This

could come right out of one of our books, King. A dying man, a will, a stuffy attorney, a kindly innkeeper. Am I right?"

"Completely," his partner said with enthusiasm. "I'll bet Mr. Lemuel V. Bishop wasn't kidding. These screwy pictures on the tiles must mean something."

Carol burst out, "But that's ridiculous! It couldn't be. Or the brother would have arrived to take charge after Mr. Bishop died."

"Ah, my sweet," said Danforth, smiling, "that is exactly where one of my meager talents confirms my guess that there's something to this odd business."

"You mean you've got talent?" his wife asked with a laugh. "I prefer money, darling."

"I just happen," returned Danforth with dignity, "to have total recall when it comes to news stories, as you very well know. And I distinctly remember that a New York attorney named Clyde R. Bishop was killed two years ago when that big Italian airliner crashed on take-off from Idlewild."

Carol said, "If you remember it, it happened." She turned to Helen. "You see? It's like being married to a computing machine."

Leroy said, "Are you serious, King?"

"Certainly I'm serious. A New York lawyer named Bishop was listed among the fatalities in that crash. See what I'm getting at?"

"That lawyer-Bishop may have been flying *here,* in response to his dying brother's letter when his plane cracked up and he was killed?"

"Doesn't it fit?"

"Like a suede glove by Barra!" said Leroy enthusiastically.

"And that's why nobody came to read this will?" Helen said, touching the tile table with the point of one dainty shoe.

"Exactly," her husband said. "And that means it probably is a will. And all these months it's just been sitting here in this lounge waiting for someone as brilliant as 'Leroy King' to come along and figure it out, and see that Mr. Bishop's heirs come into their rightful inheritance. Doesn't that sound completely reasonable?"

"It sounds suspiciously like boasting to me," Carol remarked. "But what are we waiting for? Let's get started. I was always a whiz at crossword puzzles."

"Me too," Helen chimed in, "especially on the really tough words like gnu and poi and pyx." She flashed her wonderful smile. "This little old table top shouldn't take us more than a few minutes."

"What we need," said Danforth, "is a system. If the tiles really mean something, we ought to go at the problem scientifically. Don't you think so, Mart?"

"I do. It seems obvious that the tiles must represent words or groups of words. So let's try the simplest system first. Let's write

down the words we can think of that best describe each tile."

Helen said, "Shall I be secretary?"

"Please do," said King Danforth gallantly. "I can't imagine a lovelier amanuensis."

"Hey!" Carol interjected. "Why don't you ever say nice things like that to me?"

"You're my wife. And dignified restraint is therefore indicated in my remarks to you." He grinned at his wife and added softly, "At least in public."

Carol flushed. "Come on," she said, "quit stalling. We have work to do."

Leroy said to Helen, "Make a rough sketch of the table top, honey. And number the tiles from one to sixteen. Then identify each tile as we describe it to you. Okay? Tile Number One: a signpost with a hand-shaped sign pointing west. Got it?"

"Got it," Helen said, busily writing. And when Leroy and Danforth had finished describing each tile, her notes looked like this:

1. Hand-shaped sign pointing west	2. Colonial building with sign "The Anchor"	3. Mountain scene	4. Sky and clouds
5. Woman looking at basket on doorstep	6. House on hillside	7. Wall with hole in it	8. Seascape
9. Oil lamp burning	10. Tea cup being emptied	11. Man buckling sword belt	12. Figure 7 with leaves
13. Baby waving	14. Man singing, holding open book	15. Building with egg-crate type walls	16. 8-note scale on musical staff


THE ANCHOR

"Now," said Leroy, "everybody look at tile Number One. And say, in turn, the word or words you think accurately describes the picture on it. This is a *bona fide* brainstorm session, now. We don't want anybody criticizing anybody else's suggestions till we've got them all down. Okay?"

"Okay," said the others in chorus.

"Good. Then you start, Carol."

They looked hard at tile Number One. "Sign," said Carol.

"West," said Danforth.

"Pointing," Helen suggested.

"Left," was Leroy's guess.

Helen wrote the four words down under the proper tile number.

Carol said, "That one sounded like sign language."

They ignored her. "Second tile," Danforth said. "Colonial building with a sign reading 'The Anchor'."

"Inn," said Carol promptly.

"Pub."

"Hotel."

"Seamen's rest."

They began to enjoy themselves. Helen wrote the words as they were uttered and before very long Helen's word list looked like this:

1. sign west pointing left	2. inn pub hotel seaman's rest	3. peak hill crag mountain	4. sky firmament cloud 9 heaven
5. Foundling deserted marketing good Samaritan	6. cliff home Savoia hotel	7. Humpty-Dumpty peek-a-boo aperture opening	8. ocean waves main sea
9. lamp light glow quick	10. grounds dregs good-to-last-drop lees	11. knight sword belt gird	12. Seven Seven Seven Leaves
13. Cheerio bye-bye so long see you later	14. song music singing hymn	15. Hilton school factory hotel	16. octave scale staff do-re-mi

They passed the completed list from hand to hand, studying it, switching their eyes like shuttlecocks back and forth between the listed words and the tiles on the table top.

"Now what?" asked Carol.

"Now," her husband said, "we begin to eliminate. We bring to bear the cool, critical judgment which Leroy King himself displays at all times in his novels. We select the one word for each tile that seems to make the most sense when combined with the others."

"Wait." Leroy was staring at the list. "Maybe we can find a hook to hang our decoding on, if we can figure out why three of these tiles are so similar."

"What's that mean?" Helen asked. "I don't see any tiles that look alike."

"Look at Numbers Two, Six, and Fifteen," Leroy said.

"Bingo!" Danforth said suddenly. "I get it. All three are buildings, and in all three cases one of us suggested the same word to describe them—the word 'hotel.' Right?"

"Right. And Helen even said 'Savoia' to describe tile Number Six —the very hotel in which we are sitting at this moment."

"Sure. But I doubt if the word we want for all three of those tiles is 'hotel.' The sentence in the tiles is probably too short to use 'hotel' in it three times with any significance."

"How about 'inn,' then?" Danforth asked. "Spelled with one 'n' it's a very common word and might easily be used three times in a short sentence."

"Let's try it. Write down the word 'in' opposite tile Numbers Two, Six, and Fifteen, Helen."

Helen followed instructions.

"That's the only similarity I can see," Danforth proceeded. "So we'll have to assume that each of the other tiles represents a separate word. In which case, what might the first word be, tile Number One, that would make sense coming before the word 'in'?"

Helen looked at her list. "I favor the word 'left' for tile Number One," she said thoughtfully. "It sounds like a word that would be used in a will, don't you think?"

"Not having been left anything by rich relatives, I couldn't say," Leroy grinned. "But if that's your woman's intuition, I'll buy it. First two words, therefore, are 'Left in'."

"Were doing famously," said Danforth. "We're already one-eighth finished."

"I see no reason to bat our brains out on the next two tiles," Leroy said. "In each case only one of the suggested words honestly describes the tiles. So let's put down our first row of tiles to mean: 'Left in mountain sky'."

Helen sucked on her lower lip and looked stubborn. "That's silly," she protested. " 'Left in mountain sky'! Is this a new kind of air-con-

ditioned safe deposit vault Mr. Bishop is directing us to?"

"It does seem rather meaningless," Leroy admitted.

At this point Danforth began to display the signs that always portended an announcement of immense importance from him. He cleared his throat, rubbed a hand over his crewcut briskly, and said, "I think we should all have a drink."

There was no objection to this eminently sensible deduction, so they ordered vodka gimlets all around from Guiseppi, the bartender-waiter of the hotel, who brought the cocktails to them on a classic silver tray that could have come from the ruins of Paestum.

"Now," said Danforth when the first sip of the gimlets had won unanimous approval, "may I parade a little of the perspicacity and analytical skill that, combined with Martin Leroy's, have made us famous?"

"By all means," his wife encouraged. "You look like the cat that has swallowed the cream."

"I must warn you against mixing metaphors, baby," Danforth said. "But no matter. Look at the words we have put down after tiles Four and Twelve. Notice anything about them?"

Silence. Intensive study of the indicated words. Nothing. Leroy said, "Give."

"Gladly," Danforth said grandiloquently. "I shall read them aloud and then, perhaps, the light—"

"Hold it!" Helen exclaimed. "They rhyme! Look, 'heaven' in the first batch and 'seven' in the other! 'Heaven, seven'."

"Head of the class," King said. "Now take a look at the words for tiles Eight and Sixteen."

Leroy shook his head. "'Sea' rhymes with 'do-re-mi,' I suppose. But 'do-re-mi' seems an unlikely word to end a sentence. That's the last word, remember."

"Look at the tile again," Danforth said. "All the notes on the staff are quarter notes except the third one. It's a half note. And it's 'mi.' So what about Mr. Bishop just wanting the 'mi' to be used? Spelled with an 'e'?"

Leroy nodded. "Let's try it. 'Me' for the last word, Helen."

Helen wrote it down.

"Now," said Leroy, "if we use the words that rhyme for the end tiles, our first line would read: 'Left in mountain heaven.'"

"And the rest of the message comes out like this," Danforth said.

"Left in mountain heaven
Blank in blank sea
Blank blank blank seven
Blank blank in me."

"Clear as mud," Helen laughed. "All we have to do is fill in the blanks and somebody will inherit a tile-topped table."

Leroy was staring at the table top. "If it rhymes, maybe it's a short poem. And if it's a poem, it ought to scan."

"Modern poetry," Carol suggested, "doesn't scan once in a hundred times. That's effete and old-fashioned, didn't you know?"

"I refuse to acknowledge, even remotely, that Mr. Bishop might have been writing modern verse in tiles!" her husband reproved her. "He was a classicist, I'm sure. A teacher in Ravenna. So let's say, for the heck of it, that he intended his tile poem to scan. Where does that get us?"

"In deep trouble," Leroy said. "None of the words we thought of for tile Number Five is monosyllabic. And it would have to be—to scan like the first row of tiles."

"Suppose we use *part* of that first word under tile Number Five?" Carol said tentatively. "'Foundling' is obviously an accurate description of the picture. But just 'found' could describe it, too. A baby in a basket being 'found'—get it?"

"Sounds good," her husband said. "I only hope that doesn't mean Mr. Bishop was leaving a foundling to somebody in his will. That way lies madness. However, if we use 'found,' the second row of tiles reads: 'Found in opening sea'. Wait, though, darling," Carol protested. "How come you used 'opening' for that third word?"

"It scans."

"And besides," Helen chimed in, "it would be silly to talk about a humpty-dumpty sea or a peek-a-boo sea or an aperture sea."

"This whole thing is nuts anyway," Carol said. "And there's something quite appealing to me about the phrase 'humpty-dumpty sea.' It speaks to me somehow. But I'll bow to the will of the majority—'opening' it is. So we've got:

"Left in mountain heaven
Found in opening sea
Quick blank blank seven—"

"Just a minute, Carol," King Danforth interrupted. "You said 'quick' for the first word in the third row of tiles. Why quick? The tile shows an oil lamp."

"*I* see why." Helen patted Carol's hand. "You're just a genius, darling, that's all. Certainly it's 'quick.' There's the wick in the lamp. And look at the odd shape of the lamp handle—that little handle-loop coming off to the right, it's shaped exactly like a Q. So 'Q' plus 'wick' spells 'quick'."

"I concede defeat," said Danforth with mock humility. "I guess you *are* pretty good at crossword puzzles at that."

"How about that next tile, though?" Leroy asked. "The teacup being emptied? Three of our descriptive words would scan there. We could have 'quick grounds,' 'quick dregs' or 'quick lees'."

Helen laughed. "Quick grounds seems to go more with coffee or divorce," she said, "than with a will."

Leroy was silent for an instant, holding up his hand dramatically. "Man," he said finally, "I think I've got hold of one from way out.

Look. If the second tile in that row is 'lees' it makes a faintly familiar word when combined with the word ahead of it, 'quick.' The two together would read "quick lees'."

"An adverb if I ever heard one," said Carol. "But spelled wrong. Shouldn't have an 's' on the end."

"And it's never used any more in the singular," Danforth added, "that word 'lees'."

"Let me finish. What if the final 's' is a possessive? Then what do we get?"

"Something that belongs to quickly, whoever that is."

"Shakespeare!" Danforth cried. "Mistress Quickly! *Merry Wives of Windsor!*"

"Who else?" Leroy said smugly. "Who else ever had a name like that?"

"But why Mistress Quickly?" Helen argued. "What's she got to do with tile tables or Mr. Bishop's will?"

"Mistress Quickly," said Leroy, "if I remember correctly, was a servant to Doctor Caius in Shakespeare's play. She waited on him, served as his messenger, did his housekeeping, played hostess for him—"

"Ah!" Danforth nodded approvingly. "In a word, she was a kind of Mrs. Cardoni? Because Mrs. Cardoni served in the same capacity for Mr. Bishop so faithfully? You think that Quickly in this rebus refers to Mrs. Cardoni?"

"Indubitably," said Leroy. "What do you think, girls?" They were staring at him with doubt plain on their faces.

"Well," said Helen with a kind of reluctant admiration, "you certainly reached for that one, darling. I suppose it could be."

"The verse ought to be easy from here on," Leroy proclaimed. "Which of the four words describing the next tile, Number Eleven, could belong to Mrs. Cardoni? 'Knight'—'sword'—'belt'—'gird'?"

"Ouch!" Helen said.

"Personally," said Danforth, "I find all of them slightly ludicrous when applied to our excellent landlady. Cardoni's knight? Not likely, however you spell 'knight.' Cardoni's sword? Huh-uh. Cardoni's belt? Well . . ."

"But how about the next one, King?" Carol asked. "Cardoni's 'gird.' Couldn't that be girdle?"

"Please!" said Leroy. "Mrs. Cardoni is amply favored above the waist, but her hips and waist line are quite trim. Girdle? It's unthinkable!"

"Hold it!" It was Danforth's turn to strike the pose of The Thinker. "I direct your attention to the tile itself. What is the man doing in the picture?"

"Putting on his sword."

"Yes. Now what's another way of saying 'put on' when one refers to a sword?"

"Arm," said Leroy. "Buckle on, clip on, gird on . . ."

"Gird on," Danforth said, pleased. "Just the word. Gird on. Guerdon."

The girls regarded him blankly. "Are you sure that gimlet hasn't been too much for you?" Helen asked solicitously. "What's a 'guerdon'?—if I may exhibit my stupidity."

"A guerdon is a word less common now than formerly. But it means a reward."

"Oh!" Carol's lips moved as she read over to herself the message of the tiles with the new word added. "So the third row of tiles reads: 'Quickly's guerdon seven'," she said aloud. "Seven what?"

Helen consulted her notes. "Seven 'cheerio, bye-bye, so long, or see you later.' I've heard of saying good bye several times, but seven farewells seems excessive."

"Tile Number Twelve is the only one with any leaves in it," Leroy said. "Those lovely, curving olive leaves are floating across the big figure Seven in the picture. Maybe Bishop wants us to notice the leaves."

"So—seven leaves. What's that mean?"

"Perhaps the rest of the tiles will tell us."

"All right. The first tile in the last row, Number Thirteen: a baby waving. 'Bye-bye' seems the logical choice."

"Or just 'by'," Helen suggested.

"Next," intoned Danforth, "we come to the final word—the one that rounds out this cryptic message. And it better be good. Because so far the whole thing makes as little sense as a series of undeciphered hieroglyphics."

"Maybe this last word will prove a Rosetta Stone," said Leroy smiling. "What's your fancy, ladies and gentleman? 'Seven leaves by song in me'? 'Seven leaves by music in me'? 'Seven leaves by hymn in me'? Or 'seven leaves by singing in me'?"

They all preferred 'hymn,' spelled 'him' since it was the only word that even approached intelligibility in its context.

"Now read the whole thing, Helen," Leroy directed.

"Left in mountain heaven
Found in opening sea
Quickly's guerdon seven
Leaves by him in me"

For a moment they were silent. Then Danforth sighed and shrugged and said gloomily, "Let's eat. It was a pleasant way to pass the time on a rainy afternoon. That's all I can say for it."

They went into the dining room. Helen, leading the way, was heard to murmur to Carol, "If our table in the dining room has a tile top, I'll scream!"

During the meal they chattered about everything but Mrs. Cardoni's tile coffee table. Nevertheless, from their preoccupied manner, Danforth and Leroy continued to think about it. When dinner was over, they moved into the lounge

again for coffee. Mrs. Cardoni served it to them on Mr. Bishop's table.

"Listen," said Leroy when they were alone once more. "I hate to give up on this table rebus, don't you, King? It's a gorgeous puzzle."

"Who's giving up?" his partner said stoutly. "I needed to renew my strength with a few vitamins, that's all. I've been thinking. What about Bishop's background? We may find a clue there. What did he do in Ravenna? Teach?"

"Yes."

"All right." Danforth rubbed his cropped head. "What did he teach?"

"I'll find out." Leroy got up and went out into the small lobby of the hotel. Mrs. Cardoni was behind the desk, entering figures in a ledger. He said, "What was Mr. Bishop's specialty as a teacher in Ravenna, Mrs. Cardoni? Do you happen to know?"

"Of course," she replied. "Mr. Bishop was an authority on Italian literature."

"Thanks. That might prove helpful."

"Are you still trying to make sense out of those tiles?" she asked. "I'm really afraid you're wasting your time. The table is merely Mr. Bishop's legacy to me. It's all he had except the money I used to bury him with."

"You're probably right," Leroy said. He went back to the lounge and reported.

"Italian literature!" Danforth said, beaming. "That opens up a whole new field! Bishop ran to literary allusions apparently, judging from the Mistress Quickly bit. So maybe Italian literature holds the key."

"If there's any literature in the world I know nothing about," Carol said, "it's Italian. Let's play bridge."

Helen said, "I've read Dante's *Inferno.*"

For an instant an electric silence held Danforth and Leroy. Then they began to speak simultaneously. Both stopped short. Then they grinned at each other—the familiar partnership grin they usually reserved for use when one of their complicated mystery plots had at last come right.

"Dante!" said Leroy.

"Dante!" echoed Danforth happily.

"Did I say something bright?" asked. "If so, please explain it to me."

Martin Leroy said, "This may be the key, baby. You said you'd read Dante's *Inferno.* Have you ever read the entire *Divine Comedy?"*

"Not me. *Inferno* was more than enough for me, thank you."

Her husband went on. "The other two parts of the *Divine Comedy* are *Purgatory* and *Paradise,* and that's interesting, because the first line of tiles refers to 'heaven'—or paradise, if you prefer."

Danforth broke in. "Mart! Didn't

Mrs. Cardoni say Bishop's name was Lemuel V. Bishop?"

"Yes."

"Then the middle initial 'V' may be significant."

Leroy nodded. "Virgil!" he said.

Their wives looked at them as though they had taken leave of their senses. "Virgil!" said Helen. "I thought it was Dante."

"Don't you remember?" her husband asked blandly. "It was Virgil who guided Dante through Hell in the *Inferno.*"

"Oh!"

Danforth said, " 'Left in mountain heaven'—our first row of tiles. That means Virgil left Dante when they got to Paradise which was located at the top of the mountain of Purgatory, as I recall it. Because when they reached Paradise, the lovely Beatrice took over the guiding job from Virgil."

"And the second row of tiles!" Leroy almost shouted. " 'Found in opening sea.' I'll give you three to one the 'sea' at the end of the row is supposed to be the letter 'C' and not an ocean. Get it?"

"Don't ask me," Carol said. "I never even read the *Inferno!*"

"It must stand for 'Canto'," Leroy said. "Virgil found Dante in the first part of the poem. In the opening Canto, as our verse says."

"So Virgil left Dante in heaven and found him in the first verse of the *Inferno,*" Helen said. "Why should Bishop tell us that? That doesn't sound like part of a will."

"For identification purposes," Danforth said slowly. "To point to Dante as the 'him' of the tile verse. And to serve as a kind of signature to his will by calling attention to Virgil—if his middle name was really Virgil."

"It was," said Mrs. Cardoni, who had quietly come into the room behind them. She stood with her mouth slightly open, listening, her magnificent bosom visibly swelling and collapsing as she breathed.

"Okay," Leroy said. "Next: 'Quickly's reward seven'." Maddeningly, he broke off to grin at Mrs. Cardoni and interpolate, "That's you, Mrs. Cardoni. He calls you Mistress Quickly here in the tiles."

She merely stared at him.

"Quickly's guerdon seven," Danforth said. "Punctuate that properly and it makes more sense. Simply put a colon after 'guerdon'."

"Right. 'Quickly's guerdon—or reward: seven leaves by him in me'."

They all saw it at once.

"Leaves—*pages!*" Leroy cried.

"By Dante!" Helen said in awe.

"In me," Danforth finished, his tone expressing infinite satisfaction. "That must be the table. 'In me'. Not in Virgil. obviously. In the tile-topped table itself."

Mrs. Cardoni drew closer and stared with new fascination at the colorful tiles of the table top. "What does it mean, Mr. Leroy?" she asked in bewilderment.

"If it means what I think it

means, you're going to inherit something pretty valuable."

"Valuable!" Danforth said. "Priceless is the word. Do you know something, my illiterate friends? Not a single manuscript page, not a line of handwriting, not one signature of Dante's has survived to our time. There just ain't any. So even if this should prove to be just seven printed pages of an early edition of great Dante's works, it will be priceless. And if it's actually part of the manuscript of the *Divine Comedy*"

Carol interrupted him. "Wait now, darling," she said earnestly. "Don't get Mrs. Cardoni's hopes up and then dash them. It's not fair. This whole thing is quite probably silly, Mrs. Cardoni. We've built up a message in the tiles from a crazy-quilt of words we selected quite arbitrarily, and then we've interpreted that message on the basis of clues so fragile as to be almost non-existent. You can see our chances of being right are just about a thousand to one."

"It *is* pretty far-fetched," her husband admitted. "But I honestly think we might—"

Carol interrupted him a second time. "All right. But why, if there *is* anything hidden under the tiles of the table, would Mr. Bishop have put it there in the first place, going to all this tile-painting and table-making trouble? Why not just hand it to Mrs. Cardoni and say, 'Here are some pages of Dante manuscript I want you to have when I die."

Leroy nodded. "A fair question, Carol. I think there may have been several reasons. First, I'm sure he must have been needling his lawyer brother just a bit in his quiet, scholarly way. He wanted to give this practical, serious-minded attorney a brand-new kind of will to decipher and file for probate! No doubt he gave his brother some cryptic clue to the reading of the tiles in his letter, so there would be no chance the message would *not* be read; but can you imagine his brother's embarrassment, carting this tile-topped table into the office of the register of wills or whatever it is, and trying to file it? Remember, Lemuel V. Bishop was presumably steeped in the literature and history of Italy, and to present his stuffy brother with a challenge of such Renaissance deviousness must have amused him."

"I must say it has delighted you," Carol smiled.

"The chief reason he did it," Danforth suggested, "was probably to protect Mrs. Cardoni's interests. Whatever's in the table, if it has anything to do with Dante, must be priceless, as I say. And Bishop didn't want Mrs. Cardoni, a babe in the woods in such a matter, to be cheated of her legacy's proper value if she should try to dispose of it herself. Bishop wanted his brother to handle it for her, so she'd be sure to get her rights."

Helen said, "You make it sound kind of convincing. But where, I can't help wondering, could Mr. Bishop have found anything like a Dante manuscript to begin with?"

"In Ravenna, probably," Danforth hazarded. "Dante was a political exile from Florence, his home town, for a long time, you know. He died in Ravenna, I believe. So maybe Bishop had been rooting through dusty archives there most of his life, searching through old trunks in people's attics, and came across this treasure, whatever it is. Anyway, will you girls please stop with the questions and let us take this table apart? I am not a patient man, and Mrs. Cardoni is politely trying to keep from bursting with curiosity at this very moment." He smiled at the landlady who was indeed trembling with excitement. "Are you willing to let us commit mayhem on your table, Mrs. Cardoni?"

"For such a purpose, how can I refuse?"

"Good." Danforth turned the coffee table over so that its tiled top rested on the rug and its four legs pointed toward the ceiling. The legs were screwed on individually. And there was no sign of any other screwhead on the plywood undersurface of the table. "We may have to break the tiles to get at those seven leaves," he said regretfully.

Leroy said, "Let's take the legs off first. Do you have a screwdriver handy, Mrs. Cardoni?"

She secured one from the hotel pantry in record time.

Leroy loosened the screws that held the table's tapered legs in place and removed them. Once the legs were off, four more screwheads appeared, one in each corner where the base of the leg had hidden it.

Helen, Carol, and Mrs. Cardoni leaned breathlessly over his shoulder as Leroy loosened these screws in turn. When the last screw came free, he inserted the tip of the screwdriver along the edge of the plywood and pried gently. The whole square of plywood came readily away.

They stared down at what lay between this false bottom, just removed, and the wooden base on which the tiles had been set.

Seven sheets of heavy, parchment-like vellum, yellowed with age and covered with spidery handwriting in faded brownish ink, stared back at them. Each sheet had been sealed by Lemuel V. Bishop into a transparent, dampproof envelope of cellophane.

Mrs. Cardoni took a corset-creaking breath, speechless with astonishment. Impulsively, Carol put her arms around the landlady and hugged her. Leroy muttered, "Seven leaves, by Jove!"

But Danforth said in a disappointed, puzzled voice, "But that's Latin, not Italian vernacular! It can't be part of the *Divine Comedy* manuscript!"

He leaned down over Leroy's

shoulder and delicately, with his fingertips, moved aside several of the sheets that overlapped others, revealing the lower portion of sheet Number Seven—the one that had been hidden underneath. "Look!" he breathed. "Latin, Italian, or Sanskrit—what's the difference? Do you see what that is?"

They followed his pointing finger with their eyes. They saw the two words, unmistakably clear and unblurred even through the cellophane, and written in the same spidery script as the rest: *Dante Alighieri.*

"His signature!" Danforth said. "As sure as his own Hell!" He looked up into Mrs. Cardoni's face. "Mrs. Cardoni," he said solemnly, "if that is an authentic signature, you can change your name to Mrs. Croesus."

The *Valhalla* left Naples the following afternoon for Piraeus. The Danforths and Leroys were aboard to continue their cruise around the world. They had personally committed Mrs. Cardoni and her seven "leaves" to the scholarly ministraitons of the Director of the Naples *Biblioteca,* a man named Pietro Carlo who providentially turned out to be distantly related to her dead husband's family. He had promised faithfully to look after Mrs. Cardoni's interests in the matter of the manuscript pages as well as to advise them just what her legacy consisted of when he should have settled that controversial question.

But it was not until the unbelievable beauty of Greece lay behind them and the *Valhalla* was making for Port Said and the Suez Canal at a steady twenty knots that they heard the final word on their Positano adventure.

They were having dinner when a steward brought Danforth a radiogram. He tore it open. "It's from Carlo, in Naples," he said, and proceeded to read its contents aloud:

"Happy to report your find seems authentic. Evidently fragment of rough draft of letter written in Latin by Dante to his most illustrious protector while in exile, Can Grande della Scala of Verona, immortalized in 17th Canto of *Paradiso.* Letter is famous, containing directions for interpreting *Divina Commedia.* This rough draft conforms in most respects with accepted text of that letter, of which original mss., along with all other Dante mss., has been lost. Signature alone worth millions. But Mrs. Cardoni has agreed to make a gift of legacy to Italy, provided it be officially designated as Lemuel V. Bishop-Leroy King Collection in National Library. She asks me convey her respects and deep thanks for your help. Also assurance of free lodgings at Savoia Hotel any future visits you make to Positano.

Pietro Carlo

P.S. Italy thanks you too."

They were silent when he finished reading. At length Danforth called the wine steward to their table and ordered champagne. When it was poured, he lifted his glass. "I'd like to propose a toast," he said, "a double toast."

"Hear! Hear!" said Helen.

"First," said Danforth, "to Mrs. Cardoni, a gracious, great-hearted lady who richly deserved her good fortune but chose to give it up for patriotic and generous reasons."

"Mrs. Cardoni!" they all said, and drank.

"And second," continued Danforth, "let's drink to Leroy King and his charming wives who, though nothing but humble writers of detective fiction, have managed for once in their lives to give some genuinely great literature to the world!"

They drained their glasses.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CYRIL HARE**

TITLE: ***Blennkisop's Biggest Boner***

TYPE: Legal Crime Story

LOCALE: England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *When Sir Charles Blenkinsop was Judge of the High Court he was guilty of the most reprehensible conduct . . .*

On the death of Sir Charles Blenkinsop, former Judge of the High Court of Justice, the benchers of his Inn, as was only proper, arranged a memorial service for him. It was not so well attended as such functions usually are, for Sir Charles, in spite of his acknowledged competence as a lawyer, had never been popular. Moreover, there had been certain rumors concerning his private life of a type particularly detrimental to judges. Some of his colleagues had breathed a sigh of relief when Sir Charles, a few years before, had earned his pension and quitted the Bench without open scandal.

Francis Pettigrew, still "of counsel" but now in country retirement, was at the service. His friend MacWilliam, the Chief Constable of Markshire, had thought it his duty to attend, since the deceased had been a Markhampton man; and Pettigrew accompanied him, more on the chance of meeting old Temple acquaintances than as a tribute to Blenkinsop's memory.

He was disappointed to see so sparse a congregation and was correspondingly pleased on leaving the church to find himself behind the familiar, square-built figure of his old friend Challoner, a well-known City solicitor.

He overtook Challoner at the door, introduced him to MacWilliam, and was standing with them in the porch when his eye was caught by a shabby man of about forty who smiled at him in a friendly but slightly embarrassed fashion and walked hastily away.

"Friend of yours?" asked Challoner, as they strolled down Fleet Street.

"Apparently," said Pettigrew. "He certainly seemed to know me, and I have an idea I've seen him before, but where, I haven't the remotest notion."

"Name of Smith."

"The name is certainly familiar."

"Charles Smith. Does a certain amount of reporting in the Courts. I dare say he was covering the service."

"Charles Smith," said Pettigrew meditatively. He stopped dead on the pavement. It may have been mere coincidence that it was at the door of a saloon bar. He took the solicitor by the arm and gently impelled him inside, leaving MacWilliam to follow. "Of course I know the chap. I defended him once—on a charge of murder."

"Really?" said Challoner with polite interest. "I don't read the Old Bailey reports."

"This wasn't at the Bailey. It was at Markhampton Assizes, six or seven years ago. And what is more, old Blenkinsop, whose demise we have just been mourning, tried him. That would be before your time, MacWilliam."

"As a matter of fact—" said the Chief Constable. But Pettigrew's attention was devoted to ordering drinks, and he did not bother to complete the sentence.

"Odd running into Smith like that," Pettigrew went on a few minutes later. "I may forget faces, and cases too, as often as not, but that was a case I shall remember all my life. Cheers!"

"Your health, Pettigrew. Was it a difficult task to—ah—'get him off' is the phrase, is it not?"

Pettigrew smiled grimly. "Very. Too difficult for me, at all events, he said. "On that evidence and before a local jury he never had an earthly. The case was as dead as mutton."

"That being so, I don't quite see why Smith isn't—"

"Isn't also as dead as mutton? Therein lies a mystery which will always puzzle me. Charles Smith escaped hanging solely and entirely through the positively goat-like conduct of Blenkinsop."

"As a matter of fact," said MacWilliam again, and this time he was allowed to go on. "As a matter of fact, I had occasion to read the summing-up in that case quite recently. It was remarkable."

"Remarkable? The Court of Criminal Appeal used stronger adjectives than that. I've never heard such a performance in my life. And from Blenkinsop, of all people! Now that we've done our duty by him in church we can speak the truth about him and we all know that by and large Charlie Blenkinsop was a pretty nasty piece of work, but. hang it all, the man was a lawyer. If anybody on the Bench knew his stuff, I should have said he did. But in this case the old boy

went completely haywire. When I tell you that he actually *directed* the jury to bring in a verdict of guilty . . ."

To detail all the iniquities of the summing-up took Pettigrew a full five minutes of blistering technicalities.

"Of course the thing was a push-over on appeal," he concluded. "The conviction was quashed with more rudery than I have ever heard applied to a Judge of Assize. That case should go down in history as Blenkinsop's biggest boner. But what will always puzzle me is—why on earth did he do it?"

"Had he—er—lunched very well on that day?" Challoner ventured.

"Not a bit of it. He was as sober as—as a judge, if you follow me."

"I have my own theory about the matter," MacWilliam put in. "I think the explanation is that all the parties involved—including the judge—were Markhampton people. You'll remember, Mr. Pettigrew, that your client came from what was locally considered pretty poor stock. His mother, Mary Smith—she's still alive, by the way—was no better than she should be. The girl he was accused of killing, on the other hand, belonged to one of the most respectable families in the town. Her father was a pillar of the strictest sect we have—and when Markhampton people are moral they take their morality seriously. Smith had got her into trouble, and she was desperate to be made an honest woman of—which didn't suit Smith's book at all, as he had engaged himself to a much wealthier woman. His defense was that she had committed suicide rather than face her family."

"Precisely," said Pettigrew. "Not the line of defense to commend itself to a jury of townspeople inflamed with piety and rectitude."

"Very true. Local feeling was strong against Smith. And my point is that in this matter the judge was a local man."

"He left the town quite young, did he not?"

"He did, sir, and according to my information he left it under a cloud. Young Blenkinsop had not been one of the respectables. My belief is that he took this opportunity to put himself right with the town—by taking the part of respectability and ramming home every point against the young sinner. Only, of course, he overdid it."

"It's an idea, certainly," said Pettigrew. "There must have been some explanation for Blenkinsop's extraordinary lapse. But why should you know so much about the case? I should have thought there was enough current crime in Markshire to occupy you without digging up the past."

"The past has a habit of digging itself up," said MacWilliam. "The Smith case came alive again last week. That is why I turned up the records."

"Then you've been wasting your

time. They can't try Smith again."

"Unfortunately for Smith, they cannot. He was innocent."

"What?"

"The girl's father died a few days ago. He left a full confession. He killed her himself to punish her for her sins. He quoted a number of texts to justify his action. He was a religious maniac—poor fellow."

Nobody said anything for an appreciable time, then Challoner remarked quietly, "I think this round is on me." When the drinks had been brought, he asked MacWilliam, "What is Mary Smith's address?"

"Whose?"

"Mary Smith's—Charles Smith's mother."

"Why, she lives where she always has lived—Lower River Lane."

"Number Nine?"

"That's right. How did you know?"

"I was the late Sir Charles Blenkinsop's solicitor," he said. "By his will, he left a substantial sum of money in trust for this lady during her life. You can draw your own conclusions."

Pettigrew whistled.

"There is one obvious conclusion to draw," he said. "But beyond it, I see another. The judge was Charles Smith's father."

"It certainly seems probable."

"But this is outrageous!" cried MacWilliam. "He tries his own son for murder and does his damnedest to send him to the gallows. What sort of father do you call that?"

"I should describe him as somewhat unnatural, I admit. But there are the facts."

"The old devil!"

It was at this point that Pettigrew burst out laughing. MacWilliam looked at him in disapproval.

"I don't see what there is funny about it," he said severely.

"Don't you?" spluttered Pettigrew. "I bet Blenkinsop does, if he can see anything now. He always had a low sense of humor. I've just seen the point of that famous summing-up of his. It explains everything. He made a muck of it *on purpose!* He knew that Smith hadn't a chance with the jury, so he did the next best thing, by giving him a cast-iron case on appeal. Unnatural father, my foot! He was a damned affectionate one, who was prepared to spoil his reputation and pervert justice to save his son's neck. I never thought the old ruffian had so much humanity."

He raised his tankard.

"Here's to you, Charlie Blenkinsop, wherever you are," he said. "When you directed the jury, you knew what you were about—which is more than I can say of some of your learned brothers!"

"It is satisfactory to think," MacWilliam added, "that the direction prevented a grave miscarriage of justice."

"That, my dear Chief Constable," said Pettigrew loftily, "is a mere side issue. Your irrelevancy will cost you another round of drinks."

FRIGHTENED STAR

by HUGH PENTECOST

(*continued from page 15*)

Jed walked slowly toward Sally until he was standing at her elbow. "Hi, Sally," he said.

She turned. "Jedediah Russell! But this is wonderful. I was beginning to think there were no familiar landmarks left."

"If that's a crack about my age," Jed said, "I resent it."

"You never change, Jedediah. I can't tell you how glad I am to see you."

Bright eyes, bright smile, Jed saw.

"Don't seem to be anyone to meet you," he said.

"It's a surprise," Sally said, laughing. "A surprise for Aunt Isobel. I hope it doesn't turn out to be a shock. I got ten days off between pictures and came to New York to do some shopping."

"Umph," Jed said. Then, "I'd be glad to drive you home if you say the word."

"Would you? That'd be wonderful, Jedediah. And you can bring me up to date on all the gossip."

He loaded her bags into the trunk compartment of his old jalopy and helped her into the front seat.

"You smell good," he said, grinning at her. "Real exotic."

"Why, Jedediah! I didn't know you had experience of that sort of thing."

"Always enjoy the smell of a woman," Jed said, "but I follow the advice my mother used to give me about fresh cookies. Smell but don't touch. Saved me a lot of trouble along the way." He put the old car into gear and started toward Elm Street. "This the first time you've been back since you took off for the coast, Sally?"

"The very first time," she said.

Jed lit a cigarette from the dash lighter, the only piece of extra equipment in the old car that still worked. "You and I have been friends since about the time you learned to walk, Sally," he said. "So you won't mind if I call you a liar, will you?"

"Jedediah can do no wrong," she said, playing it for a joke.

"Maybe I'll let you get away with it and maybe I won't," Jed said. "Depends on what kind of a story you've got to tell. But just so we don't misunderstand each other, Sally, I *know* you were here last night."

She turned to look at him. Her eyes had suddenly filled and two large tears rolled down her cheeks.

People believe strange things about dogs. They think they howl when there's going to be a death. They think they see ghosts. Mrs.

Bailey, who lived next door to Miss Isobel Scudder, was muttering about her spaniel, Tootsie. Periodically he had stood outside the tool shed in Miss Scudder's garden and barked his head off. It was a wonder Isobel hadn't come out and thrown something at him.

"Spooked," Mrs. Bailey muttered, after shouting herself hoarse in an attempt to get Tootsie to come home.

The truth about dogs is that they are quite sensible. They don't see ghosts and they don't have premonitions of death. Tootsie was barking at something quite real, only Mrs. Bailey couldn't know this. Neither could Jed Russell when he pulled his car up at the foot of Miss Scudder's front walk. He glanced toward the barking dog, but he was more concerned with a girl who had refused to talk, who was still fighting tears.

At the sight of Jed and Sally, the dog increased his clamor. Somebody should pay attention, he seemed to be saying, somebody should come and look!

Jedediah Russell felt like a man walking very tentatively on ice after a spring thaw. After that one moment of crackup in which Sally had been unable to check the rush of tears, he had got nowhere. She had laughed the whole thing off as a joke on Bob Molloy.

"It's very flattering he should have me on his mind so much that he'd mistake a complete stranger for me," she said. Very brittle, very bright, it sounded to Jed.

Jed Russell had lived a rich and rewarding fifty-eight years, and all his life he had depended on his instincts. This quality might have made him one of the great journalists of our time if he hadn't chosen to settle down permanently in a small town like Lakeview. Now his instinct told him that Bob Molloy had been right. There was trouble here—deep trouble. He thought he could sense an almost overpowering need on Sally's part to confide in him, but whatever had driven her to this strange behavior of a second arrival in Lakeview was too strong, too frightening.

He pulled the jalopy up at the foot of Miss Scudder's path and got out to help Sally with her bags.

She was now all charm. "I'm terribly grateful for the lift, Jedediah. I can manage from here."

His eyes twinkled under their heavy lids. "Guess I know a gent doesn't let a lady carry her own bags," he said. "Besides, I'd like to say hello to Isobel. Haven't seen her in a dog's age."

"Why don't you come over for supper tomorrow or the next day?" she said, reaching out to take the two bags from him.

He kept a firm hold on them. "Besides, I'm a newspaperman," he said. "Famous Hollywood star comes back to her hometown—I have to have the lowdown and we

go to press first thing in the morning. Lucky I saw you at the depot or I might have missed this week's edition." He started up the path.

"There's no story, Jedediah," she said. "I just got a ten-day vacation. I guess you can imagine this reunion with Aunt Isobel is pretty special. So if you don't think I'm being rude—"

"Newspapermen have to be rude," Jed said. "Now, only this morning there was a thing in the Hollywood news about you being suspended by your studio. You walk out on 'em, Sally?" He was almost at the porch steps.

"You know what that chitchat is like, Jedediah. There's usually nothing to it."

"Usually?" He turned his head toward Mrs. Bailey's frantic spaniel who was still barking and clawing at the door of Miss Isobel's tool shed. "Dog havin' a fit about something," he said. "Probably lost a ball under the door or Isobel's got a visitor—skunk or woodchuck." He started up the steps.

Before he reached the top step, the front door opened and Isobel Scudder stood there, her face as gray as cement, her mouth a thin, straight line.

"You can just set the bags down there, Jedediah," she said.

He looked at her thoughtfully; then from behind him he heard Sally's voice, high, almost hysterical. "Surprise, Aunt Isobel!" she said.

Miss Scudder was like a woman shaking herself out of a trance. She took the cue, but several beats too late to make it believable.

"Sally! What on earth!" The two women went into an embrace which was real enough, but Isobel Scudder was no more surprised, Jed thought, than he was at the daily appearance of the morning sun. They were playing it big, with a lot of "But why didn't you let me know" and "I wasn't sure I could get here and I didn't want to disappoint you" and "You look wonderful!" It was played so big that Jedediah simply walked into the house with the bags before they could stop him.

Almost instantly they were with him, one standing on each side of him. But Jed paid no attention to them. His attention was riveted on a mountainous fat man who rose slowly from the couch. The fat man was expensively dressed and his round face seemed fixed in a permanent white smile. The eyes behind the shell-rimmed glasses were not smiling, but they did not frighten Jed as they had Mr. Thompson at the railroad depot. Those eyes were clouded by something that Jed could only describe to himself as terror.

"Hi, Sally," the fat man said, his smile broadening.

Again Sally's voice had that high, false quality to it. "Why, Francis, this *is* a surprise!" she said.

"I thought you'd be coming

straight here from the coast," the fat man said. "Didn't figure a New York stopover, so I actually got here ahead of you."

"Well!" Sally said. She sounded, Jed thought, as if her mouth and throat were bone-dry. The fat man looked inquiringly at Jed, and Sally went on. "Francis, this is a very old friend—Mr. Jedediah Russell, who owns and edits the local newspaper. Jedediah, this is Francis O'Mara. He's a big-shot promotion man or something at my studio on the coast." She laughed uncertainly. "I'm never sure just exactly what your official title is Francis."

"Just a sort of trouble-shooter," the fat man said. He beamed at Jed. "I'm here to try and talk some sense into this little girl."

Jed put down the bags. "I heartily recommend it," he said. "Hasn't been a word of sense spoken around here for quite a while." The room was suddenly very still. "All this surprise! Hadn't been but one case of real surprise around here—and that was mine when I saw Sally on the station platform. She'd been here last night—and Isobel knows it, and I know it, and I expect *you* know it, Mr. O'Mara."

Jed paused. "And Isobel was expecting her now—Sally had to practically jab her with a pin to make her act surprised. And *you* were expecting her, O'Mara—your act was a little smoother, but it didn't quite come off."

The fat man's smile didn't alter by a hair. "You speaking as a friend or as a newspaper reporter?" he asked.

"I suppose it's possible to be both," Jed said. He looked at Sally on his left and then at Isobel on his right. He felt a twinge of almost painful sympathy. He didn't think he had ever seen two more frightened people.

When he looked back at the fat man he saw that O'Mara's head was cocked to one side, as though he were listening. Outside the spaniel's barking had degenerated into a sort of frustrated whining. O'Mara took a huge white linen handkerchief from his hip pocket and gently dried the palms of his hands.

"I'll assume that you're a friend," he said. "Sometimes the friendliest thing a friend can do is to let people work out their own difficulties."

Jed nicked a kitchen match into flame with his thumbnail and lit his cigarette. "So you admit there are difficulties," he drawled.

"Business matters," O'Mara said, "strictly business matters."

Jed walked over to the fireplace and tossed the match into the gray bed of ashes. When he turned he was facing all three of them. He knew this room well—a warm, friendly, lived-in room. But the drawn shades now made it dark and friendless.

"Business matters can't scare the pants off you the way the three of you are scared," Jed said. He stared

straight at Sally. "Look, honey, I don't want to be a busybody, but let's lay the cards on the table, shall we? You came to Lakeview last night on the 10:30 train. Bob Molloy saw you on the platform—he spoke to you. You ran away from him, leaving your bag. Later he brought your bag here. At first, Isobel acted friendly and as though she didn't know what the score was. Later, she was downright unfriendly and acted as though she *did* know. Bob sat outside this house all night waiting for you to show up. You didn't. All day today Isobel has had her shades drawn and has been living next to the phone—ready to answer it before it could ring twice. Mr. O'Mara arrived here before breakfast this morning and made a special big point of it. He made such a special point of his arrival that everyone in town has known about it all day." He turned his head slightly toward the standing ashtray next to O'Mara's place on the couch. "Eight cigar butts," he commented wryly. "Then Sally makes another entrance—a real big entrance this time. Most of the town will figure she came in on the 4:06 today for the *first* time. But I know she didn't and Bob knows she didn't."

"You only know it because Bob told you so," Sally said quickly, "but Bob was wrong. He simply made a mistake. He only spoke a couple of words to the girl on the platform and then she was gone."

"How do you know that?" Jed asked.

"Why—you told me!" Sally said, her eyes wide.

"I told you no such thing. I told you Bob saw you and talked to you. I didn't say anything about a couple of words and then she ran away. Besides, there was the bag he brought here."

"The bag wasn't Sally's," Miss Isobel said in a flat voice.

"Maybe not," Jed said.

"I can prove it," Miss Isobel said in the same flat voice. She went to a small closet by the front door and returned with a suitcase, a plain leather bag. "After Bob's wild story," Miss Isobel said, "I naturally examined the bag. No initials. No baggage tag or stickers. And inside—" She put the bag down on the sofa and opened it. "See for yourself."

The bag contained a plain black dress, obviously several sizes too large for Sally, a pair of black pumps, equally too large, a comb and brush, a toothbrush and a new tube of toothpaste, and two small lace-edged handkerchiefs. Jed walked over and picked up the objects one by one, his eyes narrowed against the smoke from his cigarette.

"How do I know this is the same bag that Bob brought from the station?" he asked.

"Ask him!" Miss Isobel said with sudden heat. "What gives you the right to come here and third-

degree us, Jed Russell? I'm grateful to you for giving Sally a lift from the station, but now we have a lot to talk about, and Mr. O'Mara's here on business. I'll thank you to leave us to ourselves for a while."

Jed Russell threw his cigarette into the fireplace. "Guess I have asked quite a lot of questions," he said. "Well, the older you get the curiouser you get." He snapped the bag shut. "As long as this isn't Sally's I'll take it back to Ed Thompson at the depot. The owner'll probably be inquiring for it."

He saw both women glance quickly at O'Mara. The fat man's eyelids drooped ever so slightly behind his heavy glasses.

"I'd appreciate that, Jedediah," Sally said.

"It'll be a comfort knowing Mr. O'Mara approves too," Jed said drily. He moved toward the front door. "And while I'm about it I'll try to get rid of that pesky dog of Maggie Bailey's for you. Can't hear yourself think for all his yapping and whining."

Miss Isobel took a quick step toward him. "No!" she said, sharply. "I'll handle him, Jedediah. He knows me."

Jed nodded slowly. "Suit yourself, Isobel," he said. "Be seeing you, Sally. Want to do a good story on you for the *Courier*."

He went out onto the porch, carrying the bag. He stood there for a second, watching the spaniel claw at the tool-shed door. He was assimilating the final piece of information he had gathered inside the house. When he had mentioned getting rid of the dog, and Miss Isobel had stepped toward him, Mr. Francis O'Mara's right hand had moved up and inside his left coat lapel, confirming a suspicion Jed had had from the moment he first saw him.

Mr. Francis O'Mara was wearing a shoulder holster.

Jed Russell did not go back to the *Courier* office. Instead, he walked straight across the village green to the little stationery store next to the post office, went to the phone booth at the rear, and made three phone calls. The first was to Bob Molloy at his motel. Bob was evidently waiting for the call.

"Few facts for you, Robert," Jed said. "Your girl is here."

"I told you that."

"She arrived on the 4:06 with fancy luggage, an orchid corsage, and a small-sized blare of trumpets. You made a mistake last night and—"

"I didn't make any mistake!"

"She says, Robert, she says. There's trouble, all right. Your fat man is a sort of house guest at the moment. And he's carrying a gun. I think you better get over here to Pete's store and we'll have a powwow."

"You called the cops?"

"Powwow first," Jed said. "Get over here fast—and, Bob, stick a

shotgun in the back of your car."

"But—"

"If you like the girl you'll get moving," Jed said sharply.

His next call was to a number in the town of Clayton, which he found after some difficulty in the directory.

"This the Toggery Shop in Clayton?" he asked. "Jedediah Russell here—*Lakeview Courier.* Like to inquire about a purchase made at your store today. I'd guess it was pretty soon after you opened this morning. Black dress in a large size and a pair of black, high-heeled pumps. Wouldn't be surprised if the stuff was bought by a man."

The answer was prompt. The articles had been bought that morning—yes, by a man, a very fat man who was driving a car rented from the Lakeview Garage.

The third call was to Mrs. Maggie Bailey.

"Maggie? Jed Russell here."

"How are you, Jedediah?"

"First-rate. Now listen to me, Maggie, and carefully. That dog of yours has been disturbing the whole neighborhood for the past few hours."

"Oh, dear!" Mrs. Bailey said. "I don't know what's got into him. He's spooked, Jedediah. Keeps barking around Isobel Scudder's tool shed. He won't come when I call him. I don't know what's got into him."

"He might get a medal, Maggie. How good is your nerve?"

"Medal? Nerve?

"I want you to go over to Isobel's and get your dog. And while you're getting him I want you to look in the tool-shed window. Then telephone me over to Pete's stationery store and tell me what you saw."

"You crazy, Jedediah?"

"Nope. Now listen to me, Maggie. I got a hunch that Isobel and Sally are in bad trouble. I got a hunch the trouble is in that tool shed. I want you just to peep in that window, and no matter what you see you're to act as if you didn't see anything, understand? Just pick up your dog and take her home."

"Him," Mrs. Bailey said.

"What?"

"Tootsie is a him," Mrs. Bailey said.

"Okay, him! But don't holler, Maggie, and don't jump back from the window. And after you talk to me, keep your trap shut, understand?"

"You *do* sound crazy, Jedediah."

"If you'll pardon my being vulgar," Jed said, "what you see may scare the pants off you."

"Jedediah!"

"Now move quick. I'll be watching from here. If there is any trouble I'll come running. But if you act natural there won't be none."

Jed came out of the phone booth and walked to the front of the store. He stood looking out the plate-glass window toward Mrs. Bailey's house.

"Didn't I see you bring Sally

Crane home a little while back?" the proprietor asked him.

"Yep. Home for a spell."

"How is she?"

"Fine," Jed said.

The back door of Mrs. Bailey's house opened and Mrs. Bailey appeared. She walked briskly over toward Isobel Scudder's tool shed where the spaniel still fretted and yapped at the door.

There were two small windows, one on each side of the door. Mrs. Bailey walked up to her dog and Jed could almost imagine he heard her scolding. She picked the dog up in her arms and as she straightened up, she was facing the window to the right of the door. Jed saw her freeze for an instant and then move away. She walked stiffly, like someone who wants to run.

"Good girl!" Jed muttered.

"Well, you never know what Hollywood'll do to 'em," the proprietor of the store said.

"Eh? Oh, yes, I see what you mean," Jed said. He walked back toward the booth. When the phone rang a moment later, he stepped in and closed the door.

"Yep?"

"Jedediah?" It was a shaky whisper.

"You did fine, Maggie," Jed said.

"Jedediah—"

"Well, what did you see, Maggie?"

"Jedediah! There's a dead man in there—sittin' in a chair pretty as you please—staring straight ahead."

"How do you know he's dead?"

Mrs. Bailey struggled with it. "There's a—a knife sticking in his—in his throat, clean up to the handle. There's blood down his shirt—and—"

"Yes, Maggie?"

"The knife—I recognized it, Jedadiah!"

"Whose is it, Maggie?"

"It has a bone handle with a crack in it—an old yellow crack right down the handle—"

"Whose knife is it, Maggie?"

"Many a time I saw that knife—that very same knife—in Isobel Scudder's kitchen!"

As a worried Jedediah Russell stepped out of the phone booth, Bob Molloy barged through the front door of the shop, pale and truculent.

"Mind if we use your back room a minute, Pete?" Jed called to the proprietor.

"Help yourself."

Jed picked up the suitcase from beside the booth and waved Bob into the back room.

"Now look here, Jed," Bob said, the moment Jed had closed the door, "no matter what Sally says, she came in on the last night's train."

"Sure," Jed said. "Sure." He put the suitcase on a dusty table. "This look like her bag?"

"Looks like it," Bob said, scowling. "But it was dark. I couldn't swear to it. Same kind of bag."

"I guess it's the bag, all right," Jed said. He opened it. "What do you make of all this stuff?" He held up the dress.

"Sally could use that for a tent!" Bob said.

"How about the shoes?"

"I wouldn't know about the size of her foot, Jed—"

"Look at the soles. Brand-new. Not a scratch on 'em. Look at the hairbrush and comb. Never been used. Not a drop squeezed out of the toothpaste tube. Toothbrush brand-new. One of the handkerchiefs still got a price tag on it. And did you ever know a woman to travel without clean stockings or underthings or some kind of a night dress or robe or something?"

"I don't get it," Bob said.

"In case you got stubborn they intended to show you this, Bob, to convince you it wasn't Sally you saw last night. Only he was in a hurry and he didn't make it look real."

"He?"

"Ed Thompson's fat friend. He bought the stuff in the Toggery Shop in Clayton. Now there isn't time for me to pleasure myself by mystifying you, Bob, so I'll tell you straight out. There's a dead man sitting in a chair over in Isobel Scudder's tool shed."

"*What!*"

"I figure he's been there quite a while. I figure our fat friend, who has the musical name of Francis O'Mara, meant to move the corpus last night only you obfuscated him by sitting out front in your car all night. So he decided it was safer to wait until tonight. I figure as soon as it's dark and the main street has quieted down, he'll try again."

"And you're going to let him? Look here, Jed, this is for the police and you know it as well as I do. Sally and Miss Isobel—you plan to let 'em stay there alone with a killer?"

Jed lit a cigarette, his eyes narrowed. "You got to figure the angles, Bob. Sally came in last night and you saw her and she ran away from you. Right? You took your customers to the motel and it was a little while before you went after the bag and took it to Miss Isobel. Right? Miss Scudder acted normal when you first saw her. No nerves, no tension. Right? You go out and search the woods for half an hour and when you come back everything is different—Isobel is keyed up to high C. So obviously she learned something while you were gone. You thought maybe Sally was there, but she wasn't. Sally went back to New York and made a new entrance this afternoon. Nobody with her. No gun in her ribs. See what I mean? Isobel played it that way too. Maybe O'Mara's gun was in her ribs, but if it was, Sally knew about it. Did she get outside help? No. She just acts her part. See what I mean?"

"You mean they're both in on it," Bob said glumly.

"Yep."

"Conniving in a murder!" Bob said.

"I thought you loved the girl," Jed said.

"I do, but—"

"You got a bad trouble, Robert—you've had it from the start. You got no faith in the girl. You don't believe what she tells you. No faith at all. Now I say this: I say she's one of the finest, straightest-shooting girls I ever met. I'm not in love with her, but I know that much about her. And Isobel Scudder is another one who's straight as a die. So they are collaborating with fat Francis, these two. So they must think it's the right thing to do. They might have been sold a bill of goods, Bob, but they believe in it or they wouldn't be doing it. I got that much faith in both of 'em. So I propose to string along a while, but I likewise propose to pass my own judgment on the facts."

"What facts?" Bob asked.

"We don't known 'em—yet," Jed said. "But I'd like to point out one thing to you, my faithless friend. Suppose you hadn't seen Sally last night. Suppose you were convinced you were wrong. Suppose we all accepted it as gospel that she got here for the first time on the 4:06 this afternoon. What would that do for her?"

"I guess I must be thick-headed," Bob said. "What are you driving at?"

"If I'm right, that dead man has been sitting in the tool shed since yesterday evening. So if Sally came in on the 4:06 this afternoon, she couldn't have had anything to do with killing him, could she?"

"You mean she—?" Bob's eyes were dark with anxiety.

"I think they fixed up a perfect alibi for her—if they can convince you that you were wrong about last night," Jed said.

"But that means she—"

Jed smiled a crooked smile. "I wouldn't marry you, Bob, if you were the last man on earth. No faith—no faith at all. Now I'll tell you what we're going to do . . ."

It was completely dark at ten minutes to nine that night. Lakeview had settled down to its usual quiet evening. Suddenly, just before nine, peace was shattered by a blaring voice. It came from a loudspeaker on top of a small black sedan. A voice which had curious overtones of Jedediah Russell's was blasting out the news that the Firemen's Carnival was at hand. "Bingo! Games of Chance! Win a brand-new Sports Car! Dancing! Three great days of entertainment with every cent of profit going toward your protection. Firemen's Carnival, folks! The outstanding event of our summer season! Rides for the kids! Beer for the old folks!" On and on it went, rattling the windowpanes on Main and Elm Streets.

Now this was not an unheard-of thing, this broadcasting of the com-

ing carnival; but the fact was that the carnival was six weeks away and the broadcasting usually took place when the carnival was actually in progress. People listened, were stunned, were annoyed, and suddenly the State Troopers' barracks in Clayton began to be inundated with telephone calls. The noise was so ear-shattering that no one, not even the three tense people sitting in Isobel Scudder's living room, could hear the steady sound of a steel saw biting through the padlock on the door of Isobel's tool shed.

Long before the State Troopers arrived from Clayton the broadcasting had stopped. The broadcasting car had been abandoned near the firehouse, and the best the Troopers could discover was that someone had seen a "rather tall man" running away from the small black sedan as a group of angry citizens bore down on it.

It was nearly eleven before the next step in Lakeview's drama took place. Residents of Elm Street had gone to bed, muttering about "public disturbance." Most of the houses were now dark. The street lights cast a dim greenish glow over the village green, but the areas behind the houses were pitch-dark.

Miss Isobel Scudder's house did not show a light anywhere. When the back door opened slowly, there was no one to see the bulky figure of Mr. Francis O'Mara slip onto the rear porch and make his way to the rented car which had been parked all day behind the house.

O'Mara stood for a few moments beside the door of the car, as if he were trying to adjust his vision to the darkness. Then he slowly walked the few yards to the door of the tool shed. He had a small key in his hand and he fumbled with the lock.

The lock opened easily—as though it had not been fastened at all. Mr. O'Mara pulled the door out, then turned and went back to the rented car. He got in and the engine purred under his touch. Slowly he backed the car toward the door of the tool shed.

Then he got out, opened the trunk compartment of the car, and stepped into the tool shed. For the first time he risked showing a light. He took a small torch from his pocket, snapped it on, and directed the beam toward the old canvas chair where he knew a dead man sat.

As his light focused on the chair something happened—something that choked Mr. O'Mara's breath in his throat.

The corpse rose up out of the chair and pointed a twenty-gauge shotgun at Mr. O'Mara.

After an instant of sheer terror Mr. O'Mara's hand moved quickly toward his left-coat lapel. Instantly, strong arms pinioned him from behind. Then Jed Russell dropped his impersonation of a corpse and came

forward to take the gun from Mr. O'Mara's holster and slip it into his own pocket.

"Okay, Bob," Jed said. "You can let him go."

Mr. O'Mara tenderly rubbed a bruised bicep where Bob's fingers had dug into the flesh. "A newspaperman is always a newspaperman," O'Mara said with some bitterness, "hick town or otherwise. You don't give up, Russell."

"Nope," Jed said placidly. "But maybe you've noticed, O'Mara, there are no cops. Not yet. My young friend Bob Molloy and I are willing to listen. We're kind of fond of the two ladies who are involved in this."

O'Mara's breath eased out of him in a long asthmatic wheeze. "I underestimated you, Mr. Russell," he said. "I'm perfectly willing to talk. Where—where is—he?"

"Your dead friend?" Jed said. "Over in the corner there. Not so comfortable, but I don't think it matters to him. And I think whatever talking we do had better be in the presense of the ladies. I don't want to have to double-check every step of the way. I don't know how much time we have."

"Time?"

Jed smiled grimly. "Two others know about this," he said. "A lady and her dog. And one of them is dying to talk! A first-class gossip can hang onto a secret only so long."

O'Mara walked to the back door of Miss Isobel's house with Jed and Bob Molloy directly behind him. The moment his steps sounded on the rear porch, the door opened and Miss Isobel looked out. Sally was in the shadows behind her.

"Something wrong?" Sally whispered.

"Guess you might as well switch on some lights," Jed said. "We got to see to talk. Leastwise, I do."

"Jedediah!" Miss Isobel's voice was despairing.

A moment later they were in the kitchen. Sally stared at Bob Molloy, her lips quivering. Both women gave the impression of having nerves that were stretched to the breaking point.

"Jedediah, why couldn't you mind your own business?" Miss Isobel moaned.

"The safety of people I love is my business," Jed said. "Now we may not have too much time. Bob and I have to know the score. If we like the looks of it we'll help. If we don't we won't. But any time now Maggie Bailey is apt to bust out and call the State Troopers. So I advise speed and clarity. Plenty of clarity."

Miss Isobel turned away. "We might as well go into the living room where we can sit," she said in a dull voice.

Bob Molloy didn't follow her. He walked straight across the room to Sally and took her shoulders in his strong hands. He looked down at her, his jaw jutting forward with characteristic belligerence. "Get this

straight," he said. "I've been a damn fool. From now on I don't care what happened in the past; I don't care what you did or what I did. I don't care what this is all about. I love you. Do you hear me? I'm not going to let you get away from me again." He shook her gently. "Do you hear me?"

"I hear you," Sally said, and suddenly she was being held very tightly in his arms.

"Boy's making sense at last," Jed said to no one in particular. He made a mock bow of courtesy to O'Mara, gesturing him to follow Miss Isobel. Jed brought up the rear, still carrying his shotgun.

O'Mara dried his damp palms with a big linen handkerchief. He sat on the sofa and the others had drawn chairs into a semicircle facing him. Bob and Sally sat close together.

"This is an unbelievable situation," O'Mara began. "I'll have to go back a little to get it to make sense for you. Sally, as you know, has made a big hit for herself in Hollywood. Part of my job is to make the most of it, publicity-wise. We built a kind of a fake romance for her with Marc Williams. Marc's the most valuable property we have. He's a nice fellow, but driven almost beyond endurance by the pressures of success. He lost his wife a couple of years ago in a swimming accident. He's never been the same since.

"He was agreeable to being seen places with Sally, agreeable to have some romantic hints planted in the gossip columns. It's standard procedure out there. I'd like to say I don't think he ever even tried to take advantage of it."

"Never," Sally said, looking straight ahead. "He laughed and kidded about it, and he'd play the attentive lover whenever we were in public. We actually got to be good friends. God help me, if we hadn't I wouldn't be in all this trouble."

Bob didn't speak, but his hand tightened around hers and she looked at him with a kind of wonder. This was a new Bob.

"Something none of us knew," O'Mara went on, "was that Marc had become hooked—he'd become a narcotics addict."

"He was fighting it," Sally said. "He was fighting it with all his might."

"One night about ten days ago," O'Mara said, "he called Sally. I guess he was beginning to get the shakes. He asked her if she'd come out to his place and have supper with him—stay with him until he got over the hill. She went."

"He needed help so desperately," Sally said.

"Well, they were having supper on the terrace of his house overlooking the ocean when a guy came up the garden path. He was the 'pusher' Marc had been dealing with—the guy who provided him

with the drug. Marc told him to beat it. He wasn't going to stay on the kick. He was through. The guy laughed at him. He began to describe to Marc what it would be like without it."

"It was horrible," Sally said. "Marc was listening and suddenly he was drenched with sweat."

"The guy kept on," O'Mara said, "and suddenly Marc jumped him. He started to beat him up. The guy had a gun. He pulled it and fired it, but Marc had hold of his arm and the shots went wild. Then Marc landed a knockout punch. The place was a wreck and Marc was standing over the guy, shaking, when in walked our friend."

"Friend?" Jed asked.

O'Mara jerked his head in the direction of the tool shed. "His name was Kelvin. He was a sort of private eye. His license was revoked years ago, but he worked for a magazine called *Secret*. You know their stuff—inside filth on the private lives of Hollywood celebrities. And boy, did he find himself a scoop! Marc Williams an addict! The 'pusher' identified! And Sally a witness, both to the facts about Marc and the identity of the pusher!

"Well, they all knew those gun shots would bring people. Marc urged Sally to get out of there, and she left. Kelvin, too. Marc got the pusher out of there and faced the police with the story of having surprised and fought off a sneak thief. It was fine for the moment—but he knew, and we all knew, that Kelvin wouldn't drop his hold on them. I urged Sally to take a trip home and stay under cover.

"We planted that story about a quarrel with the studio. But Kelvin wasn't giving up. His key witness was Sally. He found out she'd left Hollywood, and the next thing I got wind of was the fact that he'd started East to find her.

"I took a plane East and got here yesterday—got here before Sally did. In the late afternoon I came to Miss Scudder's house. She was out and the place was locked up. I wandered around, waiting for her. Then I happened to glance in the tool-shed window—and there was Kelvin. He was dead—with a knife in his throat."

O'Mara wiped the sweat from his forehead. "The first thought I had was—and I admit it—that Sally had got here ahead of me and had polished Kelvin off. Or maybe Miss Scudder. But then I got to thinking and I realized there was someone else interested in silencing Kelvin. The dope mob. They'd sent a guy after him and he'd caught up with him here. Well, you may ask, why didn't I call the cops? I didn't because I knew the finger would point at Sally. To defend herself against a murder charge she'd have to tell the truth. That would mean the end of Marc, and if you'll pardon the practical aspect of it, it would cost the studio about six million bucks in unreleased films.

"The thing to do was to get hold of Sally and establish an ironclad alibi for her. I knew she would arrive that day. I went to the depot to meet the night train. She came, all right, but before I could get to her, young Molloy here spotted her. It all happened so quick, and she ran away from him so fast that—well, I figured we might still face it out.

"I caught up with her, got her into my car, and told her what it would mean to her, to Marc, to the studio. She might even find she couldn't beat the murder rap. She phoned Miss Isobel and told her—that must have been while Molloy was searching the short cut for her. I got Sally on the train at Clayton without anyone seeing her, so she could come back and make her public return today. Molloy bothered me plenty. I had meant to move the body last night. If I could have dumped Kelvin's body hundreds of miles from here we'd have had nothing to worry about."

He smiled humorlessly at Bob. "But Molloy sat outside the house all night. I couldn't risk it last night. I made it clear to Miss Scudder what it would mean if she didn't play along with me. All we could do was wait till tonight. I made my own public arrival in Lakeview on this morning's train. Then I rented a car and drove over to Clayton to get some stuff to put in that bag—just to make sure we had something for Molloy if he got stubborn before Sally made her second appearance. It looked as if we were going to make it until you interested yourself, Mr. Russell—you and that damned dog!"

"Maybe you think we were wrong, Jedediah," Sally said urgently. "We weren't really helping the murderer. If it had just been me, I'd have faced it. But there was Marc who would be destroyed and the studio with its tremendous investment in him—all to be ruined because of vicious gossip."

"It checks," Bob said, supporting her loyally. "That fellow in the convertible, Jed—the one who asked the General where Miss Isobel lived. He must have been the killer."

"Just came back the next morning to make a public inspection? On the old saw about the killer always returning to the scene of the crime?" Jed asked drily. He sat staring at O'Mara from under heavy eyelids. "You sold yourself to Sally and Isobel, all right, but you haven't sold me, O'Mara."

O'Mara's head jerked up. "What do you mean?"

"Kelvin was killed with a certain bone-handled knife, jabbed clean through his throat," Jed said. "That knife belongs to Isobel. She's got a grindstone out there in the shed, and there are half a dozen knives out there. You planning to sharpen 'em yesterday or today, was that it, Isobel?"

Miss Isobel moistened her lips. "Why, yes! I took 'em out there yes-

terday noon to sharpen them. I heard the phone ring and I came back in the house to answer it. It was Miss Tracy asking if I could help out at the hospital. So I got dressed and went down there. I forgot all about the knives."

Jed nodded. "So the murder was improvised," he said. "Nobody could have counted on the knives being there. Can you figure a gangster coming all the way from California to kill a man and depending on finding a weapon handy when he needed it? Can you figure a gangster running the risk of being caught in the act in a small town like this? Even if Kelvin got to talk to Sally—even if that was somehow dangerous to the gang—he'd wait, wouldn't he, till he could polish Kelvin off in some isolated place? Nope, this was no gang killing." The heavy eyelids lifted slightly. "Maybe you're a real loyal employee, O'Mara. Maybe you'd go to any lengths to save your studio and its property. Would you go to the length of committing murder?"

"You're nuts!" O'Mara said.

"No, I don't think you would," Jed said. "Not for a minute. But I'm positive you'd *save your own hide*, no matter what the risk! What did Kelvin have on you, O'Mara?"

"Now look—"

"You're too smart a cookie to make all the mistakes you made," Jed said. "A smart guy would know he could never shake Bob's story. A smart guy, if he was trying to fake that suitcase, would have put all the stuff in it that a woman would *naturally* carry—not just odds and ends.

"You're a smart guy, O'Mara—it sticks out all over you. You wouldn't make little mistakes. *You did what you did on purpose!*"

Jed paused, then sharpened his voice. "You did it the way you did because *you wanted someone to take the rap*—in case the police caught up with you before the body could be moved. All the things you did to protect Sally actually framed her! If they ever came out they would have sent her to the electric chair.

"You wanted it that way, O'Mara. If she was caught, you'd be the loyal friend who had tried to help her out of a mess. But *she'd* burn for it! What really happened, O'Mara?"

"Look, Russell, you're inventing—"

"So I'll keep on inventing," Jed said. "You came here, maybe legitimately, to talk to Sally about the problem you all had. You ran smack into Kelvin who was hanging around too, waiting for her to arrive. You didn't want to be seen with him, so you persuaded him to go into the tool shed with you for a powwow. What did he have on you, O'Mara? Were you selling out your studio to *Secret*? That kind of double-cross goes on all the time.

"Whatever it was, you couldn't let Kelvin get away. All the time

you were talking to him I suggest you were sweating it out. You had a gun, but if you used it half the town would be down on you before you could get to the front gate. Then you saw Isobel's knives—"

Jed shrugged. "End of Kelvin. Now, with a little help from Isobel and Sally you might get out of it clean. And, if you failed, you could nail Sally with it. Now don't argue with me, O'Mara. I may be wrong on some of the small points, but working from that premise the cops will find the evidence to hang you from your fat neck until you're dead!"

O'Mara moved with amazing speed. He propelled himself forward like a giant tank—not to escape but to destroy Jed. He was on top of Jed before Jed could shift the shotgun into line and was pounding at him with his huge fists. Bob, pulling at the fat man, might have been trying to budge a team of oxen. It was Isobel Scudder who ended it with a clean hard blow on the back of the head with the fireplace tongs. O'Mara rolled over and lay still, looking like a beached whale.

Jed, breathless and with a fine mouse developing under his left eye, struggled to his feet. He grinned at Isobel.

"Always knew there was a reason I never proposed to you, Isobel," he said.

"Shut up, you old fool!" Isobel said, but tears of relief were running down her cheeks. Then she started to laugh, a touch of hysteria adding high notes. "That fellow in the convertible who spoke to the General—he was a vacuum cleaner salesman and I had an awful time getting rid of him."

Jed glanced at Bob and Sally. They weren't talking. They didn't need to. "Guess we'd better call the State Troopers," he said. "Hate to turn it over to 'em. Can't remember when I've had so much fun."

The author of this delightful spoof is Assistant Professor of English at Western Michigan University—obviously a man with an "extraordinary understanding of the ways of the academic world." The story first appeared in the Winter 1960 issue of the "Bulletin of the AAUP"—the American Association of University Professors.

We are deeply indebted to Mrs. Morrison Handsaker of Easton, Pennsylvania, for not only calling this lively tale to our attention (otherwise we surely would have missed it!) but also taking the trouble to send us tear-sheets from the "Bulletin of the AAUP." Mrs. Handsaker is "at Lafayette College" where her husband is a professor of economics.

You will forgive us, we hope, if we quote the last paragraph of Mrs. Handsaker's letter: "My husband and I are devoted readers of EQMM. We gave a subscription to a friend in Washington, who finally sends her well-worn copies to a Japanese friend in Tokyo."

All the world loves a lover—of mystery stories!

THE MIDDLEBUSH HYPOTHESIS

by EDWARD L. GALLIGAN

I REMEMBER WITH PERFECT CLARITY the moment I first heard the news. It was 3:35 on a Wednesday afternoon—my afternoon free of classes and even of committee meetings. The day was warm and sunny, spring at its best. I had just finished taking a few notes on the imagery in Act Two of *'Tis Pity She's A Whore* (for my book on post-Shakespearean drama), and I was nerving myself to read some soggy-looking papers from my Seventeenth Century course. At the moment, however, I was at the window of my study trying to determine if the bird perched near the top of the maple tree was a red-eyed or a warbling vireo.

Elizabeth, my wife, burst into the study, so excited that she forgot to apologize for disturbing me. "The Dean is dead!"

"Who?" I couldn't believe my ears.

"The Dean!"

"Which dean?" I had to be sure.

"*The* dean! The old football hero! Hubert B. Glotz, himself!" By this time the poor dear was practically carolling.

The next few minutes are blurred

in my memory, though I seem to recall a certain amount of whooping and cavorting and a kind of snake dance down to the liquor cabinet. While Elizabeth went next door to spread joy among the Wilsons (he's in History), I mixed martinis for the four of us. The occasion called for and received my finest efforts.

Calmed by a martini, Elizabeth was able to pass on to us the few details of the happy demise that she had plucked from the faculty wives' grapevine. Mary Louise Furstenburg, Hubert's secretary, had returned from the Koffee Kup and found him sprawled on the floor of his private lavatory. She summoned Dr. MacGregor from Health Service. Even MacGregor could tell that Hubert was quite thoroughly dead, probably from a heart attack; never one to risk taking a stand, he called for an autopsy to determine the cause of death.

Elizabeth's report did not give us much to go on; but we could comment on the symbolic aptness of the place of death, congratulate ourselves for having believed the rumor which had gone the rounds two years ago that Hubert had had a promising little heart attack, and make speeches about the glorious future of Morrison College now that the football coach was out of the Dean's office. Both Ralph and I felt that the absence of violence reflected some discredit on the faculty, but the girls persuaded us that it was wrong to quibble with beneficent Providence.

Naturally, cocktails flowed freely all up and down Faculty Row that evening. People moved from house to house almost at random; everyone was welcome everywhere. Musicologists chatted with clinical psychologists and logical positivists strolled amicably with Barthian theologians. Wives somehow got children in bed, food appeared from freezers and refrigerators, and the celebrations went on until well after midnight. It was a good thing for us that the President cancelled all classes the next day—out of respect for "our beloved and faithful Dean."

I was in my office at school in the afternoon demonstrating my zeal for the education of America's youth by grading those Seventeenth Century papers, when John J. "Jackie" Allerton, Sheriff of Morrison County, dropped in. Since discovering a few years ago that I had published three mystery novels in my younger and more impoverished days, Jackie never misses a chance to corner me for "a little shop talk" (and the phrase never ceases to amuse him).

He had come, the Sheriff said, "to check me in" on the investigation of "poor Dean Glotz's death." "Strickly routine investigation," but he felt that "professional courtesy" (chuckle, chuckle) required telling me about it. For once I was glad to let the oaf talk.

The autopsy revealed that Dean

Glotz had, in fact, had a heart attack and that it had been brought on by acute indigestion. The Dean had had lunch in the Union Building with Professor Rosencrantz of the Zoology Department; Professor Rosencrantz got sick that afternoon, too. The Dean had walked back from the Union Building with Professor Guild of the Geology Department; according to Professor Guild he was in unusually good spirits and in excellent physical condition.

Back in his office at 1:15 the Dean had worked on the annual report to the Board of Trustees until 2:00 at which time he had a conference with Professor Jackson of the History Department and Professor Feible of Psychology. They stated later that during the conference he complained once or twice of an upset stomach and that when they left at 2:25 he appeared to be in a rather bad humor.

His secretary got back to the office at 2:40—she had been out to coffee with Professor Harbin of the Philosophy Department since 2:15—and found him on the floor of the bathroom off his office. Dr. MacGregor arrived at 2:52 and pronounced him dead.

"And that's about it, Sherlock. I figured you'd be interested in the details, being on the faculty and all. Anyway, you amateur detectives ought to know how much us professionals have to do to wind up even an ordinary case like—not that I mean that the Dean's dying isn't important, but—well, you know what I mean. It's not like there was any evidence of foul play or anything." Jackie dwelt longingly on that phrase "foul play"; you could see visions of newspaper headlines dancing through his mind.

I thanked him, paid my amateur's respect to his professional thoroughness, got him out of the office, opened the window to air out the room (Jackie's cigars smell "like" a Sheriff's should), and sat down to do some thinking. I did not see any signs of foul play, but I did notice a few peculiarities that had escaped Jackie.

Was it mere coincidence that the five men near Hubert in his final hours were five of Morrison's most distinguished scholars and therefore five of Hubert's most ardent enemies? Or was this the last gratifying touch of a Providence bent on heaping blessings on us that day?

Or was it a sign that—well, shall we say that natural rather than supernatural hands had arranged for Hubert's departure from "the old Big-M team"?

The more I thought about it the odder—or rather, the more natural—it seemed.

Item One: Rosey Rosencrantz not only loathed Hubert for refusing to let him have the old men's pool for some experiments in breeding salt-water fish in fresh water, but Rosey had, as he frequently announced at faculty picnics, "a sewer

pipe for a stomach." (The metaphor has generally been conceded to be as accurate as it is inelegant.) Yet Rosey ate lunch with Hubert and came down with only a mild case of indigestion in the afternoon.

Item Two: Bill Guild had a fight with Hubert less than two months before to get approval of a voucher for $5.72 (or some equally absurd figure) to pay shipping charges on some specimens from Montana. The Dean insisted that with all the rocks out behind the football stadium, the Geology Department didn't have to import any from Montana. Yet Bill had willingly strolled across the campus with him.

Item Three: Neither Frank Jackson nor Joe Feible had spoken to Hubert—except from the floor at faculty meetings—since two years ago this May when he ruled that money from the library's general fund could and should be shifted to the athletic supplies fund. According to Joe, his words were, "I don't know why you damned eggheads on the library committee can't see how important it is to give the men of Morrison the first-class equipment they deserve." Yet there were Joe and Frank sitting in his office talking with him just before he "passed away," as the morticians so sweetly put it.

Item Four: Charles Harbin is intelligent, fastidious, and wealthy enough not to have to worry about salary increases. Naturally, he despised Hubert, who once quite seriously asked him how he could stay awake while reading "Aristotle and those other long-winded Greeks." Moreover, Charles is Morrison's bachelor, the one the wives are always trying to marry off and the secretaries are always moony over. Thus, it passes all belief that Charles would have asked Mary Louise Furstenburg, Hubert's trusted secretary, out for coffee; even the students know it is dangerous for a male to come within five paces of Mary Louise.

Now, though I can never make Jackie Allerton believe it, I have absolutely no urge to be a detective of any sort. Those three mystery novels were products of my salad days, when I was green in judgment and short in money. I cheerfully leave all detecting to Jackie and other professionals. Still, I am humanly curious. And Frank Jackson's office is just down the hall from mine.

As soon as I saw Frank, my suspicions were heightened. He was wearing a new sports jacket (soft, gray tweed, well tailored), a checked shirt that I had noticed in a Hathaway ad a few weeks earlier, and a pair of cordovan shoes that must have cost at least $35. Of course, it was natural that a fop like Frank would be wearing his finest raiment on that day of rejoicing; but it was decidedly odd that he would be fully prepared to honor the supposedly unexpected day with *new* finery. However, I kept

my suspicions to myself and easily led the conversation to the subject of his conference with Hubert.

Frank agreed that he and Joe would acquire special status on the faculty for having nearly witnessed the demise so long hoped for; but he tried to slip past the subject of the conference itself with a vague remark about "matters that in a sense grew out of our work on the library committee."

I would not let him slip through. "The library committee, eh? What are you old fogies up to now? Trying to get students to read books or something equally old-fashioned?" (The jocular approach seemed appropriate.)

"Books! Why, Paul Middlebush, you know better than to call them that—they're audio-visual aids nowadays." Frank paused to chuckle and flick a bit of ash off the sleeve of his new jacket. "No, nothing like that. Students weren't involved at all—purely a faculty matter." Another pause. "By the way, I've been meaning to ask if you've seen that new study that came out of Oxford on jewelry in Elizabethan England."

Of course, he knew perfectly well I had; but I refused to be drawn off the trail, even by a red herring as tempting as that. I abandoned the jocular and took the direct approach. "What sort of faculty matter?"

The prodding made Frank a bit testy. "Well, Paul, if you must know, Joe and I had a simple little scheme for setting up a fund to buy books and microfilms which faculty members need for their own research—the sort of material that one cannot very well expect a college library to buy, especially when it is having so much difficulty filling the primitive needs of undergraduate education."

"Good Lord, Frank, what made you think Glotz would approve of that? It's a splendid idea, but Glotz would have thought you were trying to cheat the school."

"You're right." Frank sighed reflectively. "He didn't like it. But he didn't get really angry until we explained how it could be financed."

"True to form."

"Unhappily, yes." He couldn't help warming to the subject. "When we mentioned the fact—and it is a fact—that we could get the money simply by dropping the varsity wrestling program and thereby eliminating the cost of a coach and of wrestling rooms in the new field house, Glotz exploded. And you know what that was like."

I certainly did. Glotz's rages were perhaps the most offensive thing about the man. He would turn purple, actually purple, and his face would twitch wildly. He would become both profane and incoherent. All of us at Morrison knew those rages.

"Joe and I saw that it was no use trying to reason with him, so we

left." A sweet, placid smile spread across Frank's face as he added, "A few minutes later, old Vacuum-Packed was dead."

Neither of us spoke for a long moment. It was a shame to break into a beautiful reverie, but I had to ask what made them think that Hubert would ever dream of sacrificing wrestling—a sport he had earned his Big M in—to support scholarship. Frank's answer was incredible: "After much hesitation, we decided that we owed it to the man to give him an opportunity to make the right decision. I suppose you could call it, well, a sort of Christian obligation."

This, mind you, was the statement of a man who had told me last fall that the study of history made it impossible for him to read most of the Seventeenth Century English drama because it made use of the convention of the sudden repentance of the villain. Villains and knaves, he knew from history, simply don't change.

When I left Frank Jackson's office, I knew with unshakable certainty that Hubert B. Glotz had been murdered.

I won't bore you with a detailed account of my subsequent research into the problem. It really wasn't difficult, especially after I overheard a student commenting that he had seen "poor Dean Glotz" on the day he died doing chin-ups with Professor Guild on a tree near the Union Building. By Friday night I had the case just about completed and called Professors Harbin, Rosencrantz, Feible, Jackson, and Guild to a meeting at my home.

At 8:15 I called the meeting to order. "Gentlemen, I have asked you here tonight to lay before you a hypothesis concerning the death of our late dean, Hubert B. Glotz. Briefly, my hypothesis is that Dean Glotz's death was brought about by the careful work of an *ad hoc* faculty committee consisting of you five gentlemen.

"I will not go into unnecessary details—I shall simply describe the particular assignments which, according to my hypothesis, each of you carried out.

"Professor Rosencrantz, you were charged with the duty of eating lunch with the Dean and of luring him into eating quantities of rather indigestible foods—no great problem with a man of his notoriously piggish habits. You succeeded admirably. You both had bean soup first; then deviled crab cakes, French fried potatoes, French fried onion rings, and salad with Roquefort dressing; and for dessert, pecan pie à la mode. No doubt the astonishing powers of your own digestive system made you the ideal man for this assignment."

Rosey nodded his pleasure at the compliment. He added, "I was prepared to introduce a dandy little contaminating agent into the salad, but fortunately it was unnecessary. I knew I could trust the Union

Building's onion rings. And the ice cream on the pie was Glotz's own idea."

I thanked him for the additional information and went on to the next man. "Professor Guild, like most geologists I have known, you are a man of more than ordinary strength and vigor. According to my hypothesis, you were assigned to meet the Dean as he parted from Professor Rosencrantz—who no doubt hurried home to treat a forthcoming attack of indigestion. Surely it was a simple matter for you on that mild spring day to trade on Dean Glotz's vanity as a former athlete and get him into a contest involving a considerable strain—specifically, chin-ups on the branch of a tree."

Bill made a little bow as he said, "I could have beaten him, you know, but it seemed only decent to let him win."

I then turned to Charles Harbin. "Professor Harbin, I suggest that you had the unpleasant duty of wooing the Dean's secretary, Miss Furstenburg, from the office so that she would not be there to give aid during the predictable attack of indigestion. I gather from the expression on your face that you agree that yours was a most arduous task."

Charles spoke in a low, anguished tone. "The woman not only paws at you constantly, she giggles. And she uses a straw primarily to blow bubbles in her soda."

I shuddered sympathetically before addressing the two remaining men.

"According to my hypothesis, you, Professor Jackson, were assigned to provoke Dean Glotz to a rage in order to heighten the effects of the attack of indigestion which was scheduled to take place at approximately 2:30. Professor Feible, I do not, frankly, understand why you were assigned to accompany Professor Jackson. Rage came so easily to the Dean that I wonder why two men would be assigned to this task. There must have been a reason; but of course, no hypothesis is quite complete at its first statement."

Frank Jackson started to speak, but I gestured for silence. "One last thing. I am convinced that my hypothesis is sound. And I take some pride and pleasure in having formulated it. Yet in one respect I am puzzled and regretful. Without boasting, I think I may say that my abilities, my often-expressed beliefs, and my length of service at Morrison all entitled me to a place on the committee. Gentlemen, I am hurt that I was not asked to serve on it."

I shall not quote Frank Jackson's reply, which was full of compliments for me and my hypothesis. He explained my omission from the committee, of which he was chairman, by pointing out that the very strength of my abilities and my fame in fictional crime made me too liable for suspicion to serve

on a committee which sought to work in obscurity.

He also filled in "the one small gap in the Middlebush Hypothesis": Professor Feible had pointed out that the presence of two men rather than one during the presentation of such a proposal would sharply increase the Dean's irritation; moreover, Professor Feible believed that his experience with the O.S.S. in interrogating prisoners of war had given him special insight into the problem of vexing a man out of all self-control. Frank assured me that the committee had never considered resorting to the crudity of violence. They had remained wholly confident that no foul play would be needed to usher Dean Glotz from this world. Finally, he moved that the committee congratulate me on the formulation of a hypothesis which revealed an extraordinary understanding of the ways of the academic world. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

"Gentlemen," I said, "I am deeply honored. Before we adjourn to the next room for refreshments, may I move that on the first Thursday of next October a committee of six, not five, meet to consider the case of the President of Morrison College."

The motion was passed by acclamation.

"I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

—SHELLEY, *Ozymandias*

TRAVELLER FROM AN ANTIQUE LAND

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

IT WAS IN APRIL 1822, ON THE third day after his friend had sailed off into a lead-grey, oil-smooth sea only a few hours before the storm broke, that Tregareth, fearing the worst, made his way to Lord Gryphon's villa, to consult with him. Was not Gryphon the nominal head of the English *literati* hereabouts?

The time was past noon, Gryphon had already had his cup of strong, green tea, and was lunching on the invariable biscuit and soda-water as he lay abed. He looked up when the tall figure entered, long black hair in disarray, striking his fist into palm.

"Surely there is *some* news, Tregareth," Gryphon said. "Are they safe? Have they been . . . *found?*"

Tregareth shook his head. "*I* have no news, my lord," he said, trying to mask his agitation with formality. "Every vessel putting into Leghorn has been questioned, but there has been no sign of the *Sea Sprite,* of Shadwell or Wilson or the ship's boy. I thought that you might have had a letter, or at least a note, from their wives at the Villa Grandi, saying that they had arrived."

"I have had nothing!" Gryphon cried.

"Fulke Grant has heard no word,

either. He blames himself, poor fellow—'It was to welcome me and get me settled that they sailed to Leghorn,' he says."

"Oh, God, Tregareth!" Gryphon moaned, covering his fat, pale face with a trembling hand. "They have been drowned! They have surely been drowned!"

Tregareth, looking away from him, turning his gaze out of the window to the hot sandy plain, said sturdily, "It does not follow, my lord. Not at all. I conceive of at least two other possibilities—no, three. First, they may have been carried away off course—to Elba, perhaps, or even to Corsica or Sardinia. Second, assuming the vessel *did* come to harm, which Heaven forbid—though she *was* cranky and frisky—there were so many other craft at sea that evening—" Tregareth spoke more and more rapidly, his broad chest rising and falling as his agitation increased. "Surely it is not unreasonable that they have been taken aboard one of them and are even now disembarking in some port. And, third, I fear we must also consider the possibility that a piratical felluca may have ridden them down—pretending accident, don't you know, my lord—and that presently we shall receive some elegantly worded message which in our blunter English speech spells 'ransom'!"

Gryphon had begun slowly to nod; now his face had cleared somewhat. He reached for his silver flask, poured brandy into the tiny silver cup. "What must we do?" he asked. "You have been a sailor—in fact, if we are to believe your own account of it—wilder than any tale *I* dared to write!—you have been a pirate, too. Command me, Tregareth! Eh?" He drained the cup, looking at the Cornishman with raised brows.

Ignoring, in his concern, the implication, the other man said, "I thank you, my lord. I propose, then—in your name, with your consent—to obtain the governor's permission to have the coast guards scan the beaches. Perhaps some flotsam or wreckage will give hint of—" He did not finish the sentence. Gryphon shuddered. "And also, " will have couriers sent out on the road to Nice, enquiring of news, if any, of their having reached another port. In the event of their having been captured by brigands, we must await that intelligence."

Gryphon muttered something about—in that event—the British Minister—

Tregareth's grey eyes grew fierce and angry. "Let Shadwell's *wife*, my lord, let poor Amelia appeal to the minister and to diplomacy. Let *me* but hear of where they are constrained—give me a file of dragoons—or if not, just a brace of pistols and a stiletto—I have stormed the corsair's lair before!"

"Yes, yes!" Gryphon cried. He rose from bed, thrust feet into slippers, and, with his queer, lame,

gliding walk, came across the room. "And I shall go with you! This is no coward's heart which beats here—" He laid his hand on his left breast.

"I know it, my lord," the other said, touched.

And, telling him that he must make haste, Gryphon thrust a silken purse into Tregareth's hands, bade him godspeed, and gloomily prepared to dress.

The two ladies met the Cornishman with flushed cheeks—cheeks from which the color soon fled as he confessed that he brought them no news. Jane Wilson essayed a brave smile on her trembling lips, but Amelia Shadwell shrieked, pressed her palms to her head, and repeated Gryphon's very words.

"Oh, God, Tregareth! They have been drowned!"

But Mrs. Wilson would not have it so. She knelt by the side of her hostess's cot in the "hall" of the Villa Grandi—a whitewashed room on the upper story, not much larger than the four small whitewashed rooms which served for bedchambers—and taking the distressed woman by the hand, began to comfort her. Wilson was an excellent sailor, she said. No harm could come to Shadwell while Wilson was aboard. The storm had lasted less than half an hour—surely not enough to injure such a stoutly built vessel as the *Sea Sprite*. Tregareth added his assurances to Jane's, with an air of confidence he did not feel.

By and by the cries gave way to moans. Amelia pressed a handkerchief to her lovely eyes and turned away her head. Tregareth would have lingered, but Jane drew him gently away. They descended the stairs together. The sea foamed and lapped almost at their feet.

For a moment they were silent, looking out over the beautiful Gulf of Spezia to the terrace. To one side was the tiny fishing village of Sant' Ursula; to the other side, a degree nearer, the equally tiny town of Lorenzi.

At length Jane spoke. "Poor, poor, dearest Amelia!" she said. "She has been far from well. It is not only her body which is weak, you know, Tregareth. She has been sick in spirit, sick at heart. It is the loss of her dear children. To bid farewell to two such sweet babes in so brief a time—no, no, Tregareth, man knows nought of what woman feels. It is too much." And so she spoke, mantling her own concern for the missing. Even when she spoke her husband's name, it was only in connection with Amelia's illness.

"Did you know, Tregareth, that scarcely more than a week ago, when she was in truth barely able to turn on her couch, that we missed her one night? Wilson found her down below, her slippers sodden and her hem drenched, and she seemed like one who walks in

a dream. I have not dared to part from her for even a moment since. We had better go back—but no word of this."

Amelia smiled at them as they returned, a sad and worn little smile. "I am ready to hear what you have to tell me, now, with more composure," she said.

And so Tregareth recounted to her what he thought she might safely hear. How Shadwell and Wilson came sailing the trim little *Sea Sprite* over the wine-dark sea to greet the poet Fulke Grant and his family. How Grant and Shadwell had fallen into one another's arms for joy. How they had settled the new arrivals in satisfactory quarters. And how, finally, it was decided that the *Sea Sprite* and the *Liberator*—Lord Gryphon's vessel—would return together, with Tregareth captaining the latter, while Gryphon stayed behind.

"Oh, why did you not do so, Tregareth?" cried Amelia Shadwell. "With a skilled sea-captain such as you to convey them—"

It was the fault of the harbormaster, Tregareth explained. At the last minute he had refused clearance to the *Liberator* on some petty point or other. And so Shadwell and Wilson, by now impatient to see their wives once more, had sailed off alone, with only Antonio, the ship's boy, for crew. Not for worlds would he have told her of his fears. Of Wilson's being—for all his wife's pride—but a gentleman-sailor. Of how awkwardly Shadwell handled the craft. Of what others had said—

"Crank as an eggshell, and too much sail for those two sticks of masts," remarked the master of a Yankee ship, spitting tobacco. "She looks like a bundle of chips going to the fire."

And the *Liberator's* first mate, a Genoa-man: "They should have sailed at this hour of the morning, not the afternoon. They're standing in too close to shore—catch too much breeze. That gaff topsail is foolish in a boat with no deck and no real sailors aboard."

There had been only a slight wind. But in the southwest were dirty rags of clouds. "Smoke on the sea," said the mate, shaking his head. "A warning . . ." as the fog closed around the trim little *Sprite.* The air was sultry, hot and heavy and close. Tregareth had gone below to his cabin and fallen into a doze. He dreamed of Shadwell, his dark-fair hair only touched with grey, ruffled by the breeze, the light of genius in his eye, the look of exaltation no his face—a boy's face still, for all he was approaching thirty—a boy's fair skin and light freckles, and a boy's look of eagerness. The world had never gone stale for Archie Shadwell . . .

Tregareth had thought, as he often did, of his own good fortune in being the friend of Shadwell and of Mrs. Shadwell; and somehow he found himself envying

Wilson, who not only had a beautiful wife of his own—Tregareth's wife was dead—but the company of the beautiful Amelia Shadwell . . . and then he had fallen asleep.

And then had come the gust of wind—the *temporale,* the Italians called it—and the squall broke. It thundered and lightninged and he rushed on deck to help make all trim. In twenty minutes the storm's fury was spent, but Jane Wilson was wrong in thinking that was too brief a time for deadly damage. Twenty seconds could do for so light a boat as the *Sea Sprite.*

Thus three days had passed—three days of ceaseless enquiry. From Gryphon, Tregareth had gone directly to the governor, mentioned the name of *il milord Gryphon,* doucely slid the purse across the desk.

"A courier? As far as Nice? Of course! And the coast guards to patrol the beaches all about? Certainly!" The purse vanished. Orders were given, messengers scurried. Tregareth had left in a flurry of assurances, and come straight to the Villa Grandi.

He had intended to leave as quickly, to pursue his own search, to flag (and flog, too, if need be!) the coast guards into vigilance—for who knew if any of Gryphon's gold would trickle down to them? But Amelia would not hear of it.

"Tregareth, do not leave us!" she begged. And he, looking at her sweet face, could not refuse to tarry a little while. Jane summoned a servant to make fire for tea. Jane herself was busy pretending the matter was no more than that of, say, a diligence whose lead-mule had delayed the schedule by casting a shoe; she bustled about with needles and thread. But Amelia would not play this game.

"Oh, Jane, in Heaven's name, be still," she pleaded.

"I am looking for the beeswax, to help thread my needles," Jane explained, hunting and peering. "I promised dear Shadwell to finish that embroidered shirt for him. Where can it be? Is that not strange? A great lump of unbleached beeswax—"

Amelia began to weep. "Shall he ever wear a shirt again? And this creature wants to kill me with her talk and her scurrying—"

But the next moment Tregareth himself was kneeling and holding her hand and vowing that Shadwell would live to wear out a thousand shirts, ten thousand. She smiled, allowed her tiny white hand to become engulfed in his great brown one. But she gave a little cry of pain.

"Why, what is this, Amelia?" he asked, astonished, opening her fingers, and looking at the scarce-healed marks there.

"I was sawing wood, kindling, for the fire," she said in a small voice; Jane and Tregareth exclaimed against such foolishness.

There were servants. Amelia pouted. "They care nothing for me," she said. "Look at that slut, there—do you suppose she cares about me?"

The servant-girl, perhaps sensing she was being mentioned, turned at that moment. She smiled. Not at all an ill-looking wench, Tregareth observed, almost abstractedly—though of course one could not even consider such coarse charms in the presence of lovely Amelia. The girl smiled. "The *signore* will soon return," she said.

Amelia spat at her, cursed, called her *puta,* struggled to rise.

"Madame!" cried Tregareth, shocked.

"She meant but to reassure you, dearest Amelia," said Jane, as the girl scuttled away, frightened.

"She did not mean to! She meant to scorn me! Does she think I am blind? Does everyone think I am blind? Do *you,* Jane?" But the hysteria passed almost as soon as it had come.

"Tregareth, forgive me," she said. "I am not well. Such sickly fancies cloud my mind . . . Oh, I know that Shadwell must be living! So great a genius cannot die so young! No age ever had such a poet. Does not Gryphon himself agree? Was he not proud to have the little ship named after his own poem? Oh! I little thought, the day he carved his initials in her main-mast, that she would give us so much grief . . . I have had such presentiments of evil—such a sense of oppression that I have not felt for years, not since poor Henrietta . . ."

Tregareth felt the little hairs rise on his neck. Never before had he heard the name of Shadwell's first wife mentioned in this house. It seemed—he scarcely knew why—it seemed dreadful to hear it now on Amelia's lips, on Amelia's smiling lips.

"Do you believe she drowned herself?" she asked. He could only stammer. "There are those who say—" Amelia paused.

"No one says—" began Jane.

But the sick woman smiled and shook her head. "Everyone knows of Shadwell and me, how we eloped while he was still a married man," she said dreamily. "Everyone knows that only Henrietta's death set us both free to marry. Everyone knows of Shadwell and Clara Claybourne," she continued. "First she bore Gryphon's illegitimate child, then she bore Shadwell's—everyone knows . . ." Her accusing eyes met those of Jane, who stood by, her face showing her pain. "But only you and I, Jane, know . . ." And she seemed to fall into a revery. Then she chuckled.

So pleased were they to have this sign of her mind passing to anything which had power to please her, whatever it might be, that they beamed. "Do you remember, Jane, your first night here? Were you listening? How Wilson said, 'To

think that my wife and I are privileged to be guests under a roof which shelters two such rare geniuses! Archie, the author of that exquisite poem, *Deucalion,* and Amelia, the author of the great novel, *Koenigsmark*—' Do you remember, Jane, what Shadwell said?"

"I did not hear, dear Amelia. What did he say?"

"He said, *'Koenigsmark!* Ha-ha!' "

For days Tregareth rode the shores, scanning the waves, the scent of the salt sea never out of his nostrils. Some few bits of flotsam from the *Sea Sprite* had come ashore, but this was not proof positive. However, he no longer had doubts. He drove himself, unrelenting, in his quest. Not only grief for his friend spurred him on now, but guilt as well.

"You have travelled so far, Tregareth," Amelia had said to him; "you are, yourself, that *'traveller from an antique land'* who brought back word of Ozymandias. In the East, of which you are so much enamored, and of which you have made me so much enamored—do they have love there, as we know it? Or—only lust?"

Tregareth had considered, throwing back his head. After a moment he said, "In the East they have that which is stronger than either love or lust. In the East they have *passion.*"

She considered this. She nodded. "Yes," she had said. "For love may fade, and lust must ever repel. *Passion.* Do not think that our English blood is too thin and cold for passion, Tregareth."

Now he asked himself, again and again, spurring through the sand, was it covetousness to desire a man's wife for your own—if the man were dead? Would not Shadwell himself have laughed at such squeamishness? Would not Gryphon?

He almost did not see the coast guard until the man called out to him. When he did see, and reined his horse, he still did not imagine. Then the man gestured, and Tregareth looked.

And there on the margin of the sea he saw him.

"There is no doubt of it being Shadwell, I suppose?" Gryphon asked.

Tregareth shook his head. "None. Shadwell's clothes and Shadwell's hair, in one pocket Shadwell's copy of *Hesiod,* and in another, his copy of Blake."

Gryphon shuddered He looked at a letter which he held in his hand. "From Mary," he said. He began to read.

" 'You have heard me tell that my grandmother, a Scotswoman, was reputed to have been fey, and to have visualized the Prince's defeat at Culloden before it happened. I, too, at times, have had

presentiments of future misfortunes. I had them at the time of poor Henrietta's death. But never so strong as during this Springtime did I feel the burden. The landscape and seascape I saw seemed not of this earth. My mind wandered so, as if enchanted, and oftimes I was not sure—and still am not sure—if the things I saw and did were real—or were the products of an ensorcelled mind, musing on ancient wrongs: and all the time, the waves murmuring, *Doom, Doom, Doom . . .*"

They were silent. "What shall be done with the body?" Gryphon asked. "The nearest Protestant cemetery is in Rome."

Tregareth said, "Shadwell a Protestant? If ever there lived a man who was a pagan in whole heart, body, and soul—Besides, in this weather, it is out of the question to convey the corpse to Rome."

Distressed, almost petulant, Gryphon flung out his fat hands. "But what shall we *do*?" he cried.

"He was a pagan," said Tregareth, "and shall have a pagan funeral. The Greeks knew how. And I have seen it done in India."

Gryphon began to quiver. He reached for the silver flask.

The widow received the tragic news with an agony of tears. Presently she recovered somewhat, and said, "I knew it would be so. I have had no other thought. Now he is young forever. Now," her voice trembled and fell, "*mine* forever."

They parted with a gentle embrace, she accepting Tregareth's counsel not to attend the immediate funeral. Later, he said, when a second interment would be held at Rome, if she felt stronger . . .

Tregareth's emotions, as he rode back, were mixed. In great measure his activity on Shadwell's behalf had absorbed the grief he would otherwise now be experiencing at Shadwell's death. Moreover, thoughts he had earlier suppressed rose now and had their will. Had there not been, in Shadwell's friendship for him, some measure of condescension? Had Shadwell not indicated from time to time—though less openly than Gryphon—a lack of complete belief in the stories Tregareth told of his youth in Nelson's Navy and his adventurous career as the consort of buccaneers in India?

But—sharpest of all—Shadwell was dead! And he, Tregareth, was alive! It was dreadful about the former, but it was impossible not to feel gratitude and joy in the latter. As he rode between the forest and the sea, Tregareth felt the keenness of delight in the fact that he lived and could experience all the rich pleasures of the living world.

The body had come ashore near a place called Via Vecchio. A small crowd had gathered, but the dragoons scarcely needed to hold them back. The people looked on, half fascinated, half horrified at the

strange scene, and kept crossing themselves.

Tregareth was in full, undisputed charge.

"I might have spared myself the trouble of bringing wood," he said. "See—not only is the forest there full of fallen timber, but here are all these broken spars and planks cast up on the shore."

He gave directions in loud and resonant tones. The workmen dared not resist, though they looked as if they would have mightily liked to. A pyre was soon built up, and the body lifted onto it. Tregareth heaped on more wood. One piece he glanced at, put it under his arm.

Gryphon was pale and ill at ease, but gentle little Fulke Grant did not even trust himself to stand, and remained sitting in the carriage.

"I think all is ready," Tregareth said. He cleared his throat. Hats came off in the crowd.

"Surely Shadwell's shade is watching us," he said, "as we prepare to bid farewell to his clay. Behold the verdant islands floating on the azure sea he loved so much, and which he took to his final embrace! Behold the ruined castles of the antiquity whose praises he sang in incomparable numbers, 'for the numbers came'! Behold the snowy bosoms of the ever-lofty mountain peaks! All these, Shadwell loved. Shadwell! *Vale!*"

He poured over the body a quantity of wine and oil, then took the waiting torch and thrust it under the pyre. The wood was tinder-dry and flared up directly. "*Vale,* Shadwell!" Tregareth cried again. He cast into the fire the copy of Blake which had been in the drowned poet's pocket. He tossed on a handful of salt, and the yellow flames glistened and quivered as they licked it up.

"Behold!" he exclaimed, "How peacefully the once-raging sea is now embracing the land as if in humility, as if to crave pardon! O Shadwell, thou—"

But here Gryphon interrupted him. "Tregareth, cease this mockery of our pride and vainglory," he said in a stifled, low, voice.

Tregareth, his long black hair floating on the wind in magnificent disorder, looked at him with some surprise. Then he looked over to Fulke Grant. But little Grant, still in the carriage, now had the silver flask in his hand. The only sound he made was a hiccup.

Tregareth shrugged. He tossed in a handful of frankincense. The flame mounted higher. The heat grew more intense.

"I cannot endure to remain much longer in Italy," Gryphon said. "Every valley, every brook, will cry aloud his name to me . . . We must go off together somewhere, Tregareth, you and I. For now I have no one left. America, Greece—somewhere far off." He sobbed aloud, then turned and

walked away. The fire crackled and hissed.

Tregareth stood all alone by the pyre. Slowly he took from under his arm the piece of driftwood. It seemed a portion of a ship's mast. On it were carved the initials *G.G.* He clearly called to mind that happy day, only a short while back, when Gerald, Lord Gryphon, had carved the letters. The top of the piece was all rent raggedly. But on the lower part the breach was only partly so. The rest of it—

He could envision the scene. The sudden trumpets of the storm, the terribly sudden blast of wind, the foremast crashing down before the frightful pressure of the wind-caught sails, mast and sail falling as dead weight upon the gunwales, and the ship careening and filling and then going over, going down, as the sea rushed in and the lightning served only to make the blackness deeper . . .

Tregareth ran his fingers over the smoother surface of the wood. Someone, plainly had sawn half through the mast and then hidden the cut with unbleached beeswax of the same color.

He lifted his fingers, bent his head. Despite the wash of the sea and the scouring of the sand, Tregareth could still note the scent of the wax. He thought, for just a moment, that he could even detect the scent of the soft bosom in which the wax must have rested to soften it—but this was only fancy, he knew. It need not, however, remain only fancy.

Love, he reflected, can fade; and lust must ever repel—but passion is stronger than either.

He came as close to the pyre as he could, threw in the shattered section of the mast, and watched it burn fiercely.

Then he turned and went to join the others.

●

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **EDWIN CARTER**

TITLE: ***Dangerous Game***

TYPE: Crime Story à la **Black Mask**

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The hunting trip was spoiled by rain. The hunters were bored with drinking and playing cards. Then the top man suggested a dangerous game . . . Here's a story, once started, you won't put down.*

THE HUNTING TRIP HAD GONE sour. Howard poured another shot of bourbon and wondered how to interpret the fiasco of the hunting trip as it may have affected his career. He had thought that being invited on this hunting trip with some of the top echelon of Bateson, Incorporated had augured well for his promotion to a vice-presidency. Now he was pessimistic. He felt cut off from the other three men in the cabin.

Maloney, the chief legal counsel of Bateson, Inc., and Tanner, who was Theodore Bateson's close personal friend and owned twenty per cent. of Bateson Preferred stock, were rapt up in a cut-throat gin rummy game. Bateson himself was still outside on the porch.

Howard thought that it was somehow typical that Bateson, who was both a gun buff and a safety bug, who had insisted that no gun be kept loaded in the cabin and had personally inspected them all to be sure, would sit on the porch all afternoon with a bottle of bourbon and shoot at empty beer cans.

Howard felt very lonely. The trip had begun badly and got worse. Maloney and Tanner had been reserved; Bateson had been inclined to give Howard the needle. They had seen no game on the first day, but late in the afternoon Bateson had shot a cow, deliberately, apparently feeling the need to kill something.

Howard had been a little disgusted when Bateson had calmly

sighted in on the strayed dairy cow and then potted her; but no one else had seemed bothered by it, especially since Bateson had squared it by impaling a hundred-dollar bill on each horn. Maloney had tried to persuade Bateson to dress the cow and cook steaks for supper, or at least to take the head and hide it; but Bateson had lost interest just as soon as work became involved.

They had spent the time after supper drinking bourbon and playing poker. There was considerable money in the game, but there was no big winner or big loser. During the night the rain had started and it had not stopped all day. They had spent the day sleeping and drinking and playing cards—all of them except Bateson, who had spent his day on the porch.

Finally it was too dark to see, so Bateson came into the cabin and sat down at the table, dropping the heavy revolver noisily on the table among the bottles, poker chips, cards, cigars, dirty plates and cups, gun kits, and fly-tying gear.

"I only have six cartridges left," Bateson said, carefully setting them up on end next to the pistol.

Tanner said, "I hope the game warden doesn't get you for shooting beer cans out of season."

Bateson grunted, a sort of amused grunt, picked up the revolver and twirled it on his forefinger.

Howard felt that he ought to say something. "How about a little game of chance?" It was hardly a brilliant thing to say and he was immediately sorry he had said it.

Bateson chuckled sarcastically. "Yeah, how about it?"

Howard began to sort and stack the poker chips.

Bateson suddenly swept the poker chips off the table and banged the table with his fist. "Yeah!" he roared. "How *about* a little game of chance? How about a ripsnorting game of Old Maid?"

"Have you got one in mind?" Tanner said.

Bateson ignored this and flung the revolver down in the middle of the table. "How about a little Russian roulette, gentlemen?"

"You're drunk," Tanner said calmly. "Sit down."

"Go take a running jump at yourself," Bateson said with equal calmness. He picked up a cartridge and swung the cylinder of the revolver out; he held the cartridge over the cylinder. "Who wants to go first?"

"Oh, don't be an ass," Maloney said.

"Boy, what a bunch of sissies," Bateson said.

He inserted the cartridge, pushed the cylinder into the frame, spun the cylinder, then raised the revolver to his temple—and pulled the trigger.

There was only a click.

"That was a damn silly thing to do," Tanner said.

"No sillier than any game of

chance," Bateson replied. "There's no real point to gambling unless there's something at stake—something big. If you can afford to lose there's no kick to it."

"Your head's not a beer can," Maloney said.

"I agree, *my* head certainly isn't," Bateson said. "But I don't know about your heads."

Tanner said, "I know what you lose, but what do you *win?*"

Bateson said, "All the players put in an equal ante and the survivor collects the pot."

"There ought to be more to it than that," Tanner said. "The man with the gun at his head ought to have the right to raise the bet. And if anyone drops out he loses his ante."

"I'll start with a hundred," Bateson said.

He quickly spun the cylinder, put the revolver to his head—and snapped the trigger.

There was the same empty click.

"You never know when to quit, do you?" Tanner said.

"He's going to find out soon enough if he keeps pushing his luck," Maloney said.

"Where's the rest of the pot?" Bateson said grimly. "I can't seem to find it with all this junk on the table."

"I don't think you're going to find it," Tanner said.

"Shut up and deal—er, spin."

Bateson shoved the gun in front of Tanner.

Tanner picked it up and examined it carefully. "A .357 Magnum, eh? Man, if you had shot Old Bossy with this, you'd have had a quarter ton of hamburger on your hands."

Bateson said, "Spare us the lesson in ballistics. What I want to see is some money in the pot. A hundred is the ante, gentlemen."

Each of the others put a hundred dollars in the pot. Somehow Howard found it to be so curiously logical a part of the dreamishness of the events that he anted automatically.

"I think I'll raise that by another hundred," Tanner said and put a second hundred-dollar bill on the pile. The others did the same.

Maloney said, "Why don't we leave the pot alone—let it grow with each spin—until the game is over."

"When *is* the game over?" Howard thought that his voice sounded unusually shrill.

Bateson said harshly, "Let's say the game's over as soon as somebody chickens out—or loses . . . Get on with it, Tanner."

Tanner put the gun down and said firmly, "I think we'd better make it a rule that the man with the gun can take his own sweet time about playing and that he's not to be heckled by any of the players."

Bateson growled a reluctant affirmation.

Tanner unhurriedly spun the cylinder, raised the revolver to his head—and pulled the trigger.

Again there was the hollow click.

"Next!" he said, and tossed the gun at Maloney.

Maloney muffed it and had to retrieve the gun from the floor. Holding it lightly by the cylinder, he bounced it up and down in his palm, like a baseball pitcher getting ready to throw. He said softly, "I wonder if anyone has ever worked out the odds on this thing."

Before he could explain, Bateson opened a fresh bottle of bourbon and took a long pull. "The odds are simple enough. There are five empty chambers and one chamber with a cartridge in it. So there's one chance out of six of the firing pin hitting the cartridge."

"Ah, but you said *chance,* old boy." Maloney took up the mathematical analysis. "There's a lot of difference between one chance out of six and *odds* of five to one. It may be merely a semantic difference, but I am not altogether sure. Now this five-to-one business—does that mean five to one *in* your favor, or *against* you? I have wondered about this before." He paused to light a fresh cigar. "What effect does the extra weight of the cartridge have on the point at which the cylinder stops spinning? Does the weight of the cartridge tend to make the cylinder stop nearer or farther from the spot where the cartridge will come under the hammer?"

As he talked, Maloney kept spinning the cylinder. "Does it make any difference in which *direction* you spin the cylinder—from right to left? In some makes of revolver the cylinder rotates clockwise as it goes into the firing cycle, in other makes it rotates counter-clockwise. Should you spin the cylinder lightly or forcefully? Does it matter whether you spin the cylinder with the gate open or closed?"

Maloney opened "the gate" and spun the cylinder, then closed the gate and spun the cylinder. "And what about *position*—the way you hold the gun?" He held it steadily, pointing at Bateson, who merely inclined his head out of the line of fire. "Suppose you spin it with the barrel pointing at the floor or at the ceiling?" He pointed it in both directions, spinning the cylinder. "What if you had a revolver that doesn't break or swing open, like some of the old single-action jobs? And then there is a friction factor —*this* cylinder feels stiff, but I have handled other guns that had cylinders which spun very freely."

Tanner said sarcastically, "It's certainly easy to see why you're a successful lawyer. After ten minutes of your bull a jury would convict the judge."

Maloney continued in his lecturing manner. "It seems to me that we are dealing with a complex matter, and as there are a number of factors obviously deserving of consideration, we ought to have a mathematician work it out for us."

"Well, we don't have a mathematician," Bateson snapped.

"Very true," Maloney said, with the air of ending a summation. He spun the cylinder, pointed the gun at his temple—and pulled the trigger.

Again there was the sound that meant the hammer had fallen on an empty chamber.

It was now Howard's turn.

At first Howard had looked on the game as some sort of dream. Then the dream had become a nightmare—horrible, but still unreal. But now the nightmare had become reality.

No, it was not a dream. He was wide-awake and sick-sober.

Under the table he wiped his sweating hands on his trousers. He picked up the gun. The weight of it surprised him. He opened it and looked at the five empty chambers and the gleaming end of the cartridge. He turned the cylinder—Maloney was right, it did seem a bit stiff. He closed the gate, turned the cylinder slowly, and was startled by the little clicking that the ratchet made as the cylinder revolved—he had heard that before when the others had had their turns, but then he had not been really aware of it; now the clicking seemed unnecessarily loud.

He tried to remember what Maloney had said about the way you spun the cylinder; but he could not think clearly—there were so *many* factors. He thought of something else, something no one had mentioned—the law of averages. The cylinder had been twirled and the trigger already pulled three—no, four times. Did that mean that the law of averages was about to catch up with him? That he had less chance of winning than the men who had gone before him? Or did a new law of averages begin to operate each time the gun changed hands?

One out of six, five to one. What difference did all this jumble of "factors" and mathematical statistics make anyhow?

It was insane. They were all drunk. He thought of what Maloney had said about the cow and the hamburger. They were all crazy. This was a completely mad thing to do. And he decided he wasn't going to do it.

He looked at the faces of the other men: Bateson's was tight and stern, his lips compressed; Maloney's was smooth and watchful, his eyes gleaming; Tanner's was blurred and bloated, his mouth moist; but they all were waiting faces—waiting for him to blow his brains out.

Howard could see Bateson's thin lips moving. He heard no sound but he knew what the word was—"Chicken." He was dead—he was just as dead as if he had pulled the trigger and had spattered blood and brain and bone all over the cabin. He would never get that promotion, he would be frozen out of the company, he had had it—he was dead, finished, done for.

Then suddenly Howard spun the cylinder as hard as he could, defiantly, thrust the muzzle against his head—and pulled the trigger.

The hammer clicked on an empty chamber.

Howard could not believe it.

Relief was almost a physical shock. The world seemed to have shrunk to the exclusion of everything but himself and the gun. Call him "chicken," would he!

Again Howard spun the cylinder, put the gun to his head, and squeezed the trigger. This time the hammer did not make the empty click he had learned to recognize.

This time it made a different click.

Puzzled, Howard opened the gun. There was a neat indentation in the primer of the cartridge. The hammer had hit it, but the cartridge had not fired.

"It's a dud," Howard said. "It didn't go off."

"Talk about horseshoes!" Tanner exclaimed. "This boy was born wearing them. I bet that wouldn't happen again in a thousand times. Thousand-to-one shot."

"More like ten thousand to one," Maloney said.

Something in their voices made Howard look up at them. There was also something strange in their faces.

He ejected the cartridge and examined it. There were scratches or dents on the lead nose. He snatched the five other cartridges from the table. They all had the same marks on the lead. Somehow they felt light, too, lighter than they should be. Someone had pulled the slugs out of all six cartridges, emptied the powder, and put the slugs back.

Howard looked at the three men. In another second they were going to laugh, going to laugh . . .

He put his hand into his jacket pocket—the fully-loaded 11-shot clip for the .22 automatic rifle was still there from the day before. The gun rack was by the door and he was between them and the gun rack . . .

The next day, a farmer searching for a missing cow stopped at the cabin. There were three corpses on the floor. Howard was sitting at the table, spinning the cylinder of a revolver, putting it to his head, and pulling the trigger. The table top was covered with his tally marks.

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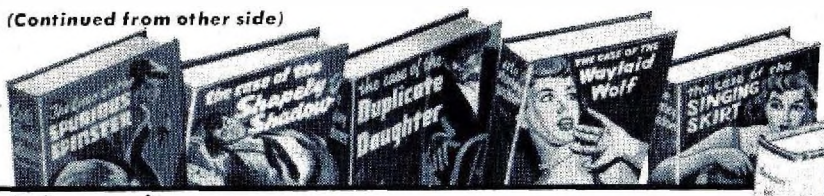

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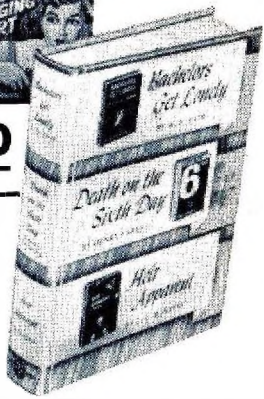

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