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February, 1949

The Jack of Diamonds

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Q. PATRICK

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK, *Publisher* • ELLERY QUEEN, *Editor*

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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THE PLEASURE OF YOUR COMPANY

"Mr. Theodore Frensham Vanderloon requests the pleasure of your company at Chesham Grove on Saturday and Sunday, February 13th and 14th . . ." Thus began the invitation which was sent by special delivery to six people — to an opera singer, to a British turfman, to a post-debutante who loved to play bridge, to a playboy, to a Judge, and to a Baroness who ran a Fifth Avenue millinery shop. Needless to warn you, these six people were selected with scrupulous discrimination — these six and no others, out of six million New Yorkers. Each envelope containing an invitation had "Strictly Personal" written on the outside — and, believe us, Mr. Vanderloon was not fooling. Nor was he fooling when, in meticulous, ornate capitals, he added one of the most amazing explanations ever written, baldly and boldly, at the end of a polite and civilized invitation. But we will not spoil your own discovery of Mr. Vanderloon's exquisitely intimate and unconventional request . . .

So you find, at the very outset, all the ingredients of the most classic of criminological situations: a weekend party; six specially picked guests and a host with a diabolical sense of humor; an isolated and remote estate in the Berkshires. Nor will it surprise you in the least to learn, as the tale progresses, that a storm cuts the estate off from civilization, marooning the group as effectively as if they were on a desert isle; that all the motor cars are out of commission; that the roads are impassable; that the electricity fails; that the telephone (among other things) is dead. The classic pattern — and what a joy it is to revel in this particular classic pattern when it is in the hands of master craftsmen like Q. Patrick! For we should warn you also that Q. Patrick will not fail you: the time-honored ingredients are all here — but the authors have given them a new meaning, in both the murderous and the manhunting senses. You know who is going to be murdered — or do you? You know who is going to be the detective — or do you? You know what is going to happen next — or do you?

We almost forgot: there is also a butler — Bowles — who constantly reassures you that he will "see to everything, sir." Bowles is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent; you know just where he fits into the scheme of things — or do you?

Beware, dear reader, of finesse and ingenuity . . .

"The Jack of Diamonds" was originally intended as a mystery play,

deliberately cast in the classic mold so suitable for stage presentation. As an experiment the authors decided to write it as a novelette first — to see if it would come off. Then, alas, other stories kept claiming attention, and the play was never written. A British actress, Beatrix Thompson, also saw the theatrical possibilities. She made a dramatic version of the novelette and this tottered around the fringes of the London Theatre for a while, boasting a most distinguished cast; but somehow the play never reached the West End. And still more stories kept intervening.

Q. Patrick still thinks the plot of "The Jack of Diamonds" is pure theatre, that it would make an excellent play. Indeed, the basic situation, with all its twists and turnings, is still one of Q. Patrick's favorite conceptions. What do you think? Can you see the events unfolding in the living-room of Chesham Grove, with the lawns and lake dimly visible through the windows at the rear of the stage, and the storm outside a Greek chorus backdropping the desperate maneuvres and the even more desperate counter-maneuvres?

Snuggle in an easy chair, or prop yourself comfortably in bed — Messrs. Vanderloon, Patrick, and Queen request the pleasure of your company . . .

THE JACK OF DIAMONDS

by Q. PATRICK

THE six invitations were sent by special delivery. The wording of each was exactly the same, and all the envelopes had "Strictly Personal" written on the outside in the exquisite handwriting of Theodore Vanderloon.

Each of the six people to whom they were addressed had met Theodore Vanderloon during one or another of his erratic sallies into New York society. They knew him to be rich, eccentric, and the author of an occasional volume of quasiphilosophical reflections. They knew him to belong to one of Manhattan's oldest families. They knew also that he had long ago shut up the old Vanderloon mansion on Park Avenue and was living in almost complete seclusion on his remote estate in the Berkshires. But not one of those widely differing persons could have called Theodore Vanderloon an intimate friend. Certainly none of them could have expected so intimate — and so unconventional — an invitation. . . .

Katharine La Motte, who was to sing Madame Butterfly at the Metropolitan Opera House that evening, was the first of the six to receive Vanderloon's formal note. She had

just stepped out of her verbena-scented bath and looked far more like the Aphrodite of Cnidus than the popular conception of an opera singer. As she reached for a rough towel bathrobe, she started to sing with careless perfection.

"Special delivery, Miss La Motte." Her maid handed her the letter.

America's operatic challenge to Europe took the envelope between a damp finger and thumb and opened it unconcernedly. As she read, the Puccini aria soared to high C, hung there a moment — and collapsed. Her smoke-gray eyes clouded. Slowly her fingers crushed the note.

"Cancel all engagements for the weekend," she said to her maid. "I'm going to the country tomorrow."

"But, Miss La Motte, there's the reception at Mrs. Dufrayne's. And then the rehearsal . . . !"

"Cancel them." The tone was abrupt, final. "And you can have the weekend off, Marie. I won't be taking you."

Katharine La Motte drew the bathrobe more closely around her superb young body and moved into the bedroom. With a fierce, almost triumphant gesture, she struck a match and held the flame to a corner of the crumpled letter. The creamy paper grew black and limp. It slipped at length from her fingers, twisting and curling to the floor.

Even before the flame had burned itself out, Katharine La Motte thrust forward her naked foot and ground the ashes until they were nothing more than a gray smudge in the pattern of her thick Persian carpet. . . .

Sir Henry Bentley (Bart.) drank soberly and to schedule. He was fingering his eleven A.M. Scotch and soda at the New York Turf Club while he leisurely turned the pages of the latest reports from his private stables in Maryland and Newmarket.

"Special delivery, Sir Henry."

A waiter handed him a square envelope encrusted with the Vanderloon coat of arms.

As the thirty-four-year-old baronet read through the strange invitation, his plain, rather attractive face lengthened and went grim. Then the flash of steel in his eyes changed to a twinkle. He gulped the rest of his whisky and scribbled Vanderloon's name on the back of the envelope.

"Waiter, send a wire to that address." He tossed a five-dollar bill across the table and then, very deliberately, tore the letter into tiny fragments. "Bring me a double Scotch. Make it smart, man."

"Very good, Sir Henry. And the message?"

"Just the one word — Willingly."

The twinkle still lingered in Sir Henry's eyes as he gazed out of the window at the icicles hanging from the roofs opposite. "And just the weather for it," he murmured. . . .

At society's smartest bridge club, Libby Hunt Farley, post-debutante, took a last over-optimistic look at her hand and went to little slam in spades.

In the intoxication of that moment she forgot that she was playing for stakes too high for her; that she had lost several hundred dollars in the last few hours; and that her all-absorbing craze for bridge was strewing her I. O. U.'s among the more expensive clubwomen of New York as thick as the frost on the ground outside. She hardly saw the letter from Theodore Vanderloon when it was brought to her.

"Special delivery, Miss Farley."

Libby Hunt's fingers moved absently to open the envelope. But when she glanced at its contents her much-photographed eyes widened with sudden fear. The coated paper crackled as she crushed it swiftly.

While she played the hand her fingers were trembling with an emotion which, for the first time in her card-playing life, had nothing to do with the game. She made a miscalculation of her opponents' trumps and went three down on her contract.

"Sorry, partner," she said mechanically. "And, by the way, you'll have to count me out at Glenda's tomorrow."

"But, Libby Hunt, darling! I thought nothing short of murder would keep you from your weekend bridge."

Libby Hunt Farley started to deal the cards. "Nothing short of murder!" she echoed with a laugh which was a shade too high. . . .

A chromium coffee percolator gurgled in the penthouse apartment of John Derwood Thring III. The grandson of the Pious Tract & Treatise Publishing Company gazed at his breakfast-lunch with jaundiced disgust. Opposite him sat a girl with a hard, pink face and hard, yellow hair. Johnnie was trying to remember at exactly what stage of the night before he had met her.

The Philippine butler, bringing Vanderloon's letter on a silver tray, interrupted the incoherence of his thoughts: "Special delivery, sir."

John Derwood Thring took the envelope and glanced blearily at its contents. He blinked once or twice, passed a hand across his handsome young face, and whistled softly.

"Let's have a look, Johnnie?" The girl leaned across the breakfast table and snatched playfully for the letter.

"No, you don't." Instantly John Thring thrust the envelope into the pocket of his bathrobe. . . .

"Special delivery, Judge."

Judge Homer Rock sat alone in his office, staring with pouched, gloomy eyes at Theodore Vanderloon's invitation. When he came to the end of the page the color in his fruity cheeks changed from strawberry to plum.

"Preposterous! What on earth . . . !"

He rose heavily, lumbered across the room, and flung the letter into the fire. While it crumpled into ashes he glanced quickly, furtively around him. Then he bellowed for his secretary.

"I intend to be — er — unwell on Saturday and Sunday, Miss Potts. I

shall not go to court and I can see nobody." He paused, adding with unnecessary truculence, "And buy me some ice skates when you go out this noon." . . .

In her expensive millinery shop on Fifth Avenue the Baroness Lili Tresckow gave a rakish tilt to the brim of a chic new model.

"Special delivery, Madame."

As she read, the Baroness's aristocratic face relaxed into a smile.

"But it is so comic and so like Theo Vanderloon with his practical jokes," she whispered. "I must of course go."

The assistant removed a pin from her mouth and looked a trifle apprehensive. "Madame is going somewhere?"

"I go tomorrow to the country." . . .

And Theodore Vanderloon's invitation was certainly original, although the Baroness, who knew him best, was perhaps the only one among those invited to have deliberately overlooked its sinister note.

The letter which had called into play such varying emotions read:

> Mr. Theodore Frensham Vanderloon requests the pleasure of your company at Chesham Grove on Saturday and Sunday, February 13th and 14th. A car will meet the train which leaves the New York railroad station at 10:05 A.M. and arrives at Ashford at 12:48 P.M. Mr. Vanderloon further requests you to bring skates, but no automobiles, no valets, and no personal maids.

But the invitation did not end there. At the foot of each note, written in meticulous, ornate capitals, had been added the phrase:

TO MEET AND TO MURDER
MR. JOSEPH STARNER

At one o'clock the next day Theodore Vanderloon was standing at a bay window in the large living-room of Chesham Grove waiting for his guests. The weather bureau had forecast a storm before evening and already there were signs of it in the sky. The whole horizon east of the Vanderloon estate gleamed a dark mother-of-pearl and the unbroken clouds were gravid with the threat of heavy snow to come.

Theodore Vanderloon was gazing thoughtfully over the lawns at the large ornamental lake, where the ice shone smooth and firm. In the wan light his elusive profile, with its grave eyes and mocking mouth, seemed that of an Etruscan faun rather than of a Twentieth Century American.

"You're sure you'll be able to manage single-handed, Bowles?"

"Yes, sir." The man who had been butler, philosopher, and friend in the Vanderloon family for more than twenty years bent in artistic absorption over a large silver tray of canapés.

"And the ice on the lake, Bowles? It will be — er — dangerous in the right place?"

"You can rely on me, sir."

Vanderloon glanced around him with a flickering smile. The wide room was charged with an atmosphere

of well-groomed hospitality. A pile of blazing pine logs spat and crackled on the hearth.

In the distance a car engine throbbed. Gradually the sound grew nearer, steadier. The automobile drew up outside, crunching the brittle ice of the drive. As Bowles went toward the front door, Vanderloon said quietly, "Tell the chauffeur to meet Mr. Starner on the next train. Then he can take the car to Ashford and have it overhauled. We won't need him again today."

As his guests entered the house Theodore Vanderloon moved forward to greet them.

"My dear Lili" — he raised the Baroness's fingers to his lips — "only you could have designed that delightful hat."

He took Libby Hunt Farley's small, nervous hand in his. "Libby Hunt, my dear, still as fascinating and as intricate as the cards you play so well. . . . And Miss La Motte, the only nightingale who looks beautiful by day and sings beautifully by night."

As Bowles led the ladies upstairs Vanderloon turned his attention to the men: "Well, Sir Henry, the Turf Club's loss is my gain. . . . And Judge Rock — at last I shall have a guest who will appreciate my 1896 port. . . . Hi, there, Johnnie Thring, you young scalawag!"

A few minutes later all the guests were gathered in the living-room. The conversation was brittle, sparkling as the champagne cocktails, and yet the six guests seemed a little too eager in their nonchalance. Nor could they prevent their eyes from straying occasionally to the door, where at any moment they expected to see Joseph Starner, the man whom they had all met so often — but never before socially.

Theodore Vanderloon moved to the hearth and glanced around him with the ghost of a smile on his sensitive mouth.

"Before our guest of honor arrives," he began, "I feel I should apologize for the somewhat unusual phraseology of my invitation. But then, Mr. Starner is an unusual man, as you all know."

Katharine La Motte was leaning forward with a vehemence that contrasted strikingly with the easy perfection of her clothes. "But I don't understand," she said swiftly. "What — what made you think I knew this man Starner?"

"Do not be alarmed, Miss La Motte. None of us would care to acknowledge the gentleman in public, but here you are among friends and fellow sufferers."

"You mean," whispered Libby Hunt breathlessly, "you mean you are all in the same mess as . . . ?"

"Yes, my dear Libby Hunt, we are all in the same mess." Vanderloon fingered the clouded crystal of his cocktail glass. "I am going to be frank with you. For the past two years Joseph Starner has been blackmailing me. He is known in New York merely as a successful, if rather

unscrupulous, private financier. But he is even more successful as a connoisseur in the indiscretions of others. In fact, his talent in that direction amounts almost to genius. I will not bore you with the details of how I came upon the information, but I have discovered that you, like myself, are all victims of his genius. It is in this capacity that I have invited you here today."

Judge Homer Rock's ripe cheeks had turned a pimento red.

He glanced apprehensively at the butler.

"Don't mind Bowles, Judge," put in Vanderloon. "He is completely in my confidence. In fact, it was through him that I found out about Starner's interest in yourselves."

The silence was uneasy. John Derwood Thring was the first to break it. He held out his glass for another cocktail and grinned. "Well, Theo, if you can be frank, so can I. I'll admit that Starner's been fleecing me for a long time. I'm in a hell of a hole. But what are you going to do about it?"

"You read my invitation?" Vanderloon asked. "It was meant in all seriousness. I knew you were sophisticated and — er — unprejudiced people. I thought that the idea I hinted at might appeal to you as much as it did to me."

Once again silence — a silence half of excitement, half of nervous indecision. The Baroness, who was curled in a chair like an exquisite white cat, lit a long Russian cigarette. Sir Henry Bentley glanced at his watch, gulped the third cocktail on his schedule, and said slowly:

"Speaking for myself, Vanderloon, we're none of us squeamish. If we were we wouldn't have come. As it is, we're here."

"Good. Then I can speak freely." Vanderloon's fragile silhouette glowed in the flushed circle of firelight. "For some time I have been thinking very seriously about Joseph Starner. He lives on the indiscretions — or, rather, the misfortunes — of other people, and his demands on those who support him are growing increasingly insistent. It is not merely a question of money. He takes his ample share of that, but, from me at least, he takes a great deal more than cash." Vanderloon's voice faltered infinitesimally. "We all of us have hidden somewhere in our pasts something which is best forgotten. Perhaps it is something we ourselves have done in a moment of weakness. Perhaps it is the — the error of someone very close to us. On those particular points we are helpless, defenseless. No one has a right to do what Starner is doing to us."

His thin shoulders were erect now, firm as the steel in his voice. "Obviously, it is impossible for us to obtain legal protection against him."

The Baroness Lili Tresckow gave a tiny shrug. Behind the blue smoke from her Russian cigarette her face was pale. "*To meet and to murder!*" she whispered.

Vanderloon's eyes narrowed. "You have put your finger on the one place where I have been inaccurate, Lili.

On your invitation I wrote the word *murder*, but one could no more murder the Starners of this world than one could murder a rat or a roach. The term I should have employed was *exterminate*."

His words slipped quietly through the warm atmosphere of the room. Yet behind the casualness of his voice there lurked a strange force. His guests were aware of it, aware of the unsuspected strength of purpose in this man whom they had always thought of as a mere visionary, a philosopher who published his charming theories on life, but who himself took no part in the realities of existence.

Sir Henry's English voice cut through the silence. His lean face creased into a grim smile. "But, murder or extermination — isn't it damn risky, Vanderloon?"

"Oh, no." His host plucked a petal from one of the jonquils on the mantel and sent it floating to the floor. "This is not going to be murder in the clumsy, conventional sense of the word. There will be no lethal weapon, no complications with the police. Starner is going to die this evening, but when he meets his death it will be by an unfortunate accident.

"You mustn't think that I asked you here to do something which I was afraid to do alone. I am perfectly prepared to kill Starner myself. I think that any one of us would be. But murder implies motives and, sooner or later, motives would involve us all. An accident is far safer, far more satisfactory. And an accident can be convincing only when there are several witnesses."

"This — this is disgraceful!" Judge Homer Rock, who for some time had been listening in speechless indignation, now rose heavily. "I don't know what sort of a person you suppose I am, Vanderloon, but I'm going to tell you right here and now that I think this is the most disgusting, the most degenerate business I've ever come across in my whole life!"

He pressed a silk handkerchief to the damp scarlet of his forehead. "I accepted your invitation as some sort of practical joke. I am going straight back to New York to put the matter in the hands of the police."

"Just a moment, Judge," put in Vanderloon quietly. "You seem to forget that Bowles and I happen to know something of what Joseph Starner — er — knows about each one of you."

"Nonsense!" The Judge's fury had reached a point bordering upon incoherence. "This Starner — who is this Starner? I've got nothing to do with him."

"There again, Judge, I think you're mistaken." Vanderloon turned to the butler. "There *was* a little matter between the Judge and Mr. Starner, wasn't there, Bowles?"

The butler was untwisting wire from the neck of a champagne bottle. "As I recall, sir, it concerned a certain Falcon Distillers Company. It seems that the Falcon Distillers Company supplied alcohol which is rather far

below government standards. They found it wise to have a judicial gentleman on their payroll, sir."

"Have another cocktail, Judge," murmured Vanderloon. "I can assure you that this champagne is not a product of the Falcon Company."

Impatiently the Judge waved away the cocktail that Bowles offered him. His puffy fingers fumbled a tablet from his vest pocket. As he slipped it between his lips he held his left hand to his side.

"Go on, Vanderloon. Go on with this farce. But as a man and as a lawyer I can tell you that you'll never trap Starner. He has more shrewdness, more cunning, than the rest of you put together. And before you're through you'll find yourselves in a worse predicament than you are now."

Ponderously he sank into his chair. Something in his tone as he had uttered those words had momentarily lent him the dignity of a prophet. It had gone now. He was just an old, tired, and rather ill-looking man.

"If there are no other objections," murmured Vanderloon, "I will do as the Judge suggests and continue with this — er — farce. I asked you all to bring skates. Mr. Starner is bringing some too. He tells me that skating is his favorite form of exercise. As soon as it gets dark I am going to suggest an hour or two on the lake. The ice is at least four inches thick. It is perfectly safe — safe, that is, for everyone except Mr. Starner."

Vanderloon crossed to the window and pointed over frosty lawns toward the gray expanse of the lake.

"You see that post near the eastern bank?" said Vanderloon. "Immediately to the left of it Bowles is going to saw a large, irregular hole in the ice. He will leave the ice block in place and it will be impossible to tell in the darkness that there is danger." Once again there was a hard, menacing quality in his voice. "Should anyone happen to be skating with Mr. Starner at that particular spot, it would not be difficult to take hold of the post with one hand and give a gentle push with the other. Even one of the ladies could do it.

"The water," continued Vanderloon quietly, "is eight feet deep. When the loose block collapses beneath him, the impetus of Mr. Starner's skates should send him forward — under the ice."

"Smart," muttered Johnnie Thring. "But aren't the police going to do a bit of deducing about that hole?"

"I don't think so. As I have said, Bowles is going to make it irregular, jagged. With the ice only four inches thick, it is perfectly possible that some spots should be thinner than others. Mr. Starner is a heavy man. What could be more reasonable than that his extra weight should break the ice? Besides, there will be the rest of us to confirm the fact that it was an accident. It is difficult to overlook the unanimous evidence of seven impartial witnesses."

"You have thought well, Theo." The Baroness's delicate face looked

older, unusually solemn. "Every leetle detail, it is so carefully planned. But to kill a man, however much one may wish him dead — it is easy to speak of but difficult in the doing. One has scruples, fears . . ."

"Naturally we all shrink from the idea of making ourselves murderers, Lili." Vanderloon moved back to the hearth and held his pale hands to the fire. "But I think we shall feel different out there on the ice. There are Japanese lanterns along the nearer bank, but the east end will be in complete darkness. Starner will doubtless be eager to have a few moments alone with all of us — especially those whose payments are perhaps overdue. And in the darkness — none of us need ever know who it actually was that —"

"But it all seems so cold-blooded," broke in Libby Hunt in a soft, strangely stifled voice. "Besides, things don't always work out the way you expect."

"Then we have plenty of time to put them right. Ashford, the nearest town, is five miles away. The other servants have developed — er — sick relatives or something, and both my cars have developed engine trouble. The paper forecasts a storm. In the past this place has been cut off from civilization for several days. You can see how easily it could be cut off again — if necessary."

As Vanderloon stopped speaking a clock in the outer hall struck two. Already the light had begun to fade from the room. Shadows slipped out of corners, sliding darkly toward the windows. Then, far away, sounded the faint purring of an automobile.

Vanderloon crossed to the window, gazing over the somber stretch of parkland. "He's coming," he said quietly.

Theodore Vanderloon crossed the room and stood by the door. He gave the impression of any ordinary host preparing to welcome any ordinary guest. But the thoughts in his mind were far from ordinary. Indeed, he, himself, was a little startled at the chaotic intensity of his feelings. This was his first opportunity to meet on his own ground the man he had learned to hate and despise as a symbol of the grasping, insensitive world.

Vanderloon felt the pulses at his temples quickening. And then, close to him in the shadows by the doorway, loomed the large figure of Joseph Starner.

"This is indeed a pleasure, Vanderloon."

In the light from the distant fire, the pink globe of Starner's face and head shone with a cherubic freshness; his massive body exuded a specious benevolence.

He had moved forward and was enveloping Vanderloon's hand in the damp plumpness of his own. "I hope I have not imposed upon your hospitality," he murmured. "I have taken the liberty . . . a little surprise . . ."

There was an almost imperceptible rustle in the shadows behind him. And then, as Vanderloon realized the

nature of Starner's surprise, he felt a sudden alarm. In a flash he foresaw the elaborate structure of his plan crumbling.

The movement in the obscurity had materialized now into a human form — wraithlike and unreal, yet real enough to be a tangible menace. Consciously or unconsciously, Joseph Starner had provided himself with the only really effective weapon of defense. *He had not come alone.*

"Carmelite is so fond of night skating." Once again Starner's voice sounded, smooth and silky. "I did not have the heart to leave her in New York."

It was the girl's aloof composure as she moved from the shadows which forced Vanderloon to realize his social obligations. Even in that oblique illumination he was struck by her almost breath-taking beauty. Her exquisitely molded face with its dark eyes and grave mouth had the serenity of an early Italian madonna. Her dress was plain, conventional, the blue-black hair parted austerely and drawn back behind her ears. She seemed the epitome of cloistered innocence — a fantastic contrast to the sleek, middle-aged man at her side.

"Mr. Vanderloon — my daughter, Carmelite."

"How very delightful!" Vanderloon took the girl's hand. "I had no idea you were married, Starner."

"Married!" The blackmailer raised a quizzical eyebrow. "No, no; Carmelite is my daughter only by adoption. She has just graduated from finishing school in Paris, and now I am anxious for her to meet the best people here."

"I am flattered to have your daughter start her career in my house. At least, I can guarantee the charming people." With a slight bow Vanderloon led the way through the long room. For the past few minutes the rest of the party had been chatting with over-elaborated nonchalance. Only Judge Rock remained in stony silence. As Vanderloon made the introductions, he was uneasily conscious of the artificial cordiality with which Carmelite Starner was received.

In contrast Joseph Starner seemed the essence of unruffled composure. He moved after his host, according to each guest in turn a pontifical bow. The inscrutable mask of his face gave no hint of surprise or suspicion. His only visible emotion was one of bland, paternal pride at the involuntary admiration which his daughter's beauty had aroused. He laid a possessive hand on the girl's shoulder and looked around the room. His pale blue eyes seemed to envelop the whole party in a comprehensive embrace. "This is particularly delightful for me, as I find myself surrounded by good friends — such *very* good friends."

Starner's enigmatic words still rang mockingly in Katharine La Motte's ears when, some time later, she stood alone in the dimly lit hall, the first of Vanderloon's guests to be ready for the skating party.

As she waited for the others by the window in her vivid scarlet costume,

she suggested a modern Valkyrie or a brooding Clytemnestra. She was peering intently across the twilit parkland toward the lake, where a slight fogginess gave warning of the impending storm. It was as though those smoke-gray eyes were straining to see to the farthest limits of the lake.

Of all the strikingly different types whom Vanderloon had selected as his guests, this young operatic star had perhaps been the most stirred and excited by his scheme. A farm girl from the West who had gained recognition for her talents by sheer forcefulness and hard work, Katharine La Motte, at twenty-nine, had discarded most of youth's softer illusions. Despite her newly acquired success she still thought of life as a continuous battle. At present she was winning. The spoils of fame were hers for the taking. But, even now, Joseph Starner with a single word could send everything crashing around her.

She showed no sign of wavering at the unexpected arrival of Carmelite Starner. She recognized the girl's presence as a menace, but it was also a challenge. Throughout lunch and the subsequent period of strained sociabilities, Katharine La Motte had remained arrogantly apart. She had been impatient for the darkness, impatient, also, for an opportunity to be alone with her host. She was eager to make certain that, in spite of this link with the outside world, he had remained as firm of purpose as herself.

"The first ready, Miss La Motte. You're setting us all a good example."

The opera star spun round, to see at her side Theodore Vanderloon in an old shooting jacket, with his skates slung over his arm.

"The girl?" she asked impulsively. "You think she's part of his blackmail game?"

"I hate to be cynical about a Botticelli angel, but Starner's hardly the man to invest in youth and innocence without expecting cash dividends in return."

"But what are we going to do?" put in Katharine La Motte urgently.

"Oh, don't let the exquisite Carmelite worry you. I must confess she gave me some bad moments at first. But now I have made suitable arrangements for her."

"You mean . . . ?"

"I mean Sir Henry. He is rich, titled, and, apparently, willing — an intriguing bait for a female blackmailer, however neophyte. I've asked him to monopolize her attention, especially while we are on the ice. If he is sufficiently captivating and we are sufficiently careful, we may even turn Carmelite into an asset. A daughter on the party should make an accident sound much more convincing."

Some of the others had joined them now: the Baroness, superbly Viennese with a gray fur cap and a gray muff; Johnnie Thring with a black and white checked scarf tied carelessly beneath his impudent young face. They both seemed gay, almost frivolous.

"Where is she — that Starner girl?"

Katharine La Motte's gaze turned instinctively to Sir Henry, who had just come up.

"She'll be down directly." A slight smile flickered over the Englishman's plain, rather attractive face. "And don't worry, Miss La Motte, I'll take dashed good care of her."

There was a momentary silence — a silence which was suddenly broken by the sound of rapid footsteps on the stairs.

They all turned, to see Libby Hunt Farley. She was running wildly down the richly carpeted staircase — running as though to escape some phantom pursuer. As she saw them she checked herself. Then, with a little cry, she moved dazedly to Vanderloon and clutched his arm.

"*He knows*," she breathed, with a swift, almost furtive glance over her shoulder.

As the others gazed at her in silence, they all felt themselves invaded by something of her panic.

"It's Judge Rock." Libby Hunt's hands fell helplessly at her sides. "I passed Starner's room on the way down. The Judge is in there. I — I didn't hear everything he said. But he's telling — telling Starner about the ice."

It was as though a chill had descended on the dimly lit hall.

"I heard the Judge say, 'They're planning to kill you . . . the post at the far edge of the lake.'" Libby Hunt's voice was trembling, almost incoherent. "Don't you see? He knows."

She broke off abruptly. There were footsteps on the landing above. Almost as one the little group swung round to face the stairs, where, slowly, ponderously, Rock and Starner descended toward them. They both wore leather sporting jackets, with their skates slung over their arms.

For the first time that day Vanderloon's guests had no small talk, no sophisticated nonchalance to cover the acute embarrassment of the moment.

Starner had reached the bottom step. He paused there, smiling at them benignly, like an indulgent teacher who had surprised his pupils in mischief and was willing to forgive them. Slowly his gaze focused on the English baronet. "I understand you are going to be kind enough to wait for my daughter, Sir Henry."

He turned serenely to his host. "I am glad you're ready for the ice, Vanderloon. The Judge and I were afraid the coming storm might make you change your plans."

For a moment the others looked at each other in amazement and indecision. Then, one by one, they passed out into the darkness of the February evening.

Only Sir Henry remained behind. As he stood looking after them, he heard Starner's voice outside, brisk and cheerful.

As Starner's voice trailed in through the open door, Sir Henry felt a reluctant admiration for this man whom he had every reason to wish dead. His

admiration, however, was tinged with perplexity. Starner knew of their plan to kill him and yet he was deliberately walking into the trap. It was crazy — it didn't make sense. But, first and last, the English baronet was a sportsman. And now his sporting instinct at least was satisfied that Starner had been given a fair chance to defend himself. The Judge's disaffection had evened up the odds. What had been planned as a covert attack was now a battle in the open, a battle which must inevitably be fought to a finish.

But Sir Henry loved danger. He was one of those normally phlegmatic men to whom excitement is a tonic. And things were really exciting now. There were excitement and danger in Carmelite, too. A smile hovered around the baronet's mouth as he thought of the strange situation which had precipitated this intimacy with the adopted daughter of his enemy. The smile had not faded when, a moment later, Carmelite herself descended the stairs.

"Thank you so much for waiting."

She was very simply dressed in a white jersey and skirt which accentuated the youthful lines of her body. Beneath a cap of white fur her face was dark and secret as a flower. Without a word Sir Henry took her arm and they passed out.

When they reached the lake they paused a moment by the small boathouse. In front of them the scene was animated and colorful. The night air and the smooth strength of the untrammeled ice seemed momentarily to have dispelled all fears and uncertainties. Vanderloon's guests appeared excited, almost hectically gay; they swooped in circles, pirouetting with laughing chatter. And in their midst, calm and benign as ever, there glided with incongruous grace the heavy figure of Joseph Starner.

Vivid colors, the hissing of skates, red cheeks, and the nodding Japanese lanterns. In spite of himself Sir Henry was caught up by their magic. Here were all the superficialities of a carefree weekend party. And yet, somewhere outside the glowing circle of light stood that post — that solitary post with its warning of invisible death.

"Allow me to help you, Miss Starner." Bowles had materialized from the darkness and was bending over the girl's skating boots. Swiftly Sir Henry slipped into his.

The others, as if gradually gaining assurance, had started to move farther away now. They were to be seen less and less frequently near the light bank. Soon they had all melted into the shadows, and there was nothing to betray their presence but the ringing of skates and the high singing of the ice, fainter . . . fainter . . .

With their departure, the deserted circle of light lost its innocent blandness. It had taken on a sinister, almost eerie quality. Sir Henry felt his pulses beating quickly as Carmelite slipped her gloved hand in his and they moved in silence onto the lake.

"I'm afraid we're going to have a storm." Polite, detached, Carmelite's voice broke into his thoughts. "I love skating and there won't be much time. Will you excuse me if . . . ?"

Almost before he realized it, she had slipped her hand from his and was gliding away into the shadows. For one moment of intense anxiety he thought she must have guessed the reason for his constant presence, that she was deliberately eluding him. Then, to his relief, he saw her again, circling around him.

And then, suddenly, she was back at his side, so near that he could hear her breathing — rapid, excited. He gazed at her in silence. From the beginning he had known she was dangerous. And yet he did not care. Against reason he found himself yielding to the spell of her nearness. He heard his own voice speaking as from some half-remembered dream: "I never thought it would happen like this — here on the ice, in America."

She did not move or speak, but somehow he could not check the stream of his own words: "I've often wondered where I would find her — the most beautiful girl in the world. I imagined her lying on the moonlit beach in Tahiti; moving behind a lattice window in some yellow house in Toledo or Cartagena; in the Tyrol, perhaps . . ."

"Why are you saying these things?" Carmelite's voice cut sharply through the darkness.

"Because I mean them — because I'm —"

"You're lying!" Her eyes gazed unflinchingly into his as they stood there together, alone and dangerously close in the darkness. "You're lying, and you're trying to fool me. I know what you really think about me — about us. I . . ."

She broke off, catching her breath in a little gasp. Somewhere in the obscurity beyond them Katharine La Motte's superb voice had risen, flooding the lake with the sudden melody of a Puccini aria. It was as if the voice of Madame Butterfly herself were coming to them, now tragic, now triumphant, now near, now remote. To Sir Henry it seemed the very essence of all the elusive dreams of youth, all the nostalgic longings which had been brought back to him by the slim girl at his side.

Carmelite, too, seemed to have been caught up in the magic of the singing. In the half-light he could see the line of her parted lips, the fringe of her lashes, dark as the reeds at the lake's edge. They had been very close; and now, as if moved by the rising wind of the storm, they drew closer. He felt her soft hair brush his cheek. Then, suddenly, she was in his arms. Her lips were pressed eagerly, fiercely against his.

As they clung together, the singing faded, and with it seemed to fade the enchantment of the moment. The following silence was deathlike and from life it turned Sir Henry's thoughts to death. Even Katharine La Motte's voice seemed ominous now in retrospect. It was as though

its very strength and beauty had deliberately been used to drown some other more sinister sound.

Carmelite was still in his arms, but she, too, had undergone a subtle change. She was no longer warm and responsive. Her lips were cold and her young body had become tense, resistant.

"What is it, Carmelite?" he asked softly. "You're frightened."

She did not reply. With a fierce, impulsive gesture she broke away from him. And before he had time to stop her she was skating off into the darkness.

For a moment Sir Henry stood irresolute. And then, sudden and capricious as Carmelite's departure, the full force of the storm struck the lake. He felt himself enveloped by the icy wind. It seemed to crush him, almost to throw him backward. On the bank the Japanese lanterns had started a crazy dance.

Then, like the violence of the storm, came the realization that Carmelite had skated away from the bank, away from those hectic lights. She had vanished toward the east end of the lake. And she alone knew nothing of the invisible death trap in the ice. Struggling against the wind, he started to skate forward. He did not care now that he had betrayed his trust; that the others had relied upon him to keep this very thing from happening. He could think only of Carmelite.

Snow had begun to fall in thick, blinding flakes. He was vaguely conscious of voices calling anxiously from different parts of the lake. The others all seemed to have lost their sense of direction. "Make for the lanterns," shouted someone.

And then, as if in mockery, those tossing gloves of light vanished.

Sir Henry urged himself forward, although he seemed to be making no headway against the wind. Now and then dark figures passed him, disappearing as swiftly as they had come. At length, as he peered through the whirling chaos of the storm, he caught a faint gleam of white — Carmelite's white costume.

"Carmelite!" he called hoarsely.

The figure checked itself, turned and skated away toward the boathouse. As Sir Henry plunged after her something loomed out of the darkness ahead of him. He tried to swerve, but the collision was inevitable. He felt a crashing blow on the side of his head. His hands flew out to steady himself and he found he was clinging — clinging desperately to the post.

Half-stunned by the impact, he could not piece things together for a moment. Then he was brought violently back to consciousness. From the darkness at his side came a low, strangled cry. And almost instantaneously the beam of a flashlight was thrown blindingly onto his face.

"Are you hurt, Bentley?" It was Vanderloon's voice, soft and toneless, scarcely audible above the howling of the wind.

"I'm all right. But — did you hear that cry?"

Vanderloon did not answer. The circle of light from his torch was moving slowly over the snow-covered ice.

"Look!"

Sir Henry's eyes followed that pointing beam. At the far side of the post a dark patch of water broke the lake's white surface. And in its center, tilted upward like a miniature berg, floated an irregular block of ice. Sir Henry saw it, but only vaguely. His whole attention was fixed on the other thing thrust up from the water.

It was the arm of a man, and the fingers were clutching frantically to catch a grip on that shifting, slippery ice block.

Instantly Sir Henry moved forward, urged by some primitive instinct far stronger than reason. He flung out a hand to help. But he was too late. The fingers had loosed their hold, stiffening in a mute gesture of despair. There was a momentary agitation on the pool's dark surface. Then swiftly, inexorably, the arm disappeared. . . .

Libby Hunt Farley had heard that cry, too. She was alone on the ice — lost in the angry swirl of sleet and snow. Before the storm broke she had wanted to be alone, had wanted to shake off Johnnie Thring, who had stayed with her so persistently. But now that he was gone her loneliness only added to the nightmare quality of those moments. She was passionately eager to find the others. And yet, something in her dreaded them more than this solitude. She dared not think what they might say, what they might have found. . . .

From somewhere ahead she caught the confused sound of voices. Then, like the pale ghost of the extinguished lanterns, she detected the beam of a flashlight. Hesitantly she started to skate toward it against the buffetings of the wind. Gradually the light grew stronger. She could make out figures, see them gesticulating excitedly.

As Libby Hunt approached, they drew aside, revealing Vanderloon. He was shouting rapid instructions to Bowles, who was on his knees peering down through a hole in the ice. As she watched, the butler picked up a long boat hook and thrust it into the water.

"What — what is it?" She heard her own voice, strangely remote.

"It's happened — in spite of the Judge's warning." It was Katharine La Motte who answered. "Starner's down there — drowned."

Libby Hunt felt a moment of faintness.

"It's all right, darling." A gruff young voice sounded in her ear, and she felt Johnnie Thring's arm slip comfortingly around her. In the pale light from the torch she could trace the outline of his handsome face. The customary mocking droop had left his lips. He looked older. "He's dead. There's nothing more to worry about, Libby Hunt. But they've got to find the body — act as though they'd done everything they could, for the police."

The silence was intense — somehow

heightened by the wailing of the wind and the sporadic knocking of the boat hook against the ice. And then Bowles's respectful voice: "There's something here, sir."

Vanderloon turned to Lili Tresckow. "The ladies better go back to the house."

Vaguely, Libby Hunt was conscious of the Baroness's hand on her sleeve. Katharine La Motte turned almost with reluctance, and the three of them moved across the ice toward the boathouse.

"That girl — his daughter? What has become of her?" The Baroness's voice; and then Katharine La Motte's indifferently: "I saw her skating back toward the house some time ago."

Libby Hunt heard these words faintly. She was absorbed with her own thoughts — absorbed with the immense feeling of relief which was welling up within her.

There would be no more trouble from Starner, no more of those suave telephone calls, no more of those carefully worded solicitations which during the past months had rendered her half sick with helpless panic. She had already paid dearly enough for her passion for cards, but that was not all. . . .

She shuddered when the memory of that afternoon at the Junior League rose up once more in her mind. She had not taken that other woman's pocketbook on purpose. It was not until she reached home that she had realized the mistake. It had been wrong of her, criminally wrong, to have used the money in it for her more immediate debts and to have gone to Starner for a loan on that diamond bracelet. But she had always meant to redeem it — to send it back anonymously.

Starner had guessed from the beginning; unwittingly she had put her head under a yoke which was far more crushing than a mere weight of debt. She had been weak, foolish. But he had had no right to make her life miserable, to threaten exposure and prison, to bleed her white for that one impulsive action.

Libby Hunt Farley was hardly conscious of removing her skates and slipping on the shoes and cape which Bowles had left for her in a neat pile in the boathouse. Instinctively she followed the others to the house, through the hall and upstairs to change her sodden clothes. Soon they were all in the living-room again, where electric lights were blazing.

Katharine La Motte was tossing logs onto the dying flames. Somehow Libby Hunt found a chair and stretched out her numb hands.

And then, without warning, the lights in the chandelier flickered and faded, plunging the room into darkness. She gave a little cry and Katharine La Motte exclaimed sharply, "What's happened?"

"The electricity, it has failed." The Baroness's voice trailed calmly from behind the bright point of her cigarette. "Often it happens in Theo's house in a storm. There is nothing to worry about."

She rose, the glowing cigarette revealing her passage to the window. Libby Hunt followed with Katharine La Motte, and the three women stood there together, gazing through the swirling snow toward the lake. Far off, Libby Hunt could see the flashing of the torch. As the clock on the mantel ticked away the minutes, the light grew nearer.

"They've found him," whispered Katharine La Motte. "They're bringing him back."

Soon that macabre cortege became faintly visible. It paused a moment at the boathouse and then moved forward again over the snow-blanketed lawns. Gradually Libby Hunt could see more detail — see those four male figures walking in rhythm, see the vague burden that they carried.

"The end of Starner!" The words came impulsively from Katharine La Motte.

Once more there rose in her that involuntary exultation — then suddenly her heart missed a beat. She had heard nothing — nothing but the faintest creaking, yet she knew as certainly as though that dark room had been drenched in light that something was moving in the shadows behind them, something malignant, evil. She wanted to cry out, to warn the others.

The creaking sounded again — nearer and nearer.

And then, as though breathed insidiously in her ear, a voice slipped out of the darkness — low, silky: "Well, ladies, there seems to have been an unfortunate accident — a little miscalculation."

Libby Hunt screamed — a long, hysterical scream. Her hand shot out and gripped the Baroness's arm. The older woman was standing by her side, tense and rigid. Against the windowpane Katharine La Motte's silhouette was frozen into startled immobility. Libby's scream sank to a strangled sob. At first she had thought that she must be mad. Now she knew that the others had heard it and that they too shared her blind, overwhelming panic.

The voice which had come to them out of the darkness was the voice of Joseph Starner.

Outside, in the tumult of the storm, John Derwood Thring heard Libby Hunt's scream. But it glanced off his consciousness; his whole mind was absorbed by the fact that he and his companions were carrying a dead man. In his twenty-five easy years Johnnie Thring had seldom stumbled upon reality. This violent encounter with it had shocked him from delayed adolescence into maturity.

Starner was dead — and gone with him was the forced remembrance of those indiscretions which Johnnie had taken so lightheartedly at the time, but which, with the entrance of Starner, had become menaces to his present peace of mind and his very existence in the future. Starner had acquired letters — letters that could have led to divorce court scandals, breach of promise suits, and other

unsavory publicity which would not only have cut him off from his inherited interest in the Tract & Treatise Company, but which would also have alienated him forever from his puritanical family.

During the past months, with Starner's threats of exposure hanging over him, Johnnie had lived even more wildly, more recklessly. He was a dog who has been given a bad name and he did not care if he hanged himself. But now he would be free to start over again, to try and pick up the dissipated fragments of his life. Maybe he could get in with a better crowd, mix up with decent girls like — like Libby Hunt. . . .

These reflections had jostled each other in his mind as he had stood there. He had felt exhilaration even at the climactic moment when Bowles called out that the hook had made contact and three of them had pulled together — pulled in grim silence while that grisly burden moved nearer and nearer the surface of the hole.

He could still see that scene with acid clarity. First the dark water had rippled; there had been the glimpse of a sodden jacket; a limp male arm; and then, awkwardly, unnaturally, that figure had reared up like some grotesque, half-human monster of the lake.

He and Sir Henry had gripped the wet, slippery shoulders and somehow had heaved until the body lay sprawled face downward on the ice. Vanderloon pointed the torch so that its light gleamed on the matted hair at the back of the head. Bowles and Sir Henry were turning the body over.

Johnnie saw the face first in profile; then gradually the bloated cheeks came into view, the staring eyes, the blue, swollen lips. As he watched, the elation drained away, leaving him defenseless before a sickening wave of disgust and panic.

That dead, distorted face was not the face of Joseph Starner. It was the face of Judge Homer Rock.

And it was Judge Rock whom they carried now past the house toward the stable buildings.

A mistake, Johnnie's mind was chanting in rhythm to the slow progress of their footsteps, *a horrible, ghastly mistake* . . .

They had entered a small, dark shed that smelled of wood shavings. They set the body down on a bench and Bowles covered it with a horse blanket. Johnnie saw Vanderloon's slim figure move through the obscurity; heard the click of a switch and then his host's voice muttering, "Light's gone . . . must be the storm. Well, there's nothing more we can do."

"I'll see to everything, sir. Don't worry." Bowles's voice was reassuring.

It was an immense relief to Johnnie to be able to leave that lifeless body there with the butler and to return with the others to the house. Somehow, as he went up to his room, the sight of his own familiar clothes spread out on the bed helped to bring things

back to normal. But when he, Vanderloon, and Sir Henry descended to the living-room, something of the nightmare atmosphere of that small, musty tool shed came rushing back.

The long room was in darkness except for a little circle of candlelight around the hearth. And leaning against the mantelpiece in the very center of that flickering illumination, stood the large, placid figure of Joseph Starner. Grouped around him, like actors holding a pose before the curtain drops, were Libby Hunt Farley, Katharine La Motte, and the Baroness Tresckow. They were staring at his smooth, benign face in fascination.

As soon as he saw the men, Starner half turned his head and smiled. "Ah, Vanderloon, I was just commiserating with the ladies."

Vanderloon did not reply. Johnnie could sense the tension in the atmosphere, sense how completely Joseph Starner was now master of the situation.

"Won't you all be seated?" he was saying, as though already he had taken possession of Chesham Grove and become its lawful master. "Baroness — allow me."

With a slight shrug Lili Tresckow took the chair he was holding for her. One by one the others followed, making a stiff, unnatural tableau in the uncertain candle beams.

"And now," said Starner briskly, "let us be businesslike. I suppose it is too late for a doctor. But at least we can call the police."

"The police!" The word came from Libby Hunt like a cry. "You're — not going to . . ."

"My dear Miss Farley, you would not have us shirk our responsibilities." Starner's benevolent gaze settled on Vanderloon. "If you would tell me where to find the telephone, I could take the routine matters off your shoulders."

Vanderloon tapped reflectively on his chair arm. "There's a telephone in the hall."

As Starner moved toward the door, a low, respectful cough sounded from the threshold. Through the gloom Johnnie could just make out the impeccably neat figure of Bowles.

"Excuse me, Mr. Vanderloon. I have just looked at the power plant, sir. I'm afraid it will take some time to restore the lights. And I think I heard Mr. Starner mention the telephone. That, I regret, has also been put out of commission."

"It has, eh?" Starner paused, and his voice held a trace of mockery. "I might have expected it. Then we must take a car to the nearest village. Or is that impossible, too?"

Bowles had slipped unobtrusively forward and was laying two logs on the fire, neatly parallel to each other. "I'm afraid there is no car available at the moment, sir. Mr. Vanderloon told the chauffeur to leave them in Ashford to be overhauled. And then, these dirt roads are dangerous in a storm — almost impassable, in fact." He whisked a brush over the coppery glaze of the hearth tiles and moved silently from the room.

During the pause that followed, Johnnie Thring crossed to Libby Hunt's side. She smiled swiftly, but she did not speak. It was Starner's voice which finally cut through the silence:

"Well, Vanderloon, as the elements and your excellent butler seem to have conspired together to maroon us, I feel that the only thing to do is to discuss this matter among ourselves with absolute frankness." He turned his paternal gaze on Libby Hunt. "I can see why Miss Farley is reluctant to have the police brought into this. It is all very awkward. In fact, I cannot help sympathizing with you upon the unfortunate miscarriage of your plan." His smile embraced them all now. "And it was an excellent plan, Vanderloon. The mechanics were ingenious and you chose your — er — collaborators with great intuition. But, unluckily, you made one initial mistake."

"I would be interested to hear it," said Vanderloon with ominous control.

"You overlooked the fact that one of your guests had a very serious heart disease; that he was under sentence of death from his doctors. No man with only a short time to live would be anxious to strain his conscience by conniving at murder. That is why he came to me."

Johnnie Thring's hand touched Libby Hunt's. He felt her fingers grip his.

"Yes," Starner was murmuring, "perhaps you are wondering why two condemned men — one condemned by the doctors, the other by your own good selves — should have ventured onto the lake this evening. Frankly, with me the motive was curiosity. I was eager to see that hole in the ice which had been destined to receive me. I persuaded the Judge to take me down there." He paused, and added slowly, "That is why I am able to appreciate how he met his death."

"You're being rather academic, aren't you?" cut in Vanderloon. "Or is it just heroic?"

"Oh, no. I was not at all heroic, I assure you." Starner beamed. "As soon as the storm started I went straight back to the house. Poor Judge Rock was left at his post. Presumably one of you saw him there and pushed him into the hole, believing him to be me. We were both of a similar build. It was a natural, though rather exasperating mistake. And, if it is a salve to anyone's conscience, whoever killed Rock merely hastened a death which would inevitably have occurred soon."

There was an undercurrent of storm and uneasiness in the silence that followed. It was as though the oil in Starner's voice had been the only check on the turbulent emotions of the others. At last Sir Henry leaned forward, his face pale and his manner truculent: "Perhaps you're right, Starner. Perhaps it was a mistake — and a darned unfortunate one, too."

"Most unfortunate!" Starner's smile was gently reproving. "But it won't help any of us to lose our tempers,

Sir Henry. After all, we are cut off here together. Things are bound to become rather unpleasant unless we behave like civilized beings."

"Civilized beings!" Katharine La Motte sprang to her feet, her hands clenched fiercely. "Why should you expect anyone to treat *you* like a civilized being? You think you've got us where you want us. Well, you're wrong. There are six of us . . ."

"I was expecting that point to come up, Miss La Motte, although I had not imagined it would be expressed quite so forcibly." Starner's voice was cool, almost indifferent. "And, if any of you are still foolhardy enough to consider another attempt on my life, I would like to draw your attention to a small detail which you overlooked in your ingenious plan. I refer to Carmelite. Not only is she a potential witness; she is also sole testatrix to all my property — including certain papers which I don't think any of you are particularly anxious to have made public."

"That girl you call your daughter!" exclaimed Katharine La Motte scornfully. "You think you can scare us with her?"

"In spite of your contempt for civilized beings, Miss La Motte, you would hardly consider murdering Carmelite as well as myself. In fact, I should have thought that you of all people would have respected the feelings of a parent — especially of an unorthodox parent."

Katharine La Motte took a swift step forward, but Starner continued:

"And even if you were to kill both myself and my daughter, Miss La Motte, I would have made arrangements for the facts to come out. Your public would be interested to know that you are a most romantically unmarried mother. It would be overcome with excitement when it discovered that the child's father is a famous bank robber now serving life sentence in Alcatraz, and that, in your less profitable days, it was his money which financed your career. And then there is the future of the child himself . . ."

While he spoke the color had drained from Katharine La Motte's cheeks, leaving them chalk-white. She made no attempt to reply. Slowly she moved to a chair and, dropping into it, buried her face in her hands. The Baroness crossed to her side, laying sympathetic fingers on her shoulder. Her aristocratic profile was contemptuous as she exclaimed, "This, Mr. Starner — it is unpardonable! It is vulgar!"

Joseph Starner's small eyes narrowed. "Yes, I may be vulgar and I may be unpardonable, Baroness. But I have my uses. I was useful to you when I saved you from being sold out on that optimistic margin account of yours and rescued the speculative securities which you had bought with the profits of your delightful hat shop. It is too much to expect so artistic, so charming a lady as yourself to be anything but muddle-headed in business, but at least you must realize how useful I was in saving you from em-

barrassing explanations to your backers. I, myself, was chivalrous enough to believe you when you told me you thought the money was entirely your own. But others might have used an uglier word for your innocent little flutter. Embezzlement is always — embezzlement."

Starner's gaze moved leisurely from one to another of the strained, hostile faces in front of him. A trifle of the benignity had left his cherubic countenance and there was a dangerous glint in his pale eyes.

"Talking of titled foreigners," he said musingly, "we Americans are almost childishly hospitable to them. But we cannot forgive them if they abuse our hospitality. For instance, in your case, Sir Henry. Of course, I personally could never believe that a well-known English sportsman would have ordered his jockey to hold back a popular horse in so important a race as the Westover Stakes. But the man in the street is not so sympathetic. And there is the inalienable fact that I do possess a sworn statement from your jockey on the matter. It is those little details which prejudice our foolish American public. I'm afraid it might ruin even your international reputation to be warned off the American turf."

Sir Henry had risen and was pouring himself a drink from the whisky decanter on the sideboard. It was too dark for the others to see that the nails pressed against the glass had gone a livid white.

Starner was shaking his head sadly as though pondering on the world's follies. "It is extraordinary how our sports and recreations can get us into difficulties. Now Miss Farley, for example — I'm sure that she would agree with . . ."

"Lay off that!"

Johnnie Thring had sprung to his feet and was standing squarely in front of the girl, his face dark with anger and disgust.

"What you say may be true, Starner — every damn' word of it. Perhaps we *would* be too scared to murder you. But there's no law that can stop me beating you up. You get a kick out of sticking pins in us and watching us squirm like — like insects. Well, if you go on with this mudslinging, I'm going to get a big kick out of taking a poke at you that'll knock you this side of hell."

The two men stood very close together. Johnnie's jaw was thrust forward and his eyes were gleaming. For a second the smile left Starner's lips, but almost instantaneously it returned — mild, tolerant.

"The young are so impulsive, Mr. Thring. So careless how they fight and — how they love. But, even so, I must thank you for giving me fair warning of your intentions. And in return I will be frank with you. I am warning you that I have a revolver with me to protect myself not only against murder but also against any physical violence."

Slowly Johnnie moved back to Libby Hunt and, as he did so, a calm, expressionless voice broke the silence:

"I thought the ladies might like some refreshment, Mr. Vanderloon."

Bowles had moved into the room, carrying a tray neatly loaded with cut-glass tumblers and a silver bowl of ice. He paused as he reached Starner's side. "I think I heard you mention a revolver, sir," he murmured deferentially. "I'm afraid I took the liberty of removing it from your suitcase shortly after your arrival, sir. Mr. Vanderloon does not approve of firearms."

Before anyone had time to comment, Bowles had vanished.

It was impossible to judge the precise effect of the butler's words upon Starner, for when he spoke again his voice had resumed its normal suavity: "The perfect servant, Vanderloon. Not only can he control the weather, the lights, and the telephone. He can also control your guests. But, now I come to think it over, it is much more sensible to have the gun out of the way, and far more desirable that the police should be ignorant of what has happened — at least for the moment. In fact, I am prepared to make a gesture." He raised pontifical hands as if to pronounce a benediction.

"I am willing to say nothing of your little plot against my life. You will doubtless appreciate my tactful silence and show your gratitude accordingly." He smiled again. "That should cause none of you grave inconvenience. You are all comparatively wealthy people." He moved from the mantel, making his way slowly through the darkened room. "I am willing to subscribe to the theory that the Judge's death was accidental, Vanderloon. But, as a precaution, I do think our host should make an effort to find out who is responsible for the accident, just in case the police chose to be — er — difficult. I will leave you alone now so that you can discuss this matter more freely."

As he reached the threshold, the door was thrown open and a slim white figure moved into the room. Starner turned.

"Carmelite, my dear child, what are you doing here?"

"It was dark up there in my room. I was frightened."

"Frightened? What of — ghosts?" Starner's laugh was indulgently paternal. "Well, you'd better go back, my dear. These people want to be alone."

The girl hesitated. Her gaze had focused on that corner of the room where Sir Henry was seated.

No one spoke as the Englishman rose and moved toward her. He stood at her side, his eyes fixed upon hers as though hypnotized. Then, as Carmelite turned to the door, he pushed blindly past Starner and followed her out of the room. Sir Henry's mind worked with British slowness. During the past hour things had happened too swiftly for him yet to grasp their full significance. But, as he felt Carmelite's arm warm against his, he was conscious once again of that exciting sense of danger.

"I don't want to go back to my room," she was saying. "Not alone."

Bowles had left a single candle in the hall. As Sir Henry turned to pick it up, he caught a glimpse of Joseph Starner, who was watching the two of them from the living-room door. The round, pink face was gleaming with strange satisfaction.

The baronet drew Carmelite away. They passed through an old-fashioned, formal drawing-room and came to the conservatory. Sir Henry set down the candle and for a moment they stood there very close together.

"What you said on the ice?" she asked abruptly. "Did you mean it?"

The fragrance of the flowers invaded Sir Henry's senses like an opiate. "I said you were the most beautiful girl in the world, Carmelite. I meant it."

Her expression had changed as he spoke. In the candlelight her eyes were shining eagerly.

"Then take me away," she cried impulsively. "I'll live with you. I'll do anything. Only take me away from here — now."

Her breath was fragrant against his face. He felt her young arms glide around his neck and she was clinging to him, kissing him passionately. Her words came urgent, incoherent: "I . . . I don't care . . . I want you to take me away . . . anywhere . . . now . . ."

"But, Carmelite, I don't understand . . . !"

"Understand!"

She moved away and he could see her face, pale and intense, tilted up to his. "You think I'm a blackmailer," she said fiercely. "Well, what if I am? What difference does it make?"

And as Sir Henry looked down at her he realized that it did make no difference. Nothing seemed real except the quick beat of his own heart and this girl, remote as a sheathed flower, yet warm and vibrant with life. He drew her nearer again and held her in his arms. "Carmelite, darling, I worship you . . . we'll leave tomorrow . . . we'll get married. . . !"

"Married!" Instantly she turned her face away so that his lips could not reach hers.

"I mean it," he said.

"But your name, your family, everything . . . and, well, you know what I am. I'm just — nobody."

"But I'm nobody, too," said Sir Henry wryly. "As for the proud ancestral family, my father was a wholesaler greengrocer who hogged the potato market during the war. The Bentley baronetcy was bought on the proceeds of his profiteering."

As they stood there together there were soft footsteps close behind them. They turned, to see Joseph Starner, his small eyes narrowed in a shrewd smile.

"You must excuse my interrupting," he murmured, "but your friends are having an important conference, Sir Henry. They will be needing you."

Sir Henry drew swiftly away and swung out of the conservatory. In the darkened drawing-room he paused a

moment in indecision. Suddenly he could not bear the thought of leaving the girl alone there with Starner. He started to retrace his steps, but the sound of the blackmailer's voice checked him:

"You have made a very promising beginning, my dear." There was a soft, satisfied chuckle. "An entrée into the English — er — market should prove extremely profitable for us both."

After Starner's departure from the living-room the others sat around the fire in silence. No one had touched the tumblers which Bowles had brought. Outside, behind the patterned brocade of the drawn curtains, the storm had abated little of its violence.

Theodore Vanderloon looked old and tired as he rose and assumed his place in front of the mantel. The dominating forcefulness of the morning had left him. When at length he spoke, his voice was diffident, uncertain: "One should know more about life than to try to shape it to one's will. I tried to solve our problem. I have succeeded only in making it far worse. I apologize."

"There is no need to apologize, Theo." The Baroness had lit another of her Russian cigarettes. "We have done our best."

"And our best is rather pathetic, Lili. So far we have achieved the doubtful advantage of depriving Judge Rock of his last few weeks of life. Incidentally, you have just heard Starner suggest that it is my duty to find out which of us was responsible for the Judge's accident. I suppose no one feels like helping me to do my duty?"

There was no reply. Questioning glances met each other and flicked away. It was Katharine La Motte who finally voiced the thought uppermost in every mind.

"Let's forget the Judge," she said harshly. "It's Starner we've got to think about. He made life hell for us before; now, with this hanging over us, it's going to be a thousand times worse. We've got to get rid of him."

"And have the lovely Carmelite blackmail us in his place?" asked Johnnie Thring with forced flippancy. "Of course, that might be more romantic. Or are you figuring on bumping the girl off, too?"

While he was speaking the door had opened, and Sir Henry Bentley stood motionless on the threshold. "If you do decide to kill Starner," Sir Henry said quietly, "I don't think you need worry about his daughter."

The others stared at him in eager surprise. There was a long moment of silence followed by a spurt of rapid sentences:

". . . but she's his heir . . . his accomplice . . . might easily be more dangerous than Starner himself . . ."

"I don't think so," broke in Sir Henry softly. "At least, I don't think she would be if she were married to me."

"But, Bentley!" cut in Vanderloon. "You really mean this?"

"Certainly, and congratulations are quite in order." The baronet's smile was humorless.

Johnnie jumped up and gripped him by the hand. "Let me be the first to wish you joy," he said with a grin. "And if you mean it and it's all true, bring on that gun, Vanderloon, and I'll take great pleasure in disembarrassing Sir Henry of the least attractive of his family connections."

"Johnnie! You mustn't!" exclaimed Libby Hunt instantly.

"Libby is right." Vanderloon glanced at the boy's flushed young face. "Things are not as simple as that. And, incidentally, you must all remember that Starner is here in the house and liable to come in at any minute." He paused. "Sir Henry's — er — gesture has made the situation much more promising, but we must not be rash. We've got to think."

"Think! We've done too much thinking — and too much talking," said Katharine La Motte sharply.

As she leaned forward into the light, the sculptured lines of her face had somehow coarsened. The glamorous veneer of the prima donna was cracking, revealing glimpses of the unscrupulous farm girl who, in her fierce struggle for fame, had used even gangsters for her own ends.

"We came here to kill Starner, but all we've done so far is argue and theorize — everything but act. Now we've got a perfect set-up. We're cut off here in the country; we have that gun; Sir Henry can keep the girl's mouth shut; and, best of all, Starner thinks we're too scared of him to do anything. All we have to do is to shoot him with his own revolver — and make it look like suicide."

"Excellent, my dear Katharine!" murmured Vanderloon, his eyes steady on hers. "I might as well have two dead guests as one. But who is to have the honor? Shall we apply for volunteers? Or shall we be Biblical and cast lots?"

And then, cool and clear as spring water, the Baroness's voice rose: "Many years ago when I was a little girl in Vienna," she murmured, "we play a game." Her eyes smiled with amused recollection. "It was like, so like to this. One of us she had to be the Wolf. We used the cards." Lili Tresckow leaned back in her chair. "I remember so well the rules. One of us children, she was to try to catch the others. She was the Wolf. But first we chose who was it to be. We took the cards and dealt them. She who get the Jack of Diamonds . . ." She broke off with a slight shrug.

"The Baroness has an idea there!" exclaimed Johnnie excitedly. "We can deal cards and no one will know who has the Jack except the lucky fellow himself."

"We had a pleasant little game in England that might be adapted, too," put in Sir Henry grimly. "It was called Cry in the Dark. After we've drawn the cards, we could leave the revolver somewhere in the room and put out the candles so that the man with the Jack of Diamonds could get it without being seen."

"Slightly theatrical, Sir Henry." Vanderloon answered. "But Aristotle maintained that it was through melodrama alone that one could achieve complete catharsis. I will get the cards and the gun. And we three men can make our bids for the role of protagonist."

"Good," said Johnnie.

"Men?" exclaimed Katharine La Motte. "Do you mean we're not going to be in on this?"

"It is more or less a man's job, isn't it?"

"A woman can pull a trigger." Katharine La Motte's eyes were shining with fierce intensity. "We'd all be under suspicion anyway, so why not . . . ?"

"Very well." Vanderloon smiled again. "I had overlooked the progress of feminine emancipation. We will let the ladies play. But we cannot afford another mistake." His eyes had hardened and the old strength rang in his voice. "After this initial childishness, I propose that we adopt Starner's suggestion and behave like adult, civilized beings. We will dress, dine as usual; and then divide up so that Starner will not suspect a conspiracy. I will have Bowles put candles in every room — but not too many. Some time during the evening the opportunity will arise. That will be the business of one person. The rest of us will come back to this room as soon as a shot is fired. We will ask no questions, and when we are all assembled we can go in a group to discover the — er — suicide. It is all rather crude, but I'm afraid the situation demands it."

"And Carmelite Starner?" breathed Libby Hunt.

"Whatever happens, I think I can manage her all right," muttered Sir Henry.

"Excellent." Vanderloon squared his lean shoulders against the mantel. "But remember that Starner must commit suicide. I am no expert, but I have a vague idea that a revolver should be fired at very close range. There must be powder marks . . ."

Slowly he moved from the mantel. His guests watched in intense silence as he crossed the room and fingered a bell rope. And then from somewhere in the distance, hollow and strangely ominous, sounded the faint ringing of the bell.

"You rang, sir?"

Vanderloon's guests stirred uneasily as the butler appeared on the threshold.

"Yes, Bowles. You have seen Mr. Starner?"

"He and Miss Starner went upstairs to dress for dinner some time ago. Do you want him, sir?"

"No." Vanderloon crossed back to the hearth. "I want a pack of cards, Bowles, and Mr. Starner's revolver."

"Very good, sir."

There was no change in the butler's expression. Quietly he left the room. When he returned he held out to Vanderloon a silver tray on which lay a small automatic and a morocco card-case.

"Keep the gun for a moment, Bowles." Vanderloon's gaze circled the tense faces in front of him, resting finally on Libby Hunt. "And give the cards to Miss Farley. I think you should shuffle for — er — luck, Libby Hunt."

The butler slipped a deck of cards from the case and handed them to the girl. Her fingers trembled as she took them and laid them on her lap; but they moved with instinctive efficiency when she cut the pack and flicked the cards together.

Johnnie Thrug had been leaning forward, watching the girl with strained eyes. Now, suddenly, he whispered hoarsely, "You've got to keep out of this, Libby. You're only a kid . . . !"

"It's all right, Johnnie. If you do it, I'm going to." Libby Hunt's voice was soft but determined. She handed the deck of cards to Vanderloon.

Quietly Vanderloon explained the situation to the butler. The two of them moved to an oak table which stood near the window. One by one the others followed until they were all grouped around it.

"I think we have everything straight," Vanderloon said. "The — er — significant card is the Jack of Diamonds. We all look at our hands and then lay them face downwards on the table."

His long fingers slid the top card from the deck. It fell in front of the Baroness. There was a soft swishing as he sent the others gliding over the polished wood.

Bowles had set two candles on the table. The light radiated outwards, throwing into bright illumination the silent circle of faces. Each expression was different. The shadow of a smile hovered around the Baroness's eyes. Sir Henry's face was set in a hard, wooden mask. Katharine La Motte's chin was thrust aggressively forward, her lips tightening as the cards piled up in front of her. Libby and Johnnie stood close together, looking very young as they stared downward with fixed intensity. Vanderloon himself was impersonal.

When the pack was two-thirds gone, his fingers paused. "We have overlooked one thing," he said. "There are six of us and fifty-two cards. That means that four will be left over. What shall we do?"

"If I might take the liberty, sir." Bowles stood respectfully waiting at his elbow.

The guests glanced up from the table, their eyes momentarily losing their glazed absorption.

"Thank you, Bowles. I appreciate your willingness to share our obligations."

He completed the deal, handing the last four cards to the butler.

There was a fragmentary pause. Then hands moved over the surface of the table; some eager, some reluctant, some deliberately casual. For a second each pair of eyes fixed on the fan of cards in front of them. Deep silence; then a rustle as the hands were tossed face downwards again on the table. Imperturbably Bowles

leaned forward between the candles and gathered the cards into a neat pack.

No one spoke until after the butler had snapped the clasp of the morocco case. Then Vanderloon murmured, "Now for the revolver. It is loaded, of course, Bowles?"

"Yes, sir."

Vanderloon's eyes scanned the room, settling finally on the grand piano which stood near the door. "Perhaps you would put it on the piano, Bowles. We can screen the fire, but, even so, it should be as far as possible from the light."

The butler picked up the silver tray and carried it to the piano. Returning to the hearth, he lifted a beaten brass screen from a corner and set it in front of the fire.

Vanderloon's voice rose again: "We can extinguish the candles now. Johnnie, you take those on the table. Bowles and I will attend to these on the mantelpiece."

Hurriedly Johnnie crossed the room, his shadow following him, vague and grotesque. Brass snuffers were raised, and one by one the small flames vanished, plunging the room into blackness. The darkness was tense, vibrant.

"I suggest we all move around for a few minutes," said Vanderloon. "That will make things easier. When I give the word, we might leave the room singly and go upstairs to dress for dinner."

The Baroness Lili Tresckow heard these words with a strange excitement. Slowly she started to move through the darkness. Without seeing or even hearing them, she was acutely conscious of the others around her. Once she brushed against the rough tweed of a male arm — Sir Henry, she thought. Once a sharp intake of breath betrayed Libby Hunt. Instinctively she strained her eyes, trying to make out her position in the room. Was she near the door — the piano . . . ?

And then she heard another noise. It came from outside the door — the muffled tread of heavy feet on the staircase. The footsteps drew nearer and stopped. There was a faint click of the turning handle and the door began to open.

Fascinated, the Baroness watched that widening strip of light. The door was fully open now, and looming black against the faint illumination from the hall was the broad silhouette of Joseph Starner. She was aware of a white shirt front and the coruscation of two diamond studs.

"Is anyone here?"

There was no answer. Interminably Starner seemed to linger on the threshold. The Baroness could feel the subtle change in the atmosphere, could sense the stillness of her invisible companions.

Then the light behind him narrowed and was absorbed once more into the darkness. The door had been shut. Starner was with them in the room.

When it sounded again, his voice was amusedly benevolent. "What is

this, Vanderloon? Hide in the dark? Or has the candlepower gone back on you, too?"

"I'm sorry, Starner." Vanderloon's answer was immediate and steady. "We were just going up to dress for dinner. As we don't know how long we're to be cut off, we have to be a bit economical with the candles."

The Baroness could hear her host's footsteps, soft and regular, as he moved to the door and threw it open. She saw his erect figure passing out into the hall. The others followed in silence, while Starner stood by the threshold, his hands in his tails' pockets, his pale eyes questioning but untroubled.

Lili Tresckow was the last to move. She felt her heart beating rapidly as she drew nearer the door and the dark shadow of the piano.

The Baroness was opposite the piano now. Swiftly her glance flashed over the polished surface of the mahogany. She felt a moment of exquisite reassurance. The silver tray was empty.

The long living-room of Chesham Grove was empty — warm and securely closed against the storm outside. Bowles had set new candles on the mantel. Eight . . . eight thirty . . . eight forty-five . . .

Dinner was over now. Occasional footsteps sounded in the hall; footsteps and voices, some soft and hurried, some loud and unnaturally cheerful; the only indications that there were still guests, still life in Vanderloon's house. The hour hand of the clock was abreast of nine, when the door opened and Bowles appeared and piled more logs on the fire.

From then on people drifted in and out, first Sir Henry and Carmelite Starner, the baronet pale and preoccupied, the girl exquisite as a Lalique glass figurine. Vanderloon himself came in for a moment; Katharine La Motte, the Baroness. But none of them stayed for long.

And then, splintering the fragile silence, a shot rang through the house. As though in imitation, a log crashed in the grate, sending up a tiny geyser of sparks. A burning chip of wood sprang out onto the thick carpet. It glowed there, grew dull, and winked into nothingness.

Then, like a delayed echo, a second shot sounded.

Silence again — punctuated faintly by the precise ticking of the clock.

At length the living-room door opened unhurriedly, and Katharine La Motte entered in a trailing saffron gown which seemed to light up the room like an extravagant candle flame. She moved to the piano with studied composure. It was as though she were taking the concert stage at Carnegie Hall. Drawing her long train aside, she seated herself and ran her fingers caressingly up and down the keyboard.

And then she started to sing.

The opening notes of the *Liebestod* flooded the quiet room. Gradually they mounted to a heightened ecstasy,

made fierce and triumphant by the impassioned beauty of that voice. The whole house seemed to be filled with music.

Vanderloon's other guests had begun to assemble. One by one they moved silently to the piano, caught up in spite of themselves by the spell of the music.

No one noticed the door opening. No one was even aware of the slim, intense figure of Carmelite Starner until the girl took a step into the room. Then the singing faded; Katharine La Motte rose from the piano; the others swung round, staring.

Carmelite Starner stared back at them, her eyes dark and strained against the startling pallor of her skin. Then, with a little sob, she stumbled toward Sir Henry.

"He'sdead!" she whispered hoarsely. "He's been shot — in his room!"

The others stood motionless as the baronet's arm moved to support her. "Carmelite, *please!*" His voice was very gentle. "Please, let me take you up to your room."

The girl's face was dazed and expressionless as Sir Henry led her out into the hall.

Vanderloon shut the door behind them and stood with his back to it. There was a faint gleam in his eyes as he glanced around him. "We'd better go up and see," he said slowly.

"All of us?" The words came from Libby Hunt, low and stifled.

"No! The women are out of it this time!" Johnnie Thring moved forward determinedly. "Come on, Vanderloon. You and Bowles and I . . ."

Without a word the two other men followed him into the hall. Bowles took a candle from a table and lighted the way up the heavy oak staircase. They passed down a dark corridor toward Starner's room. The door was shut. Vanderloon opened it.

The room itself was in darkness. There was nothing but the light from Bowles's candle to illuminate the grotesque scene in front of them. The massive figure of Joseph Starner sprawled, face upwards, on the brightly patterned carpet. Overturned at his side was a small wooden table; and lying across his white shirt front was a silver candlestick. The flame was extinguished, but it had left a broad black smudge on the starched cotton.

The candlelight revealed a dark stain on the carpet near the head; the wound above the right ear was ringed with burnt hair and marks of powder. And, clutched in his right hand, Joseph Starner was gripping his own automatic.

Johnnie Thring's eyes darted about the room. He seemed to be taking in every detail of that gruesome tableau. At length he gave a low whistle. "I'm no expert," he muttered, "but I'd say that was the perfect suicide."

"Yes, indeed." Vanderloon turned away in distaste. "Someone appears to have done a very efficient job. There is, of course, the question of fingerprints. But you can attend to that later, Bowles."

"Yes, sir."

"Now we'd better lock the room

and discuss our next move with the others."

As they went out into the corridor, Bowles turned the key in the lock and handed it to Vanderloon. Without speaking, they hurried downstairs to the living-room.

The women were grouped around the piano in the living-room. Instantly they glanced at Vanderloon, their eyes apprehensive, questioning.

"Well . . . ?" asked Katharine La Motte.

"It looks at present," said her host tonelessly, "as though the suicide will satisfy the most meticulous of experts."

Nervously Libby Hunt fingered the folds of her evening gown. "But, Theo, there's such a lot we haven't — haven't thought about. There's Judge Rock . . . and then Starner's motive for suicide . . . What are we going to say?"

"I have already given some thought to that matter, my dear." The smile that hovered around Vanderloon's mouth was humorless. "And you have in part answered your own question. Obviously it would be difficult to convince the police that this day has brought forth both a fatal accident and a suicide. But I think that the two tragedies might perhaps be combined. I suggest that for official purposes, Starner committed suicide because he murdered Judge Rock and found out that we suspected him."

"But what reason can we give for his killing the Judge?" broke in Katharine La Motte sharply.

Vanderloonshrugged. "Starner himself helped us there. He told us the Judge knew he was doomed by his doctors; that he had nothing left to live for. We might hint to the police that Starner had been blackmailing Rock and that the Judge had threatened to expose him. That supplies the motive, since exposure would have meant a long prison term for Starner."

"But mightn't that mean exposure for us all, too?" asked Johnnie. "I'd rather swing for murder than have the Tract & Treatise Company know some of the things Starner knew."

"I don't see why we — er — survivors should be involved except as witnesses," replied Vanderloon.

"But the hole in that ice?" breathed Libby Hunt. "How can we explain that?"

"You will all be witnesses of how I warned you that the ice was dangerous near the post." Vanderloon's voice was casual. "That strengthens the theory of premeditated murder on Starner's part. It should be quite convincing."

"So darn convincing," cut in Johnnie enthusiastically, "that I'm beginning to believe that's what really happened. I never thought much of the accident theory anyway. What do you others think?"

"It does not matter what we think." The Baroness's velvet gown rustled softly as she moved to a chair. Her voice was calm and quiet. "Now it is best for us to forget everything except what it is the police must know."

"Yes, Lili." Vanderloon's eyes twinkled. "I suspect that we learned a fundamental truth about life. Of course, everything depends on Sir Henry's ability to convince the girl. But if we can be certain of no trouble from her, I think we may safely notify the police of Joseph Starner's sad suicide."

For the first time that day the tension in the atmosphere slackened. Faces lost their expression of strain and uneasiness.

"All's well — if it ends well," murmured Johnnie Thring.

And then, as he spoke, the silence was broken by a sound from the hall — a sound familiar and simple, yet terrifying in its very simplicity.

It came again, sharp, urgent — the shrill ringing of the telephone.

Katharine La Motte was the first to find her voice. She swung round to Bowles and whispered dazedly, "I thought you said it was out of order . . . the storm . . . !"

"But the storm is over now, madam," replied the butler quietly. "And it was only for Mr. Starner that the wire was disconnected."

Once more the insistent clamor of the bell, bringing with it all the potential danger of the outside world.

Everyone was staring at Vanderloon as though he and he alone could make a decision.

"Shall I, sir . . . ?"

"No, Bowles, I'll go myself."

Slowly Vanderloon turned, passed through the door, and closed it behind him.

At last the door opened again.

"*Who was it? . . . What did they want?*"

Vanderloon did not leave the threshold. He stood there, his shoulders stooped, his ascetic face pale and worn. "He's beaten us again," he muttered hollowly. "Even now he's dead, Starner's beaten us again."

Never before had Vanderloon's guests seen him lose control. But now there was a faint note of panic in his voice — a panic which infected them all.

"I might have guessed it," he murmured; "might have guessed that Starner would not accept my invitation unreservedly. Before coming here he left instructions with a Mr. Wenz, who appears to be his secretary. He told him to telephone this number at eleven and, if he was unable to get in touch with Starner, he was to inform the nearest police station that there was the possibility of foul play."

"What did you say? asked Johnnie breathlessly.

"I could only temporize and prevaricate." Vanderloon's smile flickered uncertainly. "And the net result of my prevarications is that, unless Mr. Wenz is reassured by twelve o'clock, he intends to notify the Ashford police."

"But is that so terrible?" The Baroness glanced around the circle of pale faces. "We were going to call the police ourselves. It makes no difference that this secretary, he call instead."

"And have him tell the local police

that Starner came here suspecting foul play?" cut in Katharine La Motte. "Do you suppose they'd believe our suicide story then?"

"I'm afraid you're right. The whole situation has taken a — er — distinct turn for the worse," agreed Vanderloon wearily. "If that man calls the police we must be prepared for them to suspect murder."

"And if they do, what is it we say?" asked the Baroness.

"There are plenty of courses open to us, Lili." Vanderloon threw out his hands in a little gesture of resignation. "But none of them is particularly attractive. We can deny everything and risk a most embarrassing investigation. We can admit everything with a certainty of charges for criminal conspiracy. In both cases we would all be involved. The least of the evils would be for one person to take the entire blame. And, being prime mover of the whole business and the most logical suspect, I willingly offer my services as the symbolical Knave — the Jack of Diamonds."

"The Jack of Diamonds!" Libby Hunt's voice rose shrill, almost hysterical. "But you can't do that, Theo. I've *got* to tell you —" She broke off, looking wildly around her. "It was I who had the Jack of Diamonds. It was —"

"Stop it, Libby!" Johnnie Thring gripped her arm fiercely. His young face was defiant as he glared at the others. "You mustn't listen to her. She's hysterical. She didn't do it. I looked at her cards. I knew she had the Jack of Diamonds. But when the lights went out, I saw to it she couldn't get the gun."

"You mean you took it yourself, Johnnie?" put in Vanderloon quietly.

"No, Johnnie didn't take that gun!"

Everyone started as Sir Henry Bentley moved calmly into the room. The baronet was tapping a cigarette on his cuff. "Why all the excitement anyway?"

Swiftly Vanderloon told him what had happened. "So you see there is adequate cause for excitement, Bentley," he concluded ironically. "And it's such a pity. The suicide seems to have appeared quite convincing."

"Thank you," murmured the Englishman with a mock bow. "I seem to be in the market for congratulations tonight. I thought it was a pretty good job myself."

The others looked at him in astonishment.

"You mean — ?" began the Baroness emphatically.

"Yes. Libby Hunt may have drawn the Jack of Diamonds, and Johnnie may have chivalrously prevented her from getting the gun. But he needn't have, because I took it myself."

"Henry . . . !"

The Englishman swung around at the sound of his name. Carmelite Starner stood in the doorway. She was still pale, but in the candlelight her young face was calm and strangely composed.

The baronet moved swiftly to her side. "Carmelite, you promised — you said you wouldn't come down."

But the girl paid no attention. She brushed past him as though lost in some reverie of her own. The others watched in silence as she crossed the room and sat down, erect and child-like, on the edge of a ladder-back chair. "I don't know what you were talking about," she said at length, "but I heard Sir Henry say that he took the gun. Well, he didn't. None of you did. It was my father who took it. He saw it lying there on the piano when he came in here before dinner. He had it in his tails' pocket the whole evening."

"But, Carmelite," broke in Sir Henry anxiously. "What is the point . . . ?"

"What is the point of lies?" The girl turned to him almost angrily. Then her eyes moved back to the others. "I don't know what you've all been thinking about me," she said steadily, "but I expect you imagined I was just some little nobody that Starner picked up for his own purposes. Well, you're right. I'm just that."

"There is only one thing that concerns these people, Carmelite." Sir Henry's English voice was suddenly pompous. "And that is the fact that you have done me the honor to promise to be my wife."

"But that's the very reason why they have to know, Henry." She did not turn to him as she spoke. Her delicately molded chin was set and determined. "After all, they're your friends. They have a right to know that the future Lady Bentley was rescued from a slum orphanage by Starner. And there are other things they've got a right to know, too. . . . I wonder if someone would please give me a cigarette."

Johnnie Thring jumped up from the couch and proffered his case. Vanderloon glanced quickly at the clock on the mantel.

"Thank you." The girl inhaled deeply, gazing unseeingly through the haze of smoke. "As my adopted father told you, I returned from Paris only a few days ago and this is my debut in American society. But there's something he didn't explain to you, something he didn't explain to me until today. I knew, of course, that I was under deep obligation to him, but I did not know exactly how I was expected to repay his generosity. Mr. Starner told me this morning. He hinted at his methods of extorting money and suggested that I would be just the person to help him."

The room was silent as she crushed her cigarette in a bronze bowl.

"I'm not going to pretend that I was horrified or shocked," she continued quietly. "The first and last lesson I learned in the orphanage was that charity must be paid for with obedience. But I received no instructions until after we got here. Although I did not understand why at the time, Starner seemed very much amused when he saw all of you. Immediately after lunch he told me he had the ideal job for me. I was to do my best to become Lady Bentley.

"That didn't shock me particularly,

either. I tried to obey orders, but I'm afraid I wasn't very good at it." She turned swiftly to the baronet. "I couldn't go through with it, Henry. Besides, I felt certain that you'd guessed, that you were acting a part for some reason of your own. That's why I left you on the ice." She turned back to the others. "And that's how I happened to see Judge Rock being murdered."

The atmosphere of suspicion seemed heightened for a moment. Then it broke into a torrent of eager questions: "You mean . . . you actually saw . . . ?"

"Yes. I actually saw it." The girl nodded her head gravely. "When I left Sir Henry, I skated away alone. Of course, I knew nothing about that trap in the ice. But just after the storm broke I heard voices. The sleet was almost blinding but I made out two men by that post. One of them was the Judge. As I watched, the other man deliberately gave him a push and I saw him fall. Then, to my horror, the ice seemed to crack, to collapse . . ."

"But the other man," broke in Katharine La Motte. "Did you see who he was?"

"I did." Carmelite's voice was still flat, expressionless. "It was my — er — father."

"Starner!" exclaimed Johnnie. "Then at least we've figured out one thing right."

"But why should he kill the Judge?" asked Libby Hunt.

"I went to him as soon as he came off the lake. He explained quite calmly that Judge Rock had threatened to expose him unless he destroyed all his blackmail papers. Starner promised to do it if the Judge would tell him the real purpose of this house party. When he heard of your plan Starner seemed to think it all very amusing; and it was even more amusing that he'd been able to persuade the Judge to show him the trap you had set for him in the ice and then make use of it himself. It was one of his strange, perverse jokes."

"And the cream of the jest," commented Vanderloon sardonically, "was that he could accuse us of it and use his own crime to extort more blackmail."

"Yes. He told me he was going to do that," said Carmelite slowly. "I think he guessed that I didn't share his sense of humor, but —" She broke off and for the first time she seemed to lose something of her almost superhuman composure. Her eyes had involuntarily turned to Sir Henry's. "I — I didn't know what to do. I was frightened — bewildered. Then the lights went out. I lay on my bed in the darkness trying to make up my mind. I owed Starner so much, and yet . . . At last I couldn't bear it any more, being up there alone. I was desperate when I came down here. I was desperate when I begged you to take me away, Henry. But I don't think I'd have ever told about Starner if you'd just done what I asked you to — but you asked me to marry you."

She turned defiantly to the others. "I don't care whether you believe me or not, but something happened then which made me realize I could never be on Starner's side. It all made me feel cheap and dirty."

Vanderloon's eyes had turned once again to the clock. The hands were moving toward midnight.

Carmelite seemed to sense his uneasiness, for her words came more swiftly now: "After dinner I made up my mind. I went to Starner's room determined to have it out with him. He was still in one of his humorous moods. He told me how he had found you all in the dark and how he suspected he had spoiled another of your plots against him by taking his own gun. I did my best to keep cool, but when he started talking about Henry I told him I was through. I said that if he didn't give it all up I'd go straight downstairs and tell everyone how he had murdered Judge Rock. He forbade me to leave the room."

"But you disobeyed him," put in Sir Henry swiftly. He turned to the others. "From now on I'm telling the story. Carmelite came down and told me. And I went straight up, fought with Starner, and shot him."

"If I'm going to be your wife, Henry," said Carmelite, with the shadow of a smile, "you must let me have the last word. I didn't go down right away, because Starner tried to hold me there by force. He'd always banked on his knowledge of human nature and at first he could hardly believe that I'd turned against him. When he saw I was really serious he started to call me filthy names. At last he pulled out the revolver and said that if I left he would shoot."

She looked down at the silver points of her slippers. "Before I knew what was happening we were struggling. It was quite dark in the room, with only the one candle on the mantelpiece. Then he stumbled and" — she paused, passing a hand across her forehead — "somehow I had the gun. I saw him lying on the floor. I heard him laughing at me. It — it was horrible. But even then he didn't seem afraid. He dared me to shoot. . . . Something must have snapped in me, for I did it deliberately. I wanted to kill him."

"Carmelite, there's no need," protested Sir Henry.

But the girl paid no attention. "I heard the shot, saw his face. And then — well, I don't know what happened next. I must have fainted or something. When I came to and found myself on my own bed I just couldn't believe it had really happened. But I went back to Starner's room and saw him — well, you know the rest." Her hands fell limply to her sides.

Katharine La Motte's gray eyes were strangely soft as she held out her jade cigarette case. "After all, you only did what any one of us would have done," she said quietly. "We'll stand by you."

"But I don't want you to stand by me." Carmelite's voice was steady. "I've told you all this and I don't

mind telling the police. I feel justified in what I did, and a few years in prison — that wouldn't be so bad compared with the orphanage or the kind of life I'd have led with Starner."

"Listen to me, Carmelite." Sir Henry moved to her side and laid his hands on her shoulders. His eyes as he bent over her were caressing and faintly amused, but in his tone was the authority of a typical English husband. "You say that orphanage taught you obedience. Well, you're going to obey me now. You are never, never going to repeat outside this room what you have told us. When the police come you will say that your father committed suicide because we had found out that he killed Judge Rock. You can leave all the details to us."

There was a general murmur of assent. Slowly Carmelite's mouth moved into a smile. Her grave eyes were smiling, too, as they gazed up into Sir Henry's.

"Perhaps you're right," she whispered. "I suppose the future Lady Bentley . . ."

"Damn the future Lady Bentley!" explained the baronet with gruff tenderness. "I'm thinking of the present Sir Henry Bentley and his friends, who will all be absolutely in the soup if Starner didn't commit suicide."

"Unfortunately, the soup seems inevitable," put in Vanderloon quietly, as his slender finger pointed toward the clock. "It is almost midnight, and the vigilant Mr. Wenz is doubtless getting ready to spoil our story by calling the Ashford police."

"Wenz! You mean Starner's secretary?" Carmelite had sprung to her feet. "Good heavens! I'd forgotten all about him! Of course . . ." She broke off, glancing around her at the faces which had suddenly clouded with apprehension. "But the telephone, isn't it out of order?"

Swiftly Vanderloon explained what had happened. As he spoke the girl's lips parted in a fleeting smile.

"There is one advantage, Mr. Vanderloon, in being the daughter — and the heir — of a blackmailer," she said. "One inherits not only his property but also his hold over other people. I think I can prevent Mr. Wenz from calling the police."

"But even so," put in Libby Hunt anxiously, "he will know that Starner suspected. He can make trouble for us."

"We shall have no trouble from Wenz," replied Carmelite firmly. "Starner made a point of picking his assistants from people who might have had difficulty in finding employment elsewhere. I shall call Mr. Wenz and tell him that Starner has committed both murder and suicide. I shall hint that there may be an investigation into his blackmail activities and remind Wenz that I alone have access to my — er — father's private papers. By tomorrow, I'm sure, Mr. Wenz will be many miles from New York." Her lips were still curved, but her lovely eyes were fixed gravely on the baronet. "After that

I might prove how obedient I can be, Henry. Someone's got to call the local police and report the suicide. I think that I'm the most appropriate person to do it."

For a moment she stood there, motionless. Then slowly she turned and moved toward the hall. As they heard her calm, controlled voice asking for New York on the telephone, Johnnie Thring turned to Libby Hunt.

"What a girl!" he exclaimed enthusiastically.

The hands of the clock in the living-room pointed now to four. The Ashford police had come and gone, taking with them the bodies of Judge Rock and Joseph Starner. The forces of the law had been confronted with a unanimous story, politely but firmly reiterated by each person in the house. Since the town of Ashford, five miles distant, had itself been paralyzed by the blizzard, the police appreciated the fact that the temporary dislocation of the telephone, the absence of automobiles, and the bad state of the roads had made it impossible for them to report the Judge's death earlier. A routine but thoroughly efficient examination revealed nothing to arouse suspicion.

The living-room was very quiet now. Vanderloon's younger guests had gone to bed. Only the Baroness remained downstairs with her host.

"Well, Theo," she murmured, "it is over. The police believe us and plainly they respect you. There will be no more trouble." The smoke from her Russian cigarette curled lazily toward the ceiling. "It is strange — strange and rather amusing. All the time we plot and scheme, we become emotional, we lose our heads — and what is the outcome? We achieve nothing. It is the others — the ones we feared, who really act."

"And it is strange," said Vanderloon reflectively, "that the three people who we thought would make trouble were. the ones who really removed our troubles: the Judge — Carmelite — Starner. . . . As a dilettante philosopher I should consider that a profound commentary upon life."

The Baroness smiled sympathetically at his tired, drawn face. "You must not regret it, Theo. This day, with all its violence, its stupidities, it has been good. All of us, we have been brought face to face with reality; we have seen ourselves as we are; and that happens so seldom. And then, the young people, they have not only found themselves, they have found each other. I think they are going to be happy."

"You have a charming talent for making a fool forget his folly, Lili. And great intuition, too."

"But my intuition, she cannot probe so very far, Theo." Lili Trescow looked at him curiously. "Even now, there is one thing I do not understand. I thought I knew you well — and yet this whole thing, it is too hard and ruthless. It is not my idea of you. What is it made you do it?"

Vanderloon's face had gone very pale. "It was because of Leon," he

said quietly. "He's coming out at the end of the month."

"Theo . . . !"

"Yes. Now Starner is dead, you and Bowles are the only two people to know I have a son who spent five years in a French penitentiary. Possibly you are the only two who know that I married and had a son at all. It's almost twenty years since Henriette left me and took Leon back to France with her. But, now that she is dead, I think he'll come home and be a Vanderloon again." He gave a slight shrug. "The boy didn't have much of a chance with Henriette; he would have had no chance to make a fresh start with Starner alive. You see now, Lili, why I had to step out of my egoisticalseclusion to make a gesture."

The Baroness's eyes were shining as she rose. "So your son, he comes back to you," she whispered. "Oh, Theo, I am glad, so very glad. But now it is late. I say good night." Her fingers pressed his arm; and then, with a gentle smile, she moved away, fading from the pale sphere of candlelight like a charming memory.

After she had left, Vanderloon crossed to the hearth and leaned his thin shoulders against the mantel.

Vanderloon did not look up as Bowles slipped into the room. Slowly, ritualistically, the butler moved across the thick carpet, emptying ashtrays, plumping out cushions.

Vanderloon watched him with an amused smile. "You're a remarkably tidy fellow, Bowles, considering what a busy day you've had already."

"Thank you, sir." The butler glanced up. "Miss La Motte was kind enough to tell me this evening that I was as tidy and efficient as Sir Henry Bentley."

"What did she mean by that?" asked Vanderloon indifferently.

"I imagine everyone took it for granted that it was Sir Henry who went in and tidied up after the young lady, sir. Miss Starner was obviously far too upset at the time to give such a very convincing appearance of suicide." Bowles had moved away from the hearth and was collecting together a number of stray tumblers. "But, personally, I wouldn't say Sir Henry was such a tidy man, sir," he murmured. "He's made a stain on this lacquer table with his glass and I noticed a small burn in the rug where he dropped a cigarette." He shook his head thoughtfully. "And I know these Ashford police, sir. They're a thorough lot. You'd have to be a tidier man than Sir Henry to satisfy the Ashford police."

"Good heavens, Bowles! You seem to be quite a detective. Do you mean you are dissatisfied with the present version of what happened?"

"In a way, sir."

"Well, I'd like to hear your views. But I think I'll have a drink first — some of that Napoleon."

The butler brought a brandy decanter.

"And help yourself, too, Bowles."

"Thank you, sir, if it isn't a liberty . . ."

The butler fetched balloon glasses,

and for a moment the two men stood together near the dying embers of the fire. Bowles fingered the stem of his glass reflectively.

"I was surprised that no one mentioned that second shot, sir," he said at length. "It might have been awkward for Miss Starner if it had been proved that two shots were fired."

"So you thought of that, too!"

"Yes, sir. And then there was the burn on Mr. Starner's shirt front. Of course, the police thought the candle fell on him when he knocked over the table. But Miss Starner happened to mention that it was on the mantelpiece while she was struggling with her father. I just wondered why anyone should have wanted it to look as though the candle had been on the occasional table that was overturned."

"You're being distressingly like one of those omniscient butlers in fiction, Bowles," said Vanderloon, as he twirled the amber liquid in his glass. "I really believe you have a theory. Let's hear it."

He moved to a chair and sat down, nodding Bowles to follow his lead. Stiffly the butler seated himself on the edge of the divan.

"Well, sir, I gather that Mr. Starner was a very cautious man and his profession was one in which threats were often more effective than weapons. Of course, I examined the gun after I had taken it from his bag, but I know so little about firearms that all I could tell was that it was fully loaded."

"Psychologically sound, Bowles," said Vanderloon. "And perhaps you're going to explain why a sensible man like Starner should have defied that angry girl to shoot him when she had the gun and he lay helpless on the floor. It was just a ruse of his to get a stranglehold on her, eh? He knew she was the type who would shoot only once; he also knew that the first — er —cartridge was a blank."

"That's exactly what I was going to suggest, sir."

Vanderloon drained his glass and held it out to the butler. "Thank you, Bowles, I think we're both ready for another. And while I drink mine you can give me what I believe is popularly called — the reconstruction of the crime."

"You mustn't expect too much of me, sir," murmured Bowles solemnly, "but I could give you my idea of what happened. I think Miss Starner told the truth, but I also think there was someone who did not obey your orders about coming down to the living-room as soon as a shot was fired. That person hurried to Starner's room and found things very much as the young lady had left them. Starner was lying on the floor, possibly dazed by the blank explosion, or possibly even pretending to be shot, for reasons of his own."

"And then — ?" put in Vanderloon.

"Only an eyewitness could tell you what happened next, sir. But this same person must have seen the gun lying on the floor, snatched it before

he could be stopped, and shot Starner in the temple at close range. Then, of course, he did everything he could to make it look like suicide. The only really difficult matter must have been the powder marks on the shirt front caused by the explosion of the blank. That overturned candle was a clever idea, sir. Covering fire with fire, as you might say."

"So you don't think Sir Henry would have done such a good job, eh, Bowles?"

"Well, in a sense, sir, he might have done a better one. Being a sporting gentleman, Sir Henry would most certainly have searched first of all for the only thing which was completely overlooked by the other person. I mean the empty shell of the blank cartridge fired by Miss Starner."

The butler's hand went into his pocket and brought out a small metal object. "Luckily, I was able to retrieve it when I took a last look round the room before the police came."

"Admirable, Bowles!" Vanderloon took the discharged shell and fingered it thoughtfully. "I must confess I would never have thought of that. I suppose this would be what they call a clue, Bowles. And I suppose it proves that Miss Starner was not responsible for her father's death."

"That would be my guess, sir."

"As I said before, you've had a busy day, Bowles. You've been butler, cook, electrician, detective, and philosopher. Now I am going to ask you to play the role of ethical adviser, too. Do you think that the person you refer to should ease Miss Starner's conscience by telling her what really happened?"

With the appreciation of a connoisseur Bowles inhaled the aroma from the last drops of brandy in his balloon glass. "In my opinion, sir, that is a question which only you can decide. But I would like to suggest that you seem rather tired. You have had a hard day, too, sir. You had better not worry about anything like that until tomorrow."

Vanderloon looked at him quizzically. Once again the faunlike smile was hovering around his lips. "From your excessive emphasis on the personal pronoun, Bowles, I gather you have known all evening that it was I who finally killed Starner."

"Well, it wasn't exactly deduction, sir." The butler lowered his eyes modestly.

"In any case, you were quite right, Bowles. When I went to Starner's room after hearing that first shot, I never dreamed that I would have the honor. I merely went there to see if there was any tidying up to be done after the — er — Jack of Diamonds."

"Exactly, sir," said Bowles with an apologetic smile. "And I had the same idea myself. In fact, I did take a look in Mr. Starner's room. If I hadn't seen you there, I should probably have taken the liberty of doing — er — exactly what you did, sir."

EVERY CRIMINOLOGICAL CLOUD HAS A SILVER LINING

It is "an ill winde that bloweth no man to good" . . . Recently Philip MacDonald, creator of Anthony Gethryn and Doctor Alcazar, broke his foot, and while temporarily incapacitated read a lot of current magazines. In his slick-sauntering and pulp-peregrinating Mr. MacDonald came across several short-shorts, and they excited his creative curiosity. He was led to wonder whether the detective story, or the crime story, could be adapted to the short-short length.

So that we fully understand the problem, let us arbitrarily set a length for each of the four major forms of prose. The novel can be said to start at 60,000 words; the novelette (or novella) is usually 20,000 to 25,000 words; the short story ranges from 5000 to 10,000 words; and the short-short story (a product undoubtedly of our modern, streamlined notions) is a tabloid-tale, a capsule-chronicle, of 1500 to 2500 words.

Now, harken to Mr. MacDonald's findings: he came to the conclusion that the "pure" detective story could not be satisfactorily compressed into short-short length; on the other hand, the crime or mystery story lent itself easily to 2000-word development.

This is an interesting state of affairs: if true (and we are inclined to agree, with exceptions merely proving the rule), it indicates that the technical requirements of a "pure" detective story necessitate a minimum length of approximately 5000 words.

But Mr. MacDonald came to even more interesting conclusions. Determined to "experiment" in the short-short form, he fumbled around, in his memory and notebook, for suitable plots. He discovered a peculiar affinity between the short-short and the novel. He learned to his amazement that he could take the basic idea for a full-length novel and condense it to short-short proportions; and vice versa, he saw the possibilities of taking a short-short idea and expanding it to novel length. But he could not take a novelette idea or a short story idea and reduce either to 2000 words. Strange, isn't it?

But, as we said in the beginning, it is an ill winde that bloweth no magazine to good. Out of Philip MacDonald's mulling and musing, out of his criminous cogitating, emerged two "experiments" in the short-short story. Because they concern the same central character we have decided to print them together. Herewith, then, Harry the Hat — a cute customer who can operate most successfully within the confines of the shortest literary framework.

TWO EXPLOITS OF HARRY THE HAT

by PHILIP MacDONALD

1. *The Absence of Tonathal*

THE *S. S. Gigantic* (Southampton to New York) docked before noon, but it was after five in the evening when the Merritts reached their apartment house in the East Seventies.

They had been away in England for the best part of a year, and everybody — from Mr. Harkness the manager, down to Eustace the third-assistant porter — was delighted to see them back.

The Merritts stood and chatted to Mr. Harkness while the men brought in the baggage and started to take it up to their penthouse. Mr. Merritt praised the service on shipboard, Mrs. Merritt was just happy to be home, and Miss Susan Merritt (now nearly five and beginning to feel the dignity of her years) insisted upon introducing the boon companion who had accompanied her from London — a monstrous, two-foot-high teddy bear of battle-worn appearance.

"What was the name again?" asked Mr. Harkness, dutifully shaking a limply padded paw.

"Tonathal," said Susan firmly — and her father's lips silently framed the word "Jonathan," over her head.

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Harkness, and then, the baggage having been dealt with, himself escorted the Merritts to the elevator.

A couple of minutes later Mrs. Merritt was standing in the middle of her charming living room, and looking around, and beaming, and saying, "Isn't it *swell* to be back!" After which she and Mr. Merritt labored industriously over the baggage while Miss Merritt dragged Tonathal from room to room, acquainting him thoroughly with his new abode.

It was nearly seven when Mrs. Merritt said, "Let's go eat — it's getting near Susan's bedtime." Whereupon there was a general washing of hands and tidying-up and, eventually, a little trouble over Tonathal. Because Mrs. Merritt didn't want Tonathal to go with them, and Susan most emphatically did.

The day was saved by Mr. Merritt, a notable diplomat. His suggestion that Tonathal looked tired and would much rather have a little something on a tray met with general approval.

"Just so he's good an' comfable," said Susan, and proceeded to direct operations — the setting-up of a card-table by the fireplace, the choice of the right chair and its exact placement at the table, the procurement of china, glass, and silverware, and

finally — a task which she would not delegate — the exactly-adjusted settlement, in the chair, of Tonathal himself.

They finally got away at seven fifteen. They were back, well-fed and relaxed, at eight thirty, with Mrs. Merritt slightly worried about Susan getting to bed so late, and Susan feeling the same way about Tonathal.

"But I spect," she said, as Mr. Merritt put his key in the door, "he went right to sleep in the chair."

But Tonathal had done nothing of the sort. Although everything else stood where it had, Tonathal wasn't in his chair. And Tonathal — as an amazed, incredulous search showed in less than a minute — wasn't anywhere in the living room.

Susan's face began to pucker — and so, in an entirely different way, did Mr. Merritt's. He stood in the middle of the room and scratched his head and said numbly, "It's not possible! It doesn't make sense!"

Mrs. Merritt — an imaginative young woman — disappeared from the living room: while Susan quietly wept, and Mr. Merritt went on scratching his head, she could be heard moving quickly from room to room.

When she came back her face was puckered too: it looked like Mr. Merritt's, only more so. She said, in a sort of incredulous whisper, "It's not *anywhere*. It's — gone!"

Mr. Merritt, scowling, grabbed the house-telephone and began barking into it. He said, "Who's been up in my apartment? . . ." And he said, "It's no good saying that, because someone *has!* How do I know? Because we've been robbed! . . ."

And it seemed that almost at once the apartment was full of people — Mr. Harkness himself; the elevator boy; both night porters; even, for a short while, the switchboard operator.

Everyone talked at once. Everyone had theories, including that of a burglar who for some obscure reason had taken Tonathal as well as valuables. So everyone, eventually, searched every room and found that nothing but Tonathal was missing.

Mrs. Merritt took her quietly weeping daughter to bed, and Mr. Merritt, a wild glitter in his eye, got rid of all the others, except Mr. Harkness. He faced Mr. Harkness in the middle of the living room and pointed to the card-table and the empty chair, and said, in a voice which shook only a little under an iron control:

"Let's go over this — calmly. The bear was there, Harkness. In that chair. It is a toy bear, Harkness. It has no consciousness, no volition. It cannot move of its own accord. Therefore, Harkness, someone must have moved it!"

Mr. Harkness put both hands to his head and would undoubtedly, if he had chanced to have any, have torn his hair.

"Quite. Quite," said Mr. Harkness in muffled tones and then, drawing a deep breath and calling on an iron control equal to Mr. Merritt's own, proceeded to outline the only way

in which a malefactor could achieve entrance to the penthouse. Which was by a hair-raising climb, two hundred feet above the street, first from one fire escape to another, and then along the six-inch ledge of a string-course, and finally onto Mr. Merritt's roof garden.

"To steal a worn-out, one-eyed, half-stuffed *toy*?" asked Mr. Merritt, his voice mounting until it almost reached high C on the last word.

Mr. Harkness shook his head hopelessly. "No!" he said, and very shortly after that took his departure, muttering to himself.

Mr. Merritt then made himself a highball, of deepest hue and titanic proportions. He was taking his first swallow of it when Mrs. Merritt appeared, demanded one for herself, and in reply to Mr. Merritt's anxious inquiries about his daughter reported gloomily, "She's still crying . . ."

Which statement, however, was astonishingly contradicted, the very next moment, by Miss Susan Merritt herself, who appeared — a tousled, blue-pajamaed little figure — in the doorway of the living room.

"No, I'm not," Miss Merritt stated firmly. "I stopped." And Miss Merritt, although there were still tear-stains on her cheeks and a catch in her voice, smiled broadly at her parents.

"I just membered," she continued. "Tonathal's not lost. He just went to have babies." And, so saying, she turned and ran back to her room and climbed into her bed again and immediately slept.

Once more Mr. and Mrs. Merritt faced each other. Simultaneously, each asked the same question — and received the same answer.

Neither of them, it appeared, had at any time discussed with their daughter the highly improbable occurrence of Tonathal becoming *enceinte.*

"I think," said Mr. Merritt, "that if I am not very careful, I shall lose my mind."

"Me too!" said Mrs. Merritt emphatically.

"In which case," said Mr. Merritt, "there is only one thing to be done." He picked up their empty glasses and proceeded to refill them with lavish hand . . .

Something waked Mrs. Merritt. A cry, was it?

She sat bolt upright in bed, and then grabbed at her head with both hands to keep it from falling off. The clock on her bedside table said nine — and sunshine was streaming in through the venetian blinds.

There it was again! It *was* a cry — a hoarse, indeterminate cry from her husband's throat.

She leaped out of her bed and rushed into the living room.

Mr. Merritt, in pajamas, was standing by the fireplace, staring down at Tonathal's chair in frenzied bewilderment.

In Tonathal's chair sat Tonathal again!

And on Tonathal's knees — two on the left, two on the right — sat four

brand-new, bright-eyed, pint-sized teddy bears . . .

In Mulberry Street, on a clear day, there can be seen the jewelry store of one Joseph Pisantio. Over it — and never evident to the eye — is the hide-out of a gentleman known always to his intimates, and sometimes to the Police, as Harry the Hat.

Harry was up there now. He was drinking coffee with one hand and caressing his girl friend Irma with the other, while every so often he glanced at the table-top upon which lay the glittering string of emeralds which was, in fact, the missing and much publicized necklace of the Duchess of Kingston.

"Gee!" said Irma breathlessly. "Was I worried when they got wise you was on the *Gigantic!* I figured you'd never get the stuff ashore."

"I didn't," said Harry. "Friend of mine took it." He reached for a cigarette. "Nice kid . . . She didn't know what she was doin'," he said, "but she did it okay."

"Huh?" Irma sat up straight and eyed him. "A girl! Is *that* why I didn't see you till this morning?"

"Partially," said Harry. "Partially. I had to go buy her a present, see?" His mouth twitched. "Four little teddy bears . . . She's gonna be five next birthday," he added reflectively.

"Oh!" said Irma, and smiled. Harry pulled her close to him, but her eye had been caught by something on the necklace, and she leaned forward and picked from the clasp a piece of ancient, fuzzy, cotton packing.

"What's this?" she asked curiously, holding it to the light.

"That," said Harry the Hat, "comes outa the upper intestines of another bear belonging to this frienda mine."

Irma gazed at him open-mouthed.

"I had to operate," said Harry the Hat. "Twice. One helluva job, honey — specially the second time!"

2. *Sheep's Clothing*

"It's a cinch, I tell ya!" said the fat man. "A babe in arms could do it!"

"Okay," said Harry the Hat. "So it's a cinch. So a baby could do it. So what way do I come in?" He asked the question mildly, and kept a mild eye on the fat man over the rim of his glass.

Surprisingly, the fat man smiled. He said, "This is big stuff, an' for big stuff I always use the best — uh, how they call it — personnel. If you get what I mean," he said.

Harry sighed, and finished his drink. "Give it to me again," he said.

The fat man leaned over the table. He said, slowly and painstakingly and not very loud:

"It's hangin' on the wall in his dinin' room. The end wall opposite the door. It's the on'y picture on that wall. It's an' old fat dame — head 'n

shoulders — an' she's cryin'." He drew in a deep breath, and leaned closer still. "He figures nobody knows there *is* this picture, see? Now it's this way: tomorrow night he'll be goin' out to eat, same as he always does, see? An' the big Swede what works around the place, he'll be out too. So that ways the house is gonna be empty . . ."

"Okay," said Harry the Hat. "Okay. It's not the sorta line I genally go for — but seein' the price is right and your sister's a friend of Irma's —"

Mr. Otto Kublan scrambled out of the taxi and pushed a bill into the driver's hand and hurried across the sidewalk and ran up the steps toward his front door. The bill was a five and he hadn't waited for the change, which showed how worried he was.

He was worried about the Haals *Weeping Duenna*, and was in such a hurry to get into the house that he slipped on the top step and nearly fell — all soft six feet of him. But he managed to keep his balance and approached the door, pulling out his key-chain.

Six weeks ago the Haals picture had been languishing in the cellar of a Dutch farmhouse, where Mr. Kublan, being shown some old furniture by the owner, had happened to catch sight of it.

Mr. Kublan, together with a quantity of stuff he didn't want at all, had purchased the picture for a sum which worked out at approximately thirteen dollars and seventy-five cents, and had brought it home to New York. Carefully, and doing the work himself in the safe seclusion of the little studio behind the Kublan Galleries, he had cleaned the canvas, and restored it, and framed it suitably; and then, before trumpeting its discovery and starting frenzied bidding among the great collectors, had borne it home, to gloat over it for a while in happy secrecy.

But now, at eleven thirty on this particular night, Mr. Kublan was in such a state about the safety of the picture that his pudgy fingers shook and he had great difficulty in getting his key into the lock. The trouble, he told himself, was probably all in his imagination. But still, that paragraph in the evening paper had been a fact, which meant that the secrecy hadn't been complete by any means. Of course, the columnist hadn't said *what* picture ". . . *Otto Kublan recently acquired which will be the surprise of the year in artistic circles*," and further, whatever picture it was, nobody would ever imagine that he'd leave it hanging on a wall in his house. And nobody could possibly know — or could they? — that his servant was away for the night . . .

The key fitted into the lock at last, and Mr. Kublan opened the door and stepped into his dark hallway. He closed the door with one hand and reached for the light-switch with the other — and then froze in the middle of the movement. Because he had seen light where no light should

be. A thin pencil of light shining out from under the dining-room door.

And then there was a noise from the dining room. It was only the faintest whisper of sound but, like the light, it shouldn't have been there.

Mr. Kublan's heart stopped beating, and then started again, with a dreadful irregular thumping, right up in his throat. A horrible nausea seized his stomach, and his whole large body began to tremble.

Forcing himself to the most physically courageous act of his sheltered life, he tiptoed through the darkness to the alcove where the telephone stood. Silently, he lifted the instrument; slowly, softly, he dialed the "O" — and then, after an eon of waiting, heard the operator's voice. From where he stood, he couldn't see the dining-room door, and therefore was unaware that it had opened very, very slightly.

"Police!" quavered Mr. Kublan into the phone, in a harsh and sibilant whisper. "Police! At once! To—" and he gave his address.

Now the dining-room door opened fully and someone stepped out into the hallway, with the light behind him; someone who approached Mr. Kublan swiftly . . .

The light was a cold, uniform grayness when Mr. Kublan's eyes opened. He blinked at it, and tried to sit up, and then groaned and lay down again. He felt extraordinarily peaceful, but not quite in the right sort of way, because his head seemed to be filled with cotton and twice its usual size, and there was a strange, heavy lassitude about his body.

His eyes closed again — it seemed of their own volition. But he willed them to open once more. There had been something wrong with whatever it was that they hadn't quite seen. Maybe the quality of the light was part of it, and the smooth dull gray of the walls, and the odd narrow bed he was lying on . . .

Mr. Kublan forced himself to sit up, holding his oversized head in both hands.

Mr. Kublan saw that the door of this gray place he was in was not, properly speaking, a door at all, being made of strong metal bars.

Until he saw this door which was not a door, Mr. Kublan had not been sure, such was the wooliness in his head, who or why or where he was. But now, in an overwhelming flood, memory and realization came back to him — and in that order. First, he remembered the Haals, and then the light under the dining-room door, and then calling for the Police, and finally the tall figure which had come toward him in the darkness —

And now he realized what strange place he was in. It was a jail!

Mr. Kublan jumped to his feet and staggered over to the door which wasn't a door. He grasped the bars in his fat hands and tried to shake them and began to shout hoarsely . . .

Harry the Hat had just finished telling his girl friend Irma about it.

He had a drink in his free hand, and from where he sat could see with satisfaction the innocent-seeming brown-paper package which contained the priceless canvas which, with the tears running down his chubby cheeks, Mr. Kublan was at this moment describing to no less a personage than the Commissioner of Police.

Irma kissed Harry again, regarding him with an awe-stricken mixture of love and bewilderment. "Ain't you the one, though!" she said, and then, "But I still don't get it. There's you — and there's this other feller — and the cops take the wrong one. How come?"

A fleeting smile showed at one corner of Harry's long mouth. "I told 'em to," he said. "Me an' the Lieutenant was just like this." He held up illustrative fingers.

"Aw, *hon*-ey!" said Irma. "Quit the kiddin'. What I mean, it doesn't make like sense, flatfeet going to a gentleman's house and then pinching *him* 'stead of the feller they're after!"

"They didn't know," said Harry the Hat. "They was confused, because I did like the magician in the circus — I misdirected 'em. See?"

"I do not see." Irma was indignant. "And I think you're acting mean. If you don't want to tell me — well, say so. Jest say so."

"Now then," said Harry the Hat. "Now then!" He squeezed Irma's waist consolingly. "I'll tell you, Sugar. It's like this, see? I'm right in the middle of the job when this square comes home, in the highest degree unexpected. *I* hear him, an' *he's* wise there's someone after his picture, because he goes to the phone an' calls Copper. Now I figure it this way: I got about ten minutes to proceed with a certain plan, which has formed itself instantaneous in my mind. So I whip out and get the guy while he's still at the phone. He's a big fat kinda individual, but he's so scared it's no trick at all jest to clip him on the button an' put him out. Nothing rough, you understand, but sufficient to keep him doggo while I get me a glass of water and put in a few dropsa Finn, an' then kneel down an' lift up his head an' say, 'Drink this,' in a voice like I was his old man or somethin'. Well, he takes a good drink an' then he *is* out, an' I still got a couple minutes before the squad car does like disgorge its cargo at the door . . . So I beat it up the stairs, an' by the time Johnny Law starts knockin', there I am, all set. Maybe his pajamas *was* kinda loose on me — but with the robe on top, an' my hair every which way, an' the poker in my hand that I tell the Lieutenant I hit the guy with — well, there's no doubt about me, see? What I mean, it's one of those things: you go to a guy's house, an' the one in the sleep-suit's the one what lives there, isn't he? . . .

"Ipsy facto," said Harry the Hat.

Quentin Reynolds: football player, heavyweight boxing champion at Brown University, crack swimmer, reporter, lawyer, sports writer, foreign correspondent, editor, roving investigator, narrator in the movies, lecturer, radio commentator, novelist, movie scenarist — who does not know the name of Quentin Reynolds? He is a friend of great men all over the world, but even more important he is a friend of little men all over the world. He is a man of good will, and his heart belongs to the underdog. And occasionally he finds time to write detective stories. Does that surprise you? It doesn't surprise us. Show us a writer who dedicates his life to fighting evil in whatever form it may take — dictatorship, intolerance, bigotry, crime— and we will show you a detective-story writer, and a good one.

NEVER TRUST A MURDERER

by QUENTIN REYNOLDS

THE thing I first liked about Detective (First Grade) Max Friedman was that he looked like a cop. He was a very big guy who moved rather slowly, but he didn't think slowly and he was acknowledged by everyone on the force to be the best homicide cop in New York. He had a flattened nose, a souvenir of his early days when he'd been a free-swinging member of the riot squad. He had big feet and he wore big thick-soled shoes and even in plain clothes "copper" stuck out all over him. He didn't care about pottery created during the Ming Dynasty; he didn't have a flower garden; he didn't give a damn for poetry or etchings and he never voted. He was just a cop.

Max was a quiet man, who liked to listen a lot more than he liked to talk. When he did talk he talked about the only subject he knew a great deal about — the subject of murderers. Otherwise he was a very normal sort of person. On his day off he'd go to a ball game or to the race track. He was a great fan of the Giants and he also liked the Empire track because it was small and it was one of the few tracks in the world where you could actually see the horses running. He liked movies too. Oddly enough he liked crook movies the best. It's odd for a copper to like crime pictures.

"What I like about them," he once told me, grinning, "is that in those kind of movies the crook or the murderer always gets caught. Now with us it isn't that way. Often our cases end up with a lot of loose ends, and the guy we are after is maybe sitting in Mexico City laughing his head off at us."

"But, Max," I protested, "New York has the best homicide record of any city in the world except London."

"A lot of them have got away from us since I joined the force," he said darkly. "For instance, the guy who killed Elwell. Remember that case? A bridge player named Joseph Elwell? We had a thousand clues, ran 'em all down, and where do we end up? Behind the eight ball, that's where."

"The Elwell case? That was back in 1922."

"It was 1920," he corrected. "But murder is murder whether it's in 1920 or 1945."

"You hate murderers, don't you?"

He looked faintly puzzled. "No, I got nothing against them. My job is to catch them. If I don't catch them it means I've done a lousy job. But I don't hate 'em."

"But you catch most of them?"

"Oh, sure," he said carelessly. "I've sent plenty of them to the chair since I've been on homicide. You want to go to Empire today?"

"I always want to go to Empire," I told him, and then I phoned my office and said that I wouldn't be working this afternoon. I work for a very tough city editor who knows all the lies. The one thing that baffles him is the truth. I told him I was taking the afternoon off to go to Empire, and that startled him so that he said, "Okay. I got a tip on the fourth. A goat called Shoofly. Bet me five ross."

We walked out of the big gloomy-looking building on Centre Street, and the sun hit us right in the face and it felt good. We got into a squad car, which surprised me.

"This is a business trip." Friedman grinned.

"You going to pick someone up at the Empire track?"

"I hope so." The car tore up Fourth Avenue. An old-timer named Hammond was driving and he seemed to take a grim delight in seeing how close he could come to brushing very large trucks.

"It's a suspect in the Low case," Friedman said. "You been following that one?"

"Not very closely. I know that an old guy was shot, and you coppers have been running in circles looking for someone to pin it on."

"That's right," Friedman said. "Here's the story: Robert Low was a very decent citizen who lived with his eighteen-year-old son in a five-room apartment in Gramercy Square. On a Thursday night Low and his son went out to dinner and then to the theater. It was their cook's night off. They came back to the flat, and as Low was about to put his key into the lock he noticed that a light was on inside. He remembered that he had turned the light out when he and the boy had left. The cook didn't sleep in, so he knew she couldn't have turned on the light. Low was a cautious man. He told his son to run downstairs and get a cop. The kid lit out. There was no cop around Gramercy Square. He had to go over to Third Avenue. He came back in about ten minutes with

a cop. They went upstairs and there they found the old gent lying dead; shot right between the eyes. Evidently someone had burgled the flat and then, as he came out, found Low there. Maybe Low took a punch at him and then the crook shot him."

"You didn't find the gun?"

"Yeah, we found the gun. I was there with my men a few minutes later. It was a warm night and there were quite a few people around the Square. A couple of them said they had seen a small man throw something over the iron railing that keeps the vulgar unwashed from going into Gramercy Park. That's all we had to go on: a small man and this gun with no prints on it.

"We traced the gun, all right. It had been sold by a pawnbroker named George Maney. He described his customer as a small well-dressed man. He had a permit to carry the gun, and the pawnbroker had registered the name and number. It belonged to a jeweler whose own flat had been burgled about six months before. He had reported the loss of the gun permit. Evidently the two jobs had been done by the same man."

I winced as we were almost mousetrapped by an eight-ton brewery truck and a streetcar. "You don't have much to go on," I said.

"Not much," Friedman admitted sadly. "But the pawnbroker added something. The gun cost fifteen dollars, and when the customer paid for it, he said to the pawnbroker, 'If you want to make that grow, put it on Firebug in the fourth at Belmont today.' They were running at Belmont then. I asked the pawnbroker if he had bet on Firebug and he said he hadn't. He was sorry about that too, he told me, because Firebug won and paid forty-two dollars . . . so at least we knew a little more about the man. He was small, dark, and apparently he liked to bet on horses.

"Now we've got a file down at headquarters on every known criminal. That rang a small bell, not a very loud one. Before I got into plain clothes I was working with the loft squad. I knew most of the crooks around then. A lot of them turned square. A lot of them hadn't. Some of them I'd done small favors for. Anyhow I called a few of them in and asked them about a small, dark man who bet on horses and who specialized in apartment burglaries. I finally came up with Jack Rees.

"This Rees filled the bill all right except for the murder angle. He was strictly a burglar and not in the killing business at all. He was a very successful horse player, they said. He'd make a pile, then shack up with some girl in a really first-class hotel. He liked to live good. When his dough ran out he'd break into a place, lift enough jewelry to cash to give him a stake and then go back to the race track."

"We're going to pick him up?"

"I hope so," Friedman said. "After all, Empire is the only track that's open. Of course he probably isn't our

man. Flat men seldom carry guns, and no one has suggested that this Jack Rees was ever a biff guy."

"What's a biff guy?" I asked.

"On homicide we call professional murderers biff guys. Vincent Coll was a biff guy. So was Lepke, and that mob O'Dwyer got in Brooklyn was made up of biff guys."

"We're getting near there, Max," I told him. "Have that ape up in front stop leaning on that siren or we'll scare the horses to death."

It was a good day for racing, and, as I said, Empire to me is the best track in the world. First we went into the dining room to see Joe and Harry Stevens. As everyone knows they run the restaurants at the tracks and run the hot-dog business at ball games. I said to Joe Stevens, "What's good today, Joe?"

His eyes lighted up and he said, "The liver and bacon."

I said, "I mean what's good to bet on?"

"Bet on the liver and bacon," he said in disgust. "Never bet on anything that can talk."

"Horses can't talk," I reminded him.

"Jockeys can," he said. The Stevens brothers just don't believe in gambling. They think betting on horses is a very silly thing to do. I agree with them but I have the courage to ignore my principles.

"You seen a man around here named Jack Rees?" Friedman asked.

"Rees? A small, dark man? Yes, he's around here every day. I remember him because he's about the only one around who orders champagne. He's a pretty big better, I think. You'll find him somewhere around the clubhouse."

We went outside and got a table. The best of Empire is that you can sit at a table and the horses are practically right in your lap. You can really see them run at Empire. Friedman knew a lot of people there at the track. He knew the touts and he knew the runners; the men who take your money and stand in line at the windows to make your bets for you. He asked each one of them if he knew a man named Jack Rees. California Tommy, who has been a runner for thirty years, said he did the running for Rees. Sure, he knew him. A swell guy. A heavy tipper. He was around somewhere. The second race was coming up now and I liked a horse named Kate's Pride.

"He hasn't got a chance." Friedman said.

"He's got four legs. That's all the rest of them have," I told him.

"And Jimmy Crichton up on him," Max snorted. "That guy could hold an elephant away from a bale of hay. I'll take the favorite."

"Blue Grass? Hell, he's even money!" I hate betting on favorites.

"Where can you get better interest on your money?" Max said, giving California Tommy five dollars to bet on Blue Grass. I bet on Kate's Pride and watched the dog throw his jock at the gate, get off to a three-length lead and then start to sulk. She sulked herself into coming home last.

Maybe she was no good and maybe that jock was holding her in. Blue Grass, of course, won.

Friedman won the third too, and then in the fourth I made a bet for the boss on Shoofly and, trying to recoup, bet twenty for myself. Friedman went along too. Shoofly ran as if they'd filled him with benzedrine. He won by four lengths, laughing, and paid $12.40. Everybody was happy.

"Well," Friedman sighed, "let's go to work."

California Tommy pointed out a small dark man to us and said that was Jack Rees. He was with a very good-looking blonde who looked good even there with the sun shining on her. There are plenty of girls who won't go to the track. That sun brings out wrinkles. Max went up to them and showed his badge to Rees.

"You mind coming along?" he asked mildly. "We want to talk to you at headquarters."

Rees laughed. "Talk to me, copper? Is it a crime to beat the races? That's all I been doing."

"It's a crime to drop in people's houses uninvited and help yourself to little trinkets."

"You got the wrong man, copper," Rees said, not a bit disturbed. "Let me show you something."

He pulled out a wallet, and I blinked. It was filled with hundred-dollar bills. There must have been thirty of them there.

"I got plenty more too," Rees said. "You can look up my bank account. Now what is a man loaded with dough like this doing going around lifting little trinkets?"

"We could be wrong," Friedman said sadly. "But if we are you won't have to stay long; let's get going."

"You're being very silly," the blonde said angrily. "Jack is an insurance man. I've known him for ages."

"How long is ages, miss?" Max asked mildly.

"Well . . . oh, a couple of months," she said.

"Honey, I'll do what the man says." Rees was debonair and unworried. "Now let me mark the rest of your card, and you bet a hundred to win for me on these horses."

He marked the card for her and then stood up. We walked out of the place talking about the horses. Rees was all right, I decided, and this time Friedman had stubbed his toe. Rees had a nice smile and he didn't mind a bit going down to headquarters.

"What the hell! You got a job to do," he told Max. "I'm clean. I got nothing to worry about. When I was a kid, I admit, I was a bit wild. Sometimes I'd go along with the boys and maybe snatch some cigarettes or candy from a shop. But that was a long time ago."

"What insurance company do you work for?" Friedman asked.

"That's a stall to make that doll of mine happy," he laughed. "I make my living at the track. You know if you work hard enough at it you can beat the horses. I've got a clocker who's there every morning. I get the

best information there is and I don't play hunches or gray horses or fillies in the spring meetings. This is a business with me."

"You do all right?"

"I do all right," Rees said.

We got to headquarters and Max questioned him. No rough stuff; Friedman just questioned him. Low was killed on the night of September 9th — three weeks before.

"Where were you on the night of September 9th?" Friedman asked.

"I have no idea," Rees said calmly. "Where were you? Do you remember?"

"No, I don't," Friedman admitted, and I saw a reluctant look of admiration come into his eyes. This man knew the right answers.

Friedman was patient. He asked questions for two hours. Rees was tired and a little irritable now. But he answered everything with apparent frankness. Meanwhile they'd brought in the pawnbroker. Friedman took Rees downstairs to the stage where they have the line-up. First he put a light coat on him and a slouch hat. That's how the man had been dressed who'd bought the gun. He put Rees into a line with six others — all big men, I noticed. The lights were turned on.

Friedman said to the pawnbroker, "Ever seen any of those men before?"

"Sure, sure," the pawnbroker said excitedly. "I seen that man — the one on the end there."

"What?" Friedman exploded.

The man on the end of the line was Detective Charles Armstrong. Armstrong almost had apoplexy.

"Sure," the pawnbroker said. "I seen him last week. He came into my shop to buy a saxophone."

"A saxophone?" Friedman roared. Armstrong grew red in the face. He'd never live that down.

"You see any of the others?" Friedman asked.

The pawnbroker looked intently. "I think so. That little guy. That's the one all right who bought a gun off of me. He's the one who gave me the tip on Firebug. Yeah, that's the guy, all right."

"That's all," Friedman snapped. Then he brought Rees upstairs for more questioning. He wasn't so affable now.

"You'd had a bad session at the track and you were broke," he snapped. "You needed a stake. So you broke into a flat on Gramercy Square. Coming out, you bumped into the man who lived there. Maybe he took a punch at you; his knuckles were skinned. So you let him have it. Here's the gun you used."

"You're nuts," Rees said tersely. There were beads of sweat on his forehead and he was clenching his hands. "You're nuts." he almost yelled.

Friedman's questions came faster now, like trip hammers. He asked a thousand questions that had nothing to do with the murder. Where had Rees gone to school? What church did he go to as a kid? What did his father do for a living? Rees was weary now

and his eyes shifted away from Friedman's hard gaze. This was all part of a pattern. I'd seen Friedman do it before.

"You killed him." Friedman's voice was like ice.

"I didn't," Rees cried out.

"You bungled it too, you dope," Friedman snapped. "You should have stuck to your little petty-larceny jobs. You shouldn't have used a gun. You don't know how to handle one. You even left your fingerprints on this, the gun you used."

"I wore gloves," Rees shouted almost automatically. And then it was over. A look of horror came over his face as he realized what he'd said.

Then it came out, but fast. Sure he'd done the job, Rees admitted, but he didn't mean to shoot the old man. He had been surprised when he'd come out of the flat to find Low waiting, and Low had swung at him. They struggled and the gun went off accidentally.

"That was a hell of a good shot considering it was accidental," Friedman snapped. "Caught him right between the eyes. Take the bum away," he added, and they dragged the now gibbering Rees to a cell.

"You got it all down?" Friedman said to a stenographer who had been taking notes. He nodded. "Nice to have a confession. It makes things easier for the D.A."

"His lawyer will say you beat it out of him," I suggested.

"That's why I let you sit in on this," Friedman grinned. "You can testify that the questioning was gentle and all according to Marquis of Queensberry rules." . . .

That's how it was. Rees hired the most expensive criminal lawyer in town but none of his tricks worked. Rees was up before Judge Wallace, and Wallace never did like housebreakers who carried guns. Wallace threw the book at him and gave him the chair. Now if that was all there was to the story, it would hardly be worth the telling. Men like Max Friedman break murder cases every week in New York. It's routine to them. But what followed wasn't quite routine.

I met Friedman a week before Rees was scheduled to walk into that little square room and sit down in the only unoccupied chair in it. We got to talking of this and that, and finally he talked about Rees.

"Funny thing," Friedman said thoughtfully, "Fred Olsen phoned me yesterday — you know Olsen, the Sing Sing warden — well, he asked me could I get Rees two or three weeks reprieve. I asked him if he had any new evidence, and he said he hadn't. He wanted me to go to Judge Wallace and have him recommend that Rees be granted a stay. The way it works out in this state is that if the judge who did the sentencing asks the governor for a stay, it is granted automatically. Olsen made quite an issue of it, but he wouldn't give any reason. So I told him to go to hell."

"I wonder what his reason was!"

"I don't know," Friedman said.

"I'll know next week, though. You know the rule in this state. One member of the police force has to attend all executions to act as an official witness. So I'm elected."

"Do you like watching executions?" I asked curiously.

Friedman shrugged, "Frankly, murderers aren't people to me. They're rats and I'm afraid that I don't have any feeling about them."

Well, he went up to the big house on the river and when he came back, I dropped in to see him. I was a bit curious about that strange request Olsen had made. I knew the warden, all right; he was a fine honest man. It wasn't like him to ask for a reprieve for a murderer. I asked Max what the score was.

"Kind of silly," Friedman grinned. "I got up there in time for dinner. I had dinner with Olsen. He told me the truth. It seems that men in the death house get some small privileges other prisoners don't get. For instance, if they can pay for them they are allowed to have newspapers. Now Rees ordered one paper each day. Just one — the Racing Form. He'd study that damn' thing for hours and then pick horses. The guards thought he was nuts at first but then they noticed that the horses he picked usually won. So they started to bet on his selections, themselves.

"Well, he picked a few long shots, and the guards did all right stringing along with him. Olsen heard of it, too, and he started playing Rees's selections. But Olsen didn't start until a couple of weeks before Rees was scheduled to burn. Like all horse players he got awfully greedy. That's when he phoned me. He figured if he could keep Rees alive another few weeks he'd get rich. He was very unhappy when the time came to throw that switch, believe me."

"Did you see Rees before he was chilled?" I asked.

Friedman grinned, "Yeah, I saw him. In fact I took that last stroll with him. During the trial when he was on the stand he made a couple of nasty cracks aimed at me. Well, there was no reason why he should have loved me; after all, I convicted the guy. So I wasn't surprised to see his eyes gleam a bit when I walked into his cell. But then he got up and shook hands and said, 'No hard feelings, copper. You had to do it. That's your job. I just bet on a long shot that didn't come off, and I don't mind paying.' "

Friedman paused for a moment before going on. "We began the walk to that room. Rees, as calm as if he were walking to his box at Empire, said casually, 'Man alive, but I'd like to be at Belmont tomorrow. I got a real sleeper in the big stake.' I said, 'What the hell, Rees, how can the Whitney horse lose?' He said, 'You haven't been watching that filly of Hirsch Jacobs'. That Brooklyn Handicap is made for her. A little filly named Ginny R. Last time out, that was two months ago, she won a mile in 1:38 and she was looking over her shoulder at the finish. Six lengths she

won by.' I said, 'Rees, you're out of your mind. She's the longest shot in the race. She's thirty to one. I like the Whitney horse.'

"By now," Friedman continued, "we'd reached the little green door. We walked into the death house. There was the usual crowd of reporters there, all looking a bit sick. I guess Rees and I were the only ones who didn't mind it. Rees said, 'Don't be a sucker, copper. This is my last tip. Bet the family jewels on the filly, and your wife will wear diamonds. The filly is ready, chum. Jacobs has been waiting for this spot. I know. Bet on the Ginny R., copper. . . .'

"Well," Friedman said, "they were the last words he spoke. Ten seconds later he was dead."

"Funny guy, that Rees," I said to Friedman. "Even sitting there in the chair, all he could think of was horses."

"You're wrong there," Friedman said to me. "Sitting there in the chair, all Rees could think of was how he hated me and how he could square things with me."

"What do you mean, Max?"

"Why, he was purposely giving me a bum tip, hoping I'd make a good bet on the horse and lose my shirt. You can never trust a murderer even when he's sitting in the chair."

"Then you didn't bet on the filly?"

"Do you think I'm crazy?" Friedman said angrily. "Of course not. I remembered that dirty look Rees gave me when I went into his cell. He didn't like me a bit. Besides, I'd never bet on a filly in the spring. No, I bet on the solid horse that Whitney owns. No matter how you doped the race, he figured to win . . ."

"How did the race come out?"

Friedman looked surprised. "Didn't you hear? Hell, the filly won and paid $62.50. The Whitney horse finished last."

Every once in a while a ball player making his first official appearance at the plate cracks out a home run. Barry Perowne did that when he submitted his first story to EQMM. The bases were loaded at the time, and Barry Perowne's "The Blind Spot" cleared the bags. "The Blind Spot" was a prodigious, Ruthian, grand-slam homer of a story. It became a modern classic overnight, and after its publication in EQMM it was adapted for radio broadcast, made into a motion picture, and anthologized.

For EQMM's Fourth Annual Prize Contest, Barry Perowne submitted two stories. One was awarded a prize and will be published later this year; the other was promptly accepted for pre-prizewinner publication. While neither story approaches the stature of "The Blind Spot" (how many contemporary stories do?), both are clean, sharp hits in any league. You will find "Up the Garden Path" a curiously melodramatic tale which, we warn you, should not be put aside anywhere along the route . . .

UP THE GARDEN PATH

by BARRY PEROWNE

ALTHOUGH Claire Shelby hadn't seen her sister Madelon in eight years, she thought about her a great deal. They wrote regularly to each other, and, perhaps because they were twins, there existed between them a bond of intuitive sympathy and understanding.

They were the daughters of an English portrait painter, Gerald Shelby, whose commissions entailed frequent visits to the United States. He took his daughters with him, alternately, on these trips — as much to separate them as for any other reason, for their mother was dead and he considered that they were imaginatively too much wrapped up in each other.

Claire had been in America with him when war broke out, and he had arranged for her to remain there. He had returned to England with the intention of sending Madelon to join her, but fear of torpedoing had prevented this, and from the age of fifteen the girls had grown up apart.

Gerald Shelby had been killed while working as a war artist, at the assault crossing of the Rhine. He had been a celebrated, highly-paid man, but easygoing and extravagant, and he had left little. Claire had got herself a job in New York, and a year later Madelon, in England, had married a young doctor called Norman Fenn.

One day, with a vacation before her and money in her purse, Claire on a sudden impulse walked into a travel agency and booked a passage to England. She hadn't premeditated

any such thing. It was a complete surprise to her. She wasn't lonesome or unhappy herself, nor had she any reason to be troubled about Madelon, whose letters were as full, natural, and affectionate now, after eight years, as though they never had been separated.

It was just, Claire told herself, that she had a hunger to see Madelon again. She wanted to surprise her, to call her on the telephone, and when Madelon said, "Isn't this transatlantic call costing you a fortune?", she wanted to be able to answer airily, "I'm in England, darling. I'll be with you in an hour or two!"

Madelon's husband recently had taken over a practice in a small town in the Midlands, near the border of Wales.

At first, on the voyage from New York, Claire hugged to herself the thought of that telephone call, of Madelon's astonishment and delight. But as England grew steadily nearer, Claire found her excitement slipping oddly away from her and a kind of doubt taking its place. She didn't know why. The only reason she could think of was that, being at sea, she might have missed a letter from Madelon. She began to wonder whether there might be something important in such a letter, and she was tempted to send Madelon a radiogram. But the ship was due to dock in another day or so, and the vague disquiet she felt seemed to Claire so irrational that she refused to spoil her surprise because of it.

She reminded herself, "Father always hated any talk of affinity, telepathy, all that stuff, between Maddy and me."

Yet she still felt a bit worried, and to save the best part of twenty-four hours she landed by tender at Plymouth, instead of going on to Southampton.

It was evening when she went ashore, intending to go to a hotel in Plymouth and telephone Madelon from there. But the porter who carried her two large suitcases out of the Customs shed glanced at the labels, which she had addressed in care of her sister.

"Ashden Wells?" he said, with his burring Devon accent. "That's on the Birmingham line, miss. You can just catch the night train, if you hurry. Get you in to Ashden Wells at six a.m."

Claire hesitated for just a moment. Six a.m. would be an awkward time to arrive. But the thought of pushing straight on, instead of wasting a night here at a strange hotel in Plymouth, was too tempting to resist.

Presently she was settled in a corner seat in a First Class compartment of the train. It was a warm, soft night of early summer, and gazing out at the tranquil countryside sliding by in the moonlight she felt excited and moved, not only by the fact of being here in England again, but by the circumstances of the journey. It gave her a strange sensation to think that at this moment, with every click of the wheels carrying her closer to

Madelon, nobody in the world who knew her had the faintest idea where she was.

The window faintly reflected her sensitive face, her dark gray eyes, the blonde sheen of her hair. It reflected also the face of the only other person in the compartment, a middle-aged, bald man who sat in the corner seat farthest removed from her. She saw his glance roving from her neat shoes and trim ankles, over her gray tailor-made, to the suitcases in the rack above her. She turned her head with a friendly smile, but his glance dropped hurriedly, in embarrassment, to his book, a detective story with a jacket luridly depicting a hanging woman.

Claire lighted a cigarette. Taking some of Madelon's letters from her handbag, she read them through once more. They were happy letters. Madelon was very much in love with her husband.

"I want you and Norman to meet one day," she wrote, "and be great friends. Only, not *too* great, darling! I'm horribly jealous —"

Enclosed with one of the letters were some snapshots taken a few months before, when Madelon and Norman had first moved to Ashden Wells. As a child, Madelon hadn't been too strong; there had been some worry about her health. But these snapshots showed her radiant, and so much like Claire in feature and figure that looking at them was like looking at snapshots of herself. Here was Madelon on the lawn of her pretty house. Here was Madelon with her dachshund — Claire had forgotten its name; it was in one of the letters. Here were Madelon and Norman —

Claire studied this one for a long time, in the slightly rocking compartment, with the wheels beating out their monotonous rhythm.

They were standing together in a stone gateway, Madelon with a hand affectionately on Norman's shoulder. He was, Claire knew, twenty-eight, five years older than Madelon and herself. He *looked*, she thought, like a young, ambitious doctor. He was tall, impeccably dressed in a dark, double-breasted suit, and in one hand he held a black bag. He had a thin, keen face, and hair that looked as blond as Madelon's. He was definitely handsome and one day would be distinguished; he was that type. And somehow, Claire wasn't quite sure that she was going to like Norman Fenn.

She had had that feeling the first time she had looked at this picture, and she had it now — and didn't know why. It might have been that his expression seemed cold in contrast to Madelon's obvious, deep pride and love. It might have been that he was just too meticulously groomed. Or it might have been, Claire thought, that she'd rather the little, fond gesture of the hand on the shoulder had been his instead of Madelon's.

Claire didn't know why, but she didn't like the feeling she had. She put away the letters and snapshots

and tried not to think about them any more. The middle-aged, bald man was asleep in his corner, his book lying face down on his knees. She looked out of the window. The fields slid by, moonlit and peaceful; the hedges and plump trees cast shadows of a daytime blackness. She was here, she thought with a thrill. She was on her way to Madelon.

"Dearest Madelon," she thought tenderly, and the monotonous rhythm of the wheels said over and over, "Madelon — Madelon — Madelon—"

Claire was the only passenger to leave the train at Ashden Wells. The middle-aged, bald man roused himself to get her suitcases out for her. He stood them beside a platform seat, blushed when she thanked him, and scurried back aboard.

It was a glorious summer morning. The whistle of the train, as it passed on into a tunnel, floated back to Claire through the warm, early sunshine. The rails lay shining, faintly humming. The little, gray stone station was deserted, except for herself and an old porter who came limping up to take her ticket.

It seemed indecently early to telephone Madelon of her totally unexpected arrival, and she wondered whether there might be some place where she could freshen up first and get breakfast. She asked the old porter about it.

"You might find one of the 'otels astir," he said dubiously. "There's no taxis yet, though."

Claire asked, "Is there somewhere I could leave my suitcases for an hour?"

"Left Luggage office ain't open yet," said the porter. "They'll be all right where they are, miss."

Ashden Wells was a little spa town of opulent old stone houses, bowered in trees, set on the slope of a steep hillside. Against the blue sky the summit of the hill rose gently rounded, and sheep cropping high up on the heather slopes looked like white boulders slowly moving. From a chimney here and there morning smoke rose straight and still, but Claire had the narrow street leading up from the station wholly to herself. From the trees which lined it long shadows slanted; the shop windows shone blank with sunshine. The click of her heels on the pavement, the pipe and stir of sparrows in the trees, were the only sounds.

The peace of the little town, sealed in sleep and sunshine, seemed to Claire almost enchanted. She walked on and on up the steep street, passing several big, old, rambling hotels with porches in which hung pots of trailing fern and scarlet geraniums. None showed any sign of life, and presently she came to a turning marked with a name that made her heart quicken in recognition: Oldtown Road.

"I'm here," she thought. "At last I'm here."

This was it. This was the name she had written so many times on envelopes. This was where Madelon lived.

It was a broad road of old, solid houses with raised, banked lawns, pine trees, masses of blossom. Everywhere cascades of laburnum shone golden in the pure light; and, hatless, her bag under her arm, her thumbs hooked over her pocket-edges, Claire walked on slowly along the middle of the road, looking up at the houses on either side. Behind one of those sun-bright windows, she thought almost with wonder, Madelon — and Norman — would be lying asleep; and she felt suddenly a little guilty at being here this way, without warning. The beauty everywhere made the vague disquiet which had brought her so far seem silly and neurotic, and she felt like an intruder.

On a stone gatepost on the left a polished brass plate winked in the sunshine. Standing in the middle of the empty road, she could read the legend: *Dr. Norman Fenn.*

Birds flickered, piping, about the new-leafed creeper that covered the trellised walls of the house, and the casement windows of an upper room stood wide open. Madelon's room, she felt certain. What should she do? Go through that open gateway, up the short, curving drive, and ring the bell? Or call up to the window, "Madelon! Hey, Maddy!"? *Eight years —*

It was ridiculous that suddenly the morning should tremble before her eyes in a glitter of color and sunshine. She gave her head a little, impatient shake, and was about to approach the gateway when the flicker of a lace curtain in an upper window of the house on the left caught her attention. She glimpsed there a pale, beautiful face, a gleam of copper hair, dark eyes intently watching her.

The face drew back. A hand gently adjusted the curtain.

With the sense of being watched, Claire became conscious of the measured throb of her heart. She glanced around over her shoulder at the houses opposite. There, too, in an upper window, she saw a curtain move furtively; and in the tranquil morning, she felt a queer little chill, and she crossed quickly to the gateway, walked up the drive under the pines, and pressed the doorbell.

The response was instant and startling.

The door opened. There stood Norman Fenn. Before she could speak, she was in his arms. She was kissed, lifted, carried across the threshold, set down in a big, sunny hall.

Exuberantly, he was saying, "Darling, what *are* you doing here? At this hour? I was coming up today. I —" He broke off. His hands dropped. He flushed.

"I know," Claire said, and she laughed a little shakily. "You thought I was Madelon."

His blue eyes gazed at her in utter incredulity. He said slowly, "There's only one other person in the world that you *could* be." He drew a deep breath, held out his hand. "Hello, Claire."

"Hello, Norman," she said.

Still holding her hand, he shook his head. "I can't get over it," he said, in wonder. "It's amazing. I'm sorry about —"

"That wasn't your fault," Claire said.

His smile was attractive. "Thanks," he said. "But — when did you get here? Why didn't you 'phone, wire, cable? We'd have come to meet you, or Madelon would have been here, or —"

"I wanted it to be a surprise," Claire said, "and it's even rather a surprise to myself. Where *is* Madelon, Norman?"

"She's up at the cottage," he said. "I own a little old cottage up in the Welsh hills. It hasn't been used for years, but there's a bit of fishing with it, and now that we've moved so close, we thought it'd be fun for weekends. Madelon's there now, fixing it up. This is my free day, when a colleague takes my patients, and I was going up there. Otherwise, I'd probably have been in bed, this early."

She noticed, now, that he wore gray flannels and a tweed jacket. Their fit and cut, on his tall figure, were faultless. A silk muffler was knotted at his throat; not a hair of his blond head was out of place.

"But how do you come to arrive at this odd hour?" he asked.

She told him.

"You took a taxi up from the station?" he said.

"No, I walked. I thought I'd have breakfast," she explained, "before I sprang myself on you, but there was no place open, and — I sort of found my way here."

"What about your luggage?"

"I just left it on the platform. The porter said it'd be all right."

"Well," he said, smiling at her, "well, this *is* a surprise. You'll come up to the cottage with me, of course. This'll be a big day for Madelon. But look, you must want to freshen up after your journey. I'll take you up to our room. If you want to change, you'll find any amount of Madelon's things around. It's rather useful," he added, chuckling, as he led the way up the broad staircase, "that you can be so sure they'll fit. I never dreamed you two were *quite* so much alike."

He opened the door of a big, airy, bright bedroom with wide-open windows — the room which Claire had guessed would be Madelon's. One of the twin beds was smooth and neat; the other had been slept in.

"Excuse that," Norman Fenn said. "We have a daily woman, but she doesn't come in till eight thirty. The only other staff we have is a bright youth who wears a white jacket and answers the 'phone and likes to call himself 'the dispenser.' Only, being my day off, it's his, too."

Claire was looking out the window at the houses across the road. "My arrival," she said, "seemed to be rather intriguing to the neighbors."

Norman, opening the door of a wardrobe, glanced around at her.

"What gives you that impression?"

"Oh, I noticed a certain amount of — curtain reconnaissance," Claire said lightly.

He nodded with a hint of grimness. "You're right, of course. You know what a small spa is, Claire — anywhere in the world. Full of elderly, well-off, hypochondriac ladies with nothing to do but peek and gossip. A new doctor — we've only been here a few months — is meat and drink to them."

"Especially if he's young and good-looking," Claire thought to herself.

Norman said, "Well, here you are — frocks and shoes and things. Make yourself at home, Claire. I'm going down, now, to fix some breakfast."

Changing into a summer frock of Madelon's, Claire decided that Norman Fenn wasn't in the least what she had expected from that snapshot. He was anything but cold and aloof. She couldn't understand, now, why she ever should have felt that she wouldn't like him.

There was a good smell of toast and coffee when she went downstairs. Her brother-in-law was carrying a tray out through French doors that opened from the hall.

"We always have breakfast on the lawn at the back here, days like this," he said. "The sun's too good to miss."

In fact, it was very pleasant here, and peaceful. The shadows of croquet hoops slanted across the lawn, where thrushes hopped in the dew and the neat wagtails came and went busily. Everywhere glowed the gold of laburnum, the tender pink of cherry bloom. From the far end of the lawn rose a slope of hillside, grown with pines, among which were set two or three solid old houses whose windows looked down on the breakfasters.

Silver and china winked on the garden table, and as she lifted the percolator with a slim, brown hand, Claire said, "It's all really lovely."

"Ashden Wells?" Norman said. "We'll do better than this one day. This is a backwater."

The houses up on the slope, and those to either side, preserved in Claire a lingering feeling of being observed. Buttering toast, she glanced up fleetingly at the rear windows of the house where she had seen that intent, pale, beautiful face.

"What sort of people live next door there?" she asked casually.

"Oh, a whole collection of old trouts," Norman said. "It's a boarding house, expensive — what we call a 'private' hotel. Let's not talk about Ashden Wells. Tell me about your trip, Claire. When did you decide to come?"

She was telling him all about it when footsteps crunching on gravel, and a cheery whistling, sounded around the side of the house. Norman excused himself, went in through the French windows, carrying his napkin.

Claire began to stack the breakfast things on the tray. She carried it into the hall. A murmur of voices told her

which must be the door to the kitchen; and as she opened that door, which led into a sunny passage, she heard a voice saying, "There we are, then, doctor. Anything else this morning?"

"No, thanks, Thomson."

"I hear Mrs. Fenn's back, sir. I bet you're glad."

"How news gets around," Norman said drily.

A door clicked shut, and Norman was turning from it as Claire walked into the kitchen.

"Oh, you oughtn't to have bothered with that," he said, taking the tray from her. "The woman'll be here in half an hour." He put down the tray, glanced at the watch on his wrist. "We'll be on our way, shall we? I'll go and get the car out."

His car was a dark-blue convertible. As he swung it to the right, out of the gateway, he said, "Oh, by the way, your luggage — is there much of it?"

"Only two suitcases," Claire told him.

"We'll pick 'em up on the way — just in case Madelon insists on having you to herself for a day or two, up at the cottage. I hope she doesn't," he added, glancing at Claire with a smile; "I don't really like being on my own."

A man coming along the sidewalk toward them raised his hat, looking straight at Claire.

She said thoughtfully, "Norman?"

"Yes?"

"Why," Claire said, "didn't you tell that man Thomson you were talking to that I wasn't Mrs. Fenn?"

Norman frowned. "Didn't I tell him so?"

"No, you just said, 'How news gets around.'"

"Did I? Sarcasm, Claire. I get tired of the everlasting prying in this town." He laughed suddenly. "You know, we must figure out how to spring you on these people. We've not been here long, and I doubt whether anyone knows Madelon has a twin sister in America. If we handle your début just right, we can have some fun. We can get some of these old busybodies cross-eyed trying to figure things out. Didn't you pull some fast ones as kids?"

"Of course we did," Claire said. She laughed, remembering some of the things she and Madelon had done; and she was telling Norman of them when he pulled up outside the station.

They went in together, and the old porter, still on duty, touched his cap lugubriously to Claire. The suitcases were where she had left them. Norman carried them out, put them in the trunk compartment, and they drove off.

The top was down, and it was a heavenly day. Claire had forgotten all her vague uneasiness, and this newly-found brother-in-law of hers was in the highest spirits, planning the utter confusion of the gossips of Ashden Wells.

But as the kindly country of

rounded hills and orchards began to fall behind, and the misty blue mountains of Wales rose higher ahead, both grew quiet. Across the border they passed through stone villages with lockjaw names. They left the main road and followed steep byways winding higher and higher into the mountains. It was now past noon.

"Do you fish, Claire?" Norman asked.

"Yes, I love it," Claire said. "Are we nearly there, Norman?"

"One more village to go through. We'll be in nice time for lunch," Norman said.

They passed through the village he had mentioned, but still he drove on. The road grew very narrow. On the left the mountainside sloped sharply upward, grown with trees about which clung faint wreaths of mist. On the right, over a low, drystone parapet, was a sheer drop to a foaming river.

"It's a lonesome place," Claire said.

"The cottage is seven miles from the nearest village," said Norman. "It's a proper cottage. Four hundred years old. Walls eight feet thick."

She glanced at him, and it seemed to her that there was a thinness about his lips, a tension in the set of his jaw. Somehow, he looked more as he had looked in that snapshot taken with Madelon.

She frowned. "Does Madelon like it up here alone?" she asked.

"She likes it fine," said Norman.

"How long has she been up here?"

"About a month."

"A month!"

"To be exact," said Norman Fenn, "thirty-three days." He pointed. "There's the cottage," he said.

Set back above a loop of the road ahead and reached by a steep, short track stood a slate-roofed, gray-walled cottage. It looked gaunt and dreary. No tree grew near it. Claire couldn't picture Madelon in such a place. Her uneasiness, which had been stealing back on her for some time, deepened to a conviction of something wrong, and she was conscious of the foreboding, slow thump of her heart.

Norman drove through the gateless opening of a stone-walled sheepfold, swung around in front of the cottage, and switched off the engine. In the quiet that fell, there was no sound but the deep, foaming note of the river in the ravine behind them, and a crying of curlews forlorn on the mountainside.

"Well, here we are," Norman said.

She stepped out, gazing at the cottage. The dormer windows looked grimy.

"There doesn't," she said doubtfully, "seem to be anyone —"

She broke off, looking at something which lay against the worn stone step of the cottage door. It was a skeleton — the skeleton of some long, low animal like a stoat or weasel.

Queerly, though it was mentioned in one of Madelon's letters, Claire couldn't remember the name of the dachshund.

"So the pup came back," said

Norman. "It ran away, you know. About a month ago — thirty-three days, to be exact. Something frightened it, and it ran away." Fingers closed on Claire's wrist. "Let's go in," he said.

Her own voice sounded to her as remote, as disembodied, as the sad crying of the curlews. "Madelon's not here," she said, but even as she said it, she knew that her twin was here, because the dog was here.

"I'll call her," said Norman, and he raised his voice, calling, "Madelon! Oh, Madelon!"

There was only the cold note of the river, and the bird cries, thin and elusive, now here, now there.

Norman drew Claire to the door of the cottage. Taking a key from his pocket, he put it in the lock, turned it, pushed the door open, creaking. Peering in, he called again, "Madelon?"

With a sudden, violent jerk, Claire tried to free her arm. She failed. And her violence produced an answering violence. He twisted her around, thrust her, stumbling, into a room with a low, black-beamed ceiling. Light came dimly through the grimed windows.

Closing the door, Norman Fenn said, "What's the matter with you? Frightened?"

She felt deathly cold. She gripped the edge of the table, to try to still her shivering. "What have you done to her?" she said. "Where is Madelon?"

"She's here," he said, and he pointed downward.

Over the flagstoned floor the slanting, diamond-shaped shadows of the windowpanes grew sharp as the sun showed for a moment, then dimmed as the mist swirled up.

She raised her eyes, looking at him. Suddenly she flew at him, blind with grief and hate. But he caught her wrists. He forced her down into a chair, holding her there, gripping hard.

"You're just like her," he said. "She was a jealous little wildcat. She found out there was another woman, and she flung her in my face — 'Gerda! Gerda! Gerda!' Thirty-three days ago it was — here in this cottage. I'd brought her up to show it to her. She started talking about Gerda. She tried to scratch my eyes out — your Madelon. I was in a rage. I hit her — harder than I'd intended. I was sick and tired of her, anyway. I thought she had money when I married her. Gerald Shelby must have made plenty; I thought he'd left plenty. But she hadn't a bean. Gerda has. That's how I came to get interested in her. She has a fortune, and it could be mine tomorrow, but for Madelon."

He released Claire's wrists, stepped back, watching her.

"Gerda doesn't know my real name, where I live, or anything about me," he said. "But I've lost her now, of course. I've got to get out of the country, you see — make a fresh start. That takes time to arrange. There's the house in Ashden Wells to sell; my money's tied up in it. And I

can't leave the practice without making certain arrangements, or there'd be an instant hue and cry. I needed time. I still need it. That's why I had to forge one or two letters from 'Madelon' to you; I couldn't afford to have you start cabling and panicking. But it's *you* who's put a trump card in my hand, Claire. You see, I gave it out in Ashden Wells that Madelon was staying with relations, but my peeking, prying neighbors were getting suspicious. I knew it. I could *feel* it. I knew the gossiping old hags were watching me. I wasn't ready to leave, and I was in a cold sweat that any day one of them might go bleating suspicions to the police. Can you imagine how I felt when, as I was dressing this morning, I looked out of the window and saw *you*?"

He drew in his breath. She gazed up at him, fascinated.

"I knew instantly who you were, of course," he said, "and I realized at once what a wonderful break it was for me. In a couple of hours every gossip in Ashden Wells would know that 'Madelon' had been seen, that the whispers were all nonsense. I paraded you on the lawn at breakfast, so you could be seen. I paraded you through the town in the car — and, by heaven, you'd even picked on Madelon's favorite frock! You've squared everything for me, Claire. 'Madelon' can safely go 'back to her relations.' There'll be no more gossip. 'Madelon' has been *seen*, that's enough. You've given me the week or two's grace I need. Then I'll be out of this country, with a passport faked in another name. I'll be safe."

"And me?" she said, in a low voice.

He said softly, "If her little dog wanted to be with Madelon, how much more so her twin — eh?" His lighter burst in the gloom like a tiny bomb, and the flame, as he dipped a cigarette in it, shone on his taut face and was reflected in his eyes, fixed on her, shining.

But it wasn't at him that she looked. It was at the door slowly opening behind him, and the woman who stood there, a revolver steady in her hand, her face composed, beautiful and pale, her copper hair braided about her head.

She said, "Only one person is going to join Madelon, Norman."

He turned convulsively. His hands jerked up. "Gerda? *Gerda?*" His cigarette sparked on the flagstoned floor.

"Remember the last night we spent in London, Norman?" she said. "I followed you home. I wanted to know more about you. I've been in Ashden Wells for a week, right next door to you, watching you, hearing the gossip about your wife. They told me today that this girl was your wife. I wasn't so sure. She didn't behave like a wife when I saw her this morning. So I followed you here. If you'd looked back, you must have seen my car."

Her face had the cold composure of marble.

"You've no idea how much I loved you, have you, Norman? I wanted

you more than anything on earth, and I suspected you might have killed your wife — killed her for love of me. Of *me*, Norman — not of my money — *my money* —"

The report roared in the cottage like thunder, and Norman Fenn swayed, his clenched hands pressed to his face.

"My money —" She fired again as he fell. "My money — my money — my money —"

Over and over again, with a rhythm like the monotonous beat of a train's wheels, Claire heard the voice. It was saying, "Excuse me — excuse me — excuse me —"

She was gazing up into the face of a middle-aged, bald man.

"Excuse me," he was saying. "Your luggage on the rack there. I notice it's labeled for Ashden Wells. I thought I'd better wake you. We're just coming into Ashden Wells now."

She sat up, looking round dazedly. The train compartment was filled with early morning sunshine. A book lying face down on the seat caught her attention. It was a detective novel with a lurid jacket depicting a hanging woman — a woman with a white, stilled, beautiful face and braided copper hair.

The bald man said, "Are you all right? I had the impression you were — crying in your sleep. A bad dream, I expect."

"I'm all right," Claire said. "Thank you very much."

The mirror of her compact showed the pallor of her face, showed her gray eyes haunted. The train was slowing into the station, now.

A porter came and took over her suitcases. He wasn't old and lame and lugubrious, but brisk and ruddy-cheeked.

"Taxi, miss?" he said.

"Please," she said. "Please."

She was more afraid, now, than at any moment in her dream. Something had happened to Madelon. She knew it with a cold certainty. However much their father may have hated to admit it, there always had been a bond of intuition between Maddy and her. The impulse which had led her suddenly to book passage to England; her uneasiness on the ship; the ghastly dream —

Something had happened.

"Where to, miss?" said the taxi-driver.

"Oldtown Road. Dr. Fenn's house," Claire said. "Hurry, please — *hurry!*"

The taxi turned out of the station yard. So vivid had been the dream that she felt as though it were a second self who now made this journey. Here was the tree-lined street, as she had dreamed it, and as Madelon had described it in letters. There was the rounded hill — "you'd love our hill," Madelon had written — with sheep cropping high up in the sunshine.

The taxi turned into Oldtown Road, familiar from Madelon's letters, familiar from the dream — the big, old, solid houses, the raised, banked lawns, the cascades of labur-

num. The taxi pulled up; the driver climbed out and opened the door.

She said, "Will you wait, please?"

She looked at the house — the house of the snapshots, the house of the dream. Sunshine slanted golden between the red trunks of the pines. The brass plate winked on the gatepost. She glanced up at the window of the house next door — the house where she had seen the lace curtain move and the face of "Gerda" watching her. The curtains of that window, which had been caught in one or two of Madelon's snapshots, weren't lace; they were of bright-patterned chintz, and they hung motionless, incurious.

She walked up the drive and her heart was a leaden weight in her chest. She paused before the door, glanced back down the drive. The taxi-driver, standing on the sidewalk, was lighting a cigarette.

She turned again to the door, pressed the bell and stepped back, waiting, her hands clenched. Within, a dog barked sharply. A voice spoke. Footsteps sounded. The door opened and she was looking at Norman Fenn. He wore a Paisley dressing-gown. His face was strained and haggard; his eyes were hectic with fatigue; his blond hair was matted across his forehead.

The dachshund pup at his feet yapped again, and he said anxiously, "Quiet! Quiet, Gerda!" He looked at Claire. "I know who you must be," he said. "Forgive me. Did you cable or write, or something? I don't seem — You must forgive me. Come in, Claire."

He held open the door. She stepped into the hall, turned to him quickly. "Madelon?" she said.

He passed a hand over his eyes. "I thought you didn't know anything about it," he said. "She didn't want you to. She said you always worried about her, you believed she wasn't strong. Oh, by heaven, Claire," he burst out, "it's been hell, absolute hell. One feels like a murderer — a murderer —" He broke off, glancing up sharply at the landing. "Doctor?" he said.

"All right, doctor." A stout, jovial-looking man came down the stairs. "It was touch and go there for a while," he said, "but everything's fine now. You can go up for a minute."

Norman Fenn thrust past him up the stairs, taking them three at a time.

The stout man came on down, shaking his head. "Young," he said to Claire, "inexperienced." He looked more keenly at her. "Sister, eh?" he said. "Twin? H'm, that's interesting. Well, *you'd* better go up and see them, too."

"Them?" Claire whispered.

The stout man's smile broadened.

"Madelon's twins," he said.

Taking his hat from the hall table, he walked out into the glory of the morning, where the laburnum from its summer bounty shed golden petals on the dewy lawn.

PAINTED FACES

by JOSEPH HARRINGTON

I DON'T think that Magistrate Henry R. Waldrop had any real aversion to painted ladies. In fact, I'm almost sure of it, having seen him when, considerably in his cups, he had his arms around two of them and was very affectionate.

The first time it happened in court he was just surly and captious and impatient, the docket being very large, and a good baseball game on for the afternoon. There was a woman complainant on the stand, being rather verbose about the way her husband slapped her, and the insults he heaped upon her. She wore a mask of cosmetics.

Magistrate Waldrop broke in.

"Go home and wash your face!" he snapped.

"I —" The painted woman looked at him. "What?"

"You heard what I said! Go home and wash that junk off your face! It's disgusting; it nauseates me, and I daresay it nauseated your husband. Get down!"

Well, that was the first time. I think that Magistrate Waldrop, a bit of a misdirected publicity hound, was astounded himself to find he'd landed on the front page of most of the papers, on page 3 of the rest, mostly with a boxed, freak item, telling how he'd ordered a wife to go home and wash her cosmetics off. It was a brand-new stunt then.

After that, he pulled the stunt at least once a year. It was always good for a couple of paragraphs if not a box. And a couple of times he got mad and indignant because Magistrates Marie Modwith (who used cosmetics herself plentifully and sure enough needed them) and Franklin C. Wirth sent women home to wash away their cosmetics, thereby getting their own names in the paper. He indicated to me, bitterly, that this was a particularly low form of plagiarism. After all, he'd thought of it first. And heavens knows the papers paid little enough attention to the goings-on in police courts.

There was some small, feeble editorial comment in the *Star* after one such incident — to the effect that what a woman did with her face was nobody else's business, and this was going beyond the reasonable limits of jurisprudence. But, since it mentioned Magistrate Waldrop by name, the judge was pretty well pleased. He called me in and gave me a long, windy interview on the evils of cosmetics, to health as well as morals, and was quite disappointed that no newspaper used it.

Well, I covered the first time it happened. Also the last.

I remember the last particularly well, because the girl had lovely legs, shining yellow hair in a page-boy bob, as trim a figure as I ever saw. Even her face was pretty. Sure, the make-up was heavy, but she knew how to use it. The pink overlay was just in the right places, and they were using that purplish tinted lipstick then.

It was just an overtime parking case, and she could have paid a dollar and gone on her way. Instead, she pleaded not guilty, which let her in for a $5 fine, and she was going to be found guilty, anyway. But she pleaded not guilty, went on the stand, and swore she hadn't parked more than fifteen or twenty minutes in an overtime zone. She explained that she'd parked there the day before and an officer made a chalk mark, which apparently hadn't worn off overnight. And apparently the officer assumed — erroneously — that he'd made the mark when he passed an hour before he gave her the ticket.

Magistrate Waldrop leaned over his desk and made sure the press was represented — by me. He was careful about these things because once he spent ten minutes making a speech from the bench on the evils of speeding, and sentenced a bewildered first offender to sixty days in jail — only to discover I'd gone out for a snifter or two, not seeing anything interesting in view, and missed it all.

But I was there that day all right, and Magistrate Waldrop turned on the girl.

"Go home and wash that miserable muck off your face!" he snapped.

The girl stopped, looked at him in bewilderment.

"You heard me! You look like a hussy! Go wash that paint off your face — every last lick of it! And keep those skirts down over your knees! What are you trying to do — vamp this court?"

"No, sir," the girl stammered. "I — I — " She pulled down the skirt, which wasn't high anyway — certainly not enough to suit me. She could only get it down an inch or two. Maybe she blushed. But underneath that make-up, it didn't show.

"Step down! Step down! Come back tomorrow morning — with a clean face, remember! Get down!"

She got down, shaking and embarrassed.

I moved a few paragraphs on it. Her name was Elsie Something. Why I remembered Elsie, I don't know, because when you hear the names of two or three hundred defendants, you never use your memory. You copy from the papers of the Court Clerk. The business of washing the face was old stuff by now. But the pulling down of the skirt was new, and the item was published.

The next morning the office chased me down on a suicide, eight blocks away from the court. The policeman on the beat gave me most of the dope. Gas. All jets turned on. Elsie Bonsel, 22, a commercial artist. In the kitchen of a three-room apartment.

Lived alone. Neighbors smelled gas, called the superintendent. She was lying on the linoleum floor. No, he hadn't seen any notes.

The name, the first part of it, anyway, clicked. I hung around the entrance of the apartment until Doc Vance, the assistant medical examiner, came out, right behind the crew of the morgue wagon with their sagging basket.

"Doc," I said, "this dame — did she have yellow hair, page-boy style?"

"That's right, Bill. Yellow hair, page-bob. Know her?"

"A pretty little thing?"

"Pretty!" He stared. "I can see you don't. Pretty! Oh, Lord! Bill, she'd turn your stomach. From here —" he put a finger under his right ear, slid it down to his chin and part way up on the other side toward the left ear — "from here to here she had one of those purple birthmarks, but the worst I ever saw — and I've seen bad ones. I don't see how she could stand to look at herself in the mirror. Ghastly!"

"Any notes?"

"No notes, but it was suicide all right. And with that face, I don't blame her."

I telephoned the office, then went back to court. I still wasn't too sure. Not until the Court Clerk called "Elsie Bonsell Elsie Bonsell" And there was no answer.

I leaned against the Magistrate's bench. "That's the one," I told Waldrop, "you sent home yesterday to wash the make-up off her face."

"And she isn't here — Clerk! Clerk! Get me a warrant!"

"Won't do much good," I said. "She's dead."

"Oh?" he stared at me.

I told him about the suicide, and the disfiguring birthmark. He was sweating before I was through.

"Any notes?" he asked.

"Nope."

"H'mm." He wiped some of the sweat off his face. "Nothing to indicate — ?"

"Nope."

"The laws of libel —" he began. "They prohibit any unwarranted conclusions that may be —"

"I know 'em."

"Obviously, no connection. Clerk! Call the next case."

That was the last time Magistrate Henry R. Waldrop sent a woman home to wash her face. Also, he never liked me after that. The feeling was mutual.

IN A PROSE STRIPPED FOR ACTION

Most of the short stories about Jo Gar, the Filipino detective, appeared originally in "Black Mask," where they were attributed to an author named Ramon Decolta. Perhaps some of you already know that "Ramon Decolta" was one of the pseudonyms used by Raoul Whitfield, a co-founder, so to speak, of the hardboiled school of mystery fiction. Together with Carroll John Daly, Dashiell Hammett (the best if not actually the first of that savage school), Raymond Chandler, and others, Raoul Whitfield helped to develop the typically American tough 'tec — the species which gave the whole genre such a powerful shot in the arm. Now that we look backwards, we marvel once again at the phenomenal popularity which hardboiled homicides enjoyed — we say "look backwards" because at the time of this writing hardboiledism seems definitely on the wane, even in the movies. Is it because the founding fathers have tired of their own technique? Or is it simply that too much of even a good thing inevitably stales? Or have we become, in the last decade, shockproof? Surely it cannot be denied that in these critical days the more violent aspects of the slambang school — the copious bloodlettings, the thunderous chases, the rampant sexiness — strike a remarkably tame note: the blazing automatic, even in the hands of the toughest dick ever perpetrated on paper, evokes only a pipsqueak of terror in the shadow of atomic annihilation.

Will the rough, raffish ratiocination of the 1920–30s ever regain its old stranglehold? We doubt it. The detective story must keep pace with the times. A new note of seriousness, whatever form it may take, will replace the old strong-arm method. Yet it should be remembered that the hardboiled approach, both in style and substance, made an imperishable contribution. That is why, no matter what new suit of clothes the detective story may wear in the near or distant future, it is imperative that we bring you, from time to time, outstanding examples of the muscles-and-murder school.

"The Rainbow Murders Begin" is the first of a sequence of six adventures about diminutive Jo Gar, the Island detective. Although united by a central theme, the six stories do not constitute a serial: each tale stands on its own feet, and can be read independently of the other five. The connecting thread is Jo Gar's search for the ten diamonds, worth $200,000, which were stolen from Delgado's jewelry store, on the Escolta,

in Manila — and for the ruthless killers who dished out death for diamonds. In these episodes of evil you will find the best features of the hardboiled manner: the aura of authenticity, the staccato speech, the restrained realism. The tales are lean and hard — and unforgettable.

THE RAINBOW MURDERS BEGIN

by RAOUL WHITFIELD

THE brown-faced driver of the *carromatta* shrilled words at the skinny pony, tugged on the right rein. He stood up in front of his small seat and waved his left arm wildly. Jo Gar leaned forward and watched the approaching machine sway down the narrow street. It was a closed car, mud-stained. It swung from side to side, traveling at high speed. For a second its engine was pointed to the right of the *carromatta*, now crowded far to one side of the street. And then it careened straight towards the small vehicle.

The driver shrilled one word. His small, scantily clad body curved from the front seat. For a second Jo Gar had an unobstructed view of the speeding car. He muttered a sharp "Dios!" — hunched his small figure forward and jumped.

His sandals had not touched the broken, narrow pavement at the right side of the street when his ears heard the splintering of wood. A woman screamed, in a high, short note, down the street. There was another splintering sound — then the cry of the pony. Jo Gar's diminutive body struck the pavement; he went to his knees, lost balance and rolled over on his back. His pith helmet snapped from his head, thudded like a drum lightly struck, away from him.

He wasn't hurt, and got slowly to his feet. There was a great deal of excitement in the street. The pony had been dragged to the curb and lay on one side, tangled in the *carromatta* shafts. It was vainly trying to rise. The vehicle was a wreck. But the machine was still swaying on its way — a horn sounding steadily.

Near the Pasig the street curved sharply to the left. Even as Jo Gar stared after the machine, it swung far to the right. For a second he thought it would crash into the awninged Chinese shop at the curve. But it did not — it swung back into the middle of the street, was lost from sight. The sound of the horn died. Voices all about the Island detective were raised, pitched high. Chinese, Spaniards, Filipinos — the street was suddenly filled with them.

Jo Gar recovered his helmet, placed it on his head. The sun was still hot, though it was sinking over the bay.

He moved towards the struggling pony, speaking sharply to the driver, who was shouting wildly after the vanished car. Together they freed the pony from the shafts and harness — it struggled to its feet and stood trembling, nostrils wide. The driver cursed steadily.

A brown, open car came down the street from the direction the other had come, horn screaming. Jo Gar narrowed his gray-blue eyes on the brown uniforms of Manila police — saw the face of Juan Arragon turned momentarily towards him. The Manila lieutenant of police shouted something — then the car was beyond. A wheel lifted wreckage of the *carromatta*, deposited by the crash car fifty yards distant, and sent it skimming towards the pavement. A voice behind Jo said excitedly:

"What the devil, Señor Gar! That was a close one for you —"

A man dressed in white duck was running down the street towards the wreckage of the *carromatta.* He wore no helmet. He shouted hoarsely, but slowed down as he neared the spot where the crowd had gathered. Jo Gar said in an unhurried tone:

"What is it, Grassner?"

The man in white duck was short, thick-set. He had the squarish face of a German. He widened blue eyes on the Island detective's narrowed ones.

"Delgado's!" he breathed heavily. "Robbery — there were three cars — different directions!"

Jo Gar said slowly: "Delgado's — yes. Of course. And three cars —"

The *carromatta* driver was standing near the pony, cursing shrilly. Tears of rage ran down his brown cheeks. There was still much excitement. The Island detective said sharply to the driver:

"Please stop it! Your pony is not much hurt. You will be paid for the *carromatta.* That is enough!"

Grassner said thickly, breathing with difficulty:

"Herr Mattlien is dead. A bullet hit him."

Jo Gar frowned. He had little use for Herr Mattlien. But robbery had now become murder. He asked in a low, almost toneless voice:

"You saw — the robbery?"

Grassner blinked at him with his small, blue eyes. He shook his head. People were crowding around them.

"I was in the International Bank, around the corner," he said more calmly. "There were shots — and I ran out. Cars were moving away from Delgado's, and Mattlien was running towards them, a gun in his hand. There were more shots — he fell. I went to him — he was dead."

Jo Gar made a clicking sound. He shook his head, spoke to the *carromatta* driver.

"I am Señor Gar — come to my office later and I shall help you."

The driver said: "I am a very poor man —"

The Island detective nodded. "It is true," he agreed. "But you are also alive."

He moved along the street, towards the corner near the Escolta, occupied

by Delgado's jewelry shop. A crowd was gathering; there were many police. A dead-line had already been established, but Jo Gar was well known; he went through the entrance, into the warm air stirred by the shop's ceiling fans.

Arnold Carlysle, the American chief of Manila police, had arrived and was listening to words from the short, black-mustached owner of the place. Liam Delgado's white hair was ruffled; he moved his hands nervously. Carlysle, listening, saw Jo Gar enter the shop. He beckoned to him.

Delgado was saying in his perfect English: "It was terrible! Ramon — my only son — dying as I came out from the vault —"

He turned away abruptly, covered his face with his long-fingered, brown hands. Carlysle spoke grimly to Jo:

"They used — American methods, Gar. Three cars — with license plates covered with dust. Four of the men came inside. Delgado's son resisted — they shot him down. Mattlien, the German guard at the International Bank — he was shot down, in the street. They escaped in all directions — but we'll get them, Gar!"

The Island detective nodded. He said in his toneless voice:

"One of the cars upset the *carromatta* in which I was approaching the Escolta. It was going towards the Pasig, and Juan Arragon was in close pursuit."

Carlysle nodded grimly. "We heard the shots — at the station," he said. "It was a daring robbery."

Delgado had dropped into a wicker chair, near a counter. Jo Gar said quietly:

"Three machines — a double murder. And robbery — how much did they get?"

Delgado said in a dull tone, softly: "The Von Loffler diamonds — the famous Rainbow diamonds. All ten of them. Two hundred thousand dollars, at least. And some small stones —"

Jo Gar widened his gray-blue eyes. Carlysle went to the entrance of the store and gave orders in a steady, hard voice. There was the clang of an ambulance gong, in the distance.

The Island detective said: "The Von Loffler diamonds. But I thought they were in the bank vault —"

Delgado's tortured eyes met Jo's. He said in a broken voice:

"Von Loffler brought them here this morning. I was to set them into a comb for his wife."

Jo Gar narrowed his eyes and nodded his head slowly. Delgado got to his feet, hands suddenly clenched at his sides. He said in a terrible voice:

"They will pay — for this! By —— —— they will pay! My only son —"

Jo Gar spoke softly: "It is — very bad. You saw faces?"

The jewelry shop owner said: "They were masked — their whole faces. There were just the eye slits. Four of them were in here. They held guns, and the one who shot my son down was tall and well built. He was standing over Ramon — when I ran in —"

He turned away from the Island de-

tective. Carlysle was coming into the shop again. There was a great deal of excitement outside, but inside there was almost silence. One white-clad clerk was walking back and forth behind a long display counter, muttering softly to himself.

Carlysle came close to Jo and spoke in the same grim tone.

"I have sent word to all the Constabulary stations. We shall pick up the cars in which they escaped."

Jo said: "Have there been reports of stolen cars lately?"

The Manila Police head frowned. "Two reports — one yesterday — one this morning."

The Island detective shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"I do not think it will help greatly to find the machines," he observed.

Carlysle said: "Juan Arragon was in close pursuit. There is a possible chance."

The Island detective nodded slowly. "Yes," he agreed. "A chance."

Liam Delgado faced them suddenly. His eyes were shot with red. He ran trembling fingers through his white hair. He said fiercely:

"There were four of them. I will have them — every one! I am wealthy — and I will use my wealth —"

There was the staccato cough of a motorcycle — a brown-uniformed figure rode to the curb before the shop. He dismounted, hurried inside. He was breathing heavily. He spoke rapidly in Filipino dialect to Carlysle. The head of the Manila police interrupted him sharply, telling him to speak more slowly. Jo Gar said quietly:

"He says Arragon's car skidded, beyond the bridge. There was a crash into iron railing — the driver was hurt and the car disabled. Pedestrians have told him that Juan stopped another car, and continued the pursuit. The bandit machine was far ahead, running along the right bank of the Pasig."

Carlysle groaned. "It will get away," he muttered. "The bandits were masked — the drivers of the three machines may not have been noticed —"

Jo Gar looked towards the back of Liam Delgado. The jewelry shop owner was standing near a counter, his body rigid.

Jo said slowly:

"One leaves the Island only by boat."

Carlysle half closed his eyes. "There are many American visitors here — and English, too. Three boats sail in the next three days. Two of them are big vessels. It will be very difficult —"

He broke off. There was a little silence. Then the police head said slowly:

"But they have the diamonds — the Von Loffler stones. We can search thoroughly, at the docks."

Jo Gar touched the tips of his stubby, brown fingers to almost colorless lips. His almond-shaped eyes were slitted, three-quarters closed.

"We can do many wise things," he observed with a grimness strange in him. "But unfortunately, *others* can do wise things, also. . . ."

At seven o'clock Jo Gar paused before the Manila *Times* office and read the large-lettered bulletin before which a small crowd had gathered. It told him that none of the bandits had been captured, that they had got away with diamonds valued in excess of two hundred thousand dollars — the "famous Von Loffler ten," and that they had murdered Ramon Delgado and Herr Mattlien. It further stated that one escaping machine had crashed into a *carromatta* from which Señor Jo Gar and the driver had barely escaped with their lives. Also Lieutenant of Manila Police Juan Arragon, in pursuit of this crash car, was missing. He had hailed another car, with a Chinese driver, after the one in which he had been riding had skidded and crashed.

The machine, the Chinese, and Juan Arragon — all had vanished along the right bank of the Pasig. The whole police force, aided by Island Constabulary, were hunting down the bandits. The *Times* offered a reward of five thousand dollars, and it was rumored that Liam Delgado would announce an offer of a large sum — for the bandits' capture. Two of the machines used in the robbery had been found, abandoned. Each had been stolen. They were being examined for fingerprints. It was the most daring crime in the history of Manila.

The Island detective smiled grimly, and then he thought of Juan Arragon and the smile went from his face. He was fond of Arragon — the lieutenant of police had often blundered in the past, but he had always tried. And the item that mentioned his disappearance was not pleasant to read.

Jo turned his back to the bulletin and waited for a *caleso* to pass — one with a strong-looking horse. He waited only a few minutes.

Across the bridge, on the far side of the black-watered Pasig, there were several police cars. Along the road over which Juan Arragon was supposed to have pursued the car that had struck the *carromatta* in which Jo had been riding there were Constabulary officers. On the left were moored *sampans* and various other type craft — on the right of the road there were hundreds of native huts, thatch-roofed and similar.

From the main road other roads angled off — many of them. Relaxed in the *caleso*, Jo Gar frowned at the roads. Three miles along the river road and the country suddenly became deserted. There were fewer cross roads — native shacks were scattered. The ground was rolling; there were curves. A half-dozen times Jo stopped the *caleso* and made inquiry of natives, but always the answer was the same — nothing had been seen of the pursued car, or of the one in pursuit.

It was growing dark when Joe ordered the *caleso* driver to turn back. He breathed softly to himself:

"The bandits inside the shop were not recognized. No attention has been paid to the machine drivers; even I would not recognize the man who drove the car that crashed into us. Some say it was a Chinese who was driving the car that Juan comman-

deered, others say it was a Jap. No one seems to be sure of the type of car. It is always so."

He shook his head slowly. The *caleso* reached the Escolta, chief business street of Manila, and proceeded slowly towards the police station. Jo descended, paid the driver and climbed the stairs to the office of Carlysle. The American frowned into his eyes, shook his head slowly:

"Nothing — not a thing!" he breathed. "I don't like the way things look, Señor Gar. Arragon has dropped from sight. He was alone with that driver of the car he picked up. One of the police officers with him was stunned in the crash — and Juan ordered the other one to look after him. And he's dropped out of sight."

Jo said very slowly, wiping his brown forehead with a handkerchief, and narrowing his eyes on a slowly revolving ceiling fan:

"The killers are very desperate. That is natural. They have valuable diamonds, and they have murdered two persons. They would not hesitate —"

He broke off, shrugged. Carlysle swore beneath his breath and watched the Island detective. He said, after a little silence:

"Juan Arragon thought very well of you, Señor Gar. You showed him up many times, but he always was good-natured about it. If you ——"

He broke off. Jo Gar smiled a little and said in his toneless voice:

"Herr Mattlien is dead. Ramon Delgado is dead. Ten extremely valuable diamonds are missing. The method of the robbery was very modern. I am interested, of course."

Carlysle said: "Good. Of course you are. The method was American, I'd say."

The Island detective shrugged. "Perhaps," he agreed. "But it does not mean that Americans were the bandits."

Carlysle said bitterly: "I hope not — for *their* sakes."

Jo Gar lighted one of his brown-paper cigarettes and said very slowly:

"I shall try to find Juan Arragon — but it is important that the vessels are watched. Very important."

Carlysle said: "I've got everything working — we're trying to find someone who can identify a driver of one of the three cars. The descriptions are all vague — guesswork."

Jo Gar turned his small body slightly. He said in a tone touched with grimness:

"I will return for a few minutes to my office, then I shall move about."

Carlysle's eyes were narrowed. He said with a touch of eagerness:

"You will let me know — as soon as you learn something?"

Jo moved towards the door of the office. He nodded his head a little.

"*If* I learn something — I will let you know," he said quietly, and went down the stairs to the street.

His small office was not far off the Escolta; the street was narrow and curving. There were few people on it; the shops were small and most of them had closed for the night. It was al-

most dark when he turned in at the entrance and climbed the narrow, creaking stairs. He climbed slowly, conserving his energy.

At the landing before his office he paused a few seconds, stood in the faint light from a small, hanging bulb. Then he went towards the door and reached for the knob. His office was seldom locked; he kept little of importance there.

When he opened the door there was a faint breeze from the window. He reached for the switch — and white light filled the room. For a second he stood motionless, his shoulders and head slightly forward. His eyes looked towards the wicker chair near the small table.

He recognized the uniform first. It was khaki in color. Next he recognized the figure. Juan Arragon's body was half turned away from him — head and shoulders rested on the table. The helmet was not in sight — Arragon was bareheaded. His dark hair glistened in the white light. There was a definite inertness about the position of the body.

Jo Gar said very steadily: "Juan — Juan Arragon!"

From the Pasig there was the shrill note of a river launch whistle. A driver called in a high-pitched voice, in the street below.

Jo Gar sighed. Then he stepped into his office, closed the door. He went slowly to the side of Juan Arragon. He looked first at the head, with the half-opened eyes. Then he found the two bullet holes, not far from the heart.

There was little blood.

There were books on the floor; they had fallen as though swept from the table with force. An ink bottle had crashed and broken. Near the right, outstretched fingers of the dead police lieutenant was a bit of white paper. A stubby pencil lay beyond it. There were scrawled words on the paper. Jo Gar leaned forward and read them. After a few seconds he reread them, aloud.

"'*Calle Padrone* — house in palmetto thick — high porch — shutters — go at once — I am shot — French—"

That was all. Jo Gar straightened and turned his back on his friend. He went to the window and looked down towards the street, unseeingly. He felt very bad. Juan Arragon was dead, shot to death. They had worked together on many crimes. Now that was finished. Often Juan had been wrong, but he had always been fair.

Jo Gar slowly lighted a cigarette. He drew a deep breath and moved his lips a little. He said:

"I will find them, of course. They have murdered him. And Ramon Delgado. And Mattlien. Because of diamonds — ten of them."

He stood motionless for several seconds. Then he shrugged, turned and went from the office. He did not look again at Juan Arragon. He walked, not too rapidly, the short distance to the police station.

Carlysle said, looking with wide eyes at the body of Juan Arragon:

"God — they got him! But he scrawled the address of the hide-out. We'll get out there —"

Jo Gar shook his head slowly: "If you send men there — be very careful," he said tonelessly. "The address was meant for *me*."

Carlysle blinked. "Yes," he agreed. "but that doesn't make any difference —"

Jo Gar said softly: "You see the pencil — it is near the right-hand fingers. The writing — it is in English."

Carlysle frowned. "It's Arragon's writing," he breathed. "He could write English."

The Island detective nodded. "He wrote with his *left* hand," he said quietly. "If he were dying and wished to give me directions, I do not think he would write in English. And how did he get here?"

Carlysle stared at the dead police lieutenant. He muttered something the Island detective did not hear. Jo Gar said slowly:

"He was shot — and brought here. His handwriting was imitated. It is clever work. But they did not remember that Juan was left-handed. And I understand Filipino — he would have scrawled words to me in that language."

Carlysle said: "They wanted you to go to *Calle Padrone* — to the house in the thicket —"

Jo Gar said very quietly: "I should be very careful how your men approach the house."

The American police head frowned. "They're afraid of you, Jo," he said grimly. "They planned this crime carefully. They know Juan has worked with you. They thought they'd get you out of the way —"

He broke off. The muscles of the Island detective's mouth twitched. He said:

"It is possible."

Carlysle looked down at the scrawl. "They figured the shaky writing would get by — with you thinking Arragon was in bad shape when he wrote it. They didn't know he was left-handed. And I'd forgotten —"

He checked himself. Jo Gar spoke very quietly:

"The killers know of Señor Gar," he said. "That is unfortunate."

Carlysle, his eyes still narrowed on the scrawl, spoke grimly.

"There is this word 'French,' " he said. "They wanted you to believe their nationality was French. That eliminates something — they're not French."

Jo Gar said nothing. He went to the window of his office and stood with his back to Carlysle and several of his men. The American police head gave orders. Then he spoke to the Island detective.

"The coroner will be here soon. I'm going to the *Calle Padrone*, with my men —"

Jo nodded. "I shall see you in a few hours," he said quietly, and added in a toneless voice: "I hope."

Carlysle frowned. "Delgado is offering a ten-thousand-dollar reward," he said. "I'm going to have the boat

passengers carefully checked, the luggage searched."

He moved towards the door of the office. Jo Gar followed him. Carlysle said: "You going my way?"

The Island detective shook his head. His eyes were almost closed.

"I think it will be better for both of us," he said softly, "if I go alone."

Von Loffler sat across the table from Delgado and Jo Gar. He was a German who had lived many years in the Islands. His body was lean and he was not young. He looked at Delgado's white hair and said thickly:

"It is very bad. The diamonds are insured, of course. But in England. I sympathize with Señor Delgado, and I agree with him. You have done much good work in the Islands, Señor Gar. These bandits and killers must be caught."

Jo Gar said nothing. Delgado spoke in a firm, low voice.

"Señor Gar is more familiar with conditions here than other detectives might be. Lieutenant Arragon was his friend. I think we have much — the three of us — to work for, together. But Señor Gar — it is his business."

Von Loffler nodded. His face was grim. His blue eyes narrowed on Delgado's.

"Your son, Liam," he said. "Señor Gar's friend. And my diamonds." His eyes flickered to Jo's. "You will work for us, Señor?" he asked.

Jo Gar smiled with his thin, colorless lips pressed together. He parted them and said:

"Yes — but I feel it will be difficult. This was not an ordinary crime. It may mean that I must leave the Islands."

Delgado said firmly: "I want my son's killers — no matter where you must go."

Von Loffler nodded his head slowly. "It is right," he said. "You have the description of the stones — it is the best I can do."

The Island detective nodded. He said very quietly:

"Just the three of us must know what I am doing. Even the American, Carlysle — he must not know. I shall need funds. It may prove expensive."

Delgado shrugged. "That is simple," he said.

Jo Gar got to his feet. "When Carlysle took his men to the *Calle Padrone* address he found only a deserted shack. There was not a clue — nothing. But had *I* gone —"

He spread his stubby fingered hands. Von Loffler said:

"It will be dangerous, Señor. But that is your business."

The Island detective looked expressionlessly at the room's ceiling.

"It is so," he agreed. "It is my business."

Carlysle was smiling when Jo Gar moved along the cell block of the old police station and reached his side. He spoke with enthusiasm.

"I sent for you — we've got one of them. It's just a matter of a few hours now, and we'll have the others."

Jo Gar made a clicking sound. He

looked at the American head of police with widened eyes.

"That is very good," he said slowly. "But how —"

Carlysle cut in on his calm voice. "I didn't want you to waste time running around the city."

Jo lowered his lids slightly. The change in the manner of Carlysle was very evident. He was almost patronizing now. He had one of the bandits — he would shortly have the others. He had done it without Jo Gar's aid.

The Island detective was silent. Carlysle said with a smile:

"Lieutenant Mallagin picked up the Chinese driver of the car Arragon commandeered, about an hour ago. Just after eleven. He was staggering along the Pasig road — on the other bank. He'd been badly beaten and was soaked. They had tried to drown him, but he regained consciousness and let his body float with the current. Then he crawled ashore. He recognized one of the bandits — a Filipino. We've traced the crime to Cantine, the half-breed that we turned loose from Billibad three months ago. He ran the hold-up."

Jo Gar said, in a slightly puzzled tone: "But you said you had one of them —"

Carlysle was excited; he made gestures with his hands.

"We'll have the one he recognized," he stated. "I meant we had found the Chinese driver."

Jo Gar said slowly: "That is — good."

Carlysle said: "I've got all the men out for the pick-up, and I didn't want you going off at an angle."

The Island detective half closed his eyes and spoke softly:

"And what became of the machine of this Chinese?" he asked.

Carlysle said: "He doesn't know. A bullet hit Arragon as they were gaining on the other car. He collapsed. The Chinese used brakes — but the other car had stopped, and he was rushed. They knocked him unconscious — the road was deserted; it was around a curve."

Jo Gar said slowly: "And you think Cantine was the leader — the half-breed?"

Carlysle make a grunting sound. "Sure of it," he snapped. "The Filipino that this Chinese identified was one that served a term at Billibad — he was one of Cantine's men. We'll have them all pretty quick."

The Island detective spoke in his toneless voice:

"That will be — very good."

The American head of police chuckled. "We won't have to worry about the boats that are sailing tomorrow," he said. "Didn't care much for that job, anyway. Passengers are easily insulted. It would have been very difficult."

Jo Gar lighted a brown-paper cigarette and blew a thin stream of smoke above his head.

"I did not think this Cantine — possessed so much courage," he said slowly.

Carlysle grunted. "He learned something — and took a chance," he

said. "He wasn't so smooth. There was too much killing."

The Island detective said: "May I talk — with the Chinese?"

Carlysle frowned a little. But he nodded his head.

"I'll go along with you," he replied.

Jo Gar smiled with his eyes. "I shall be honored," he said simply.

The Island detective rose from the small wicker chair and smiled at Carlysle. He narrowed his eyes on the brown, fat face of the Chinese.

"He is of good breed," he said slowly. "He speaks without becoming muddled, and clearly. You have been lucky."

Carlysle smiled expansively. The head of the Manila police was in a genial humor. "Not lucky, but rather careful, Gar," he said.

Jo shrugged. "He staggered right into your hands," he pointed out. "I meant that it was fortunate he was not killed — shot or drowned."

Carlysle said nothing. He turned towards the door leading from the room in which Jo Gar had been questioning the Chinese. It opened as he faced it; Lieutenant Mallagin entered. He was breathing heavily, obviously excited.

He spoke in broken English. "I have captured — one of Cantine's men. He is hurt — very much. He fell from a *sampan* deck — but will not talk. The doctor — he say he may die quick —"

Carlysle frowned. Jo Gar was watching Mallagin with expressionless eyes. He glanced at the Chinese — the man's mouth was half opened; he was staring at the chunky-bodied Filipino.

The chief of police frowned. Mallagin said in a husky tone:

"I think it would be wise — to take this Chinese — to him — while he lives. He then might talk —"

Carlysle nodded: "Yes," he said decisively. "We'll get him right there. Where is — this man?"

Mallagin said: "In the shop of Santoni, who deals in fruit — not far from the Spanish bridge. He is very bad."

Carlysle nodded. He looked towards the Chinese. He said sharply:

"You are going with us — you will identify a man who is hurt."

The fear that was in the eyes of the Chinese seemed to grow. He mumbled something that Jo Gar failed to understand; his hands were moving about strangely. The Island detective said:

"You think it is wise —"

The expression in the American's eyes checked him. He smiled slightly and bowed. Carlysle said slowly:

"I'm taking charge of this case myself. In the past Juan Arragon did much good, and much harm, poor devil!"

The Island detective said nothing. Carlysle spoke to Lieutenant Mallagin.

"We will use my private car. There will be the driver and myself, and the Chinese. Yourself, of course — and pick two men in whom you have confidence."

Mallagin nodded and turned away.

Jo Gar said in a quiet voice:

"I should like to accompany you. Juan Arragon was my friend —"

There was a touch of coldness in Carlysle's voice.

"I'm sorry — there will not be enough room. But I shall keep you informed —"

The Island detective narrowed his almond shaped eyes. He said softly:

"I might replace one of the two men you told Lieutenant Mallagin to choose."

Carlysle said steadily: "It is a police matter — and you are not of the police. Go ahead, Lieutenant — get your men."

Jo Gar bowed slightly. He said in a faintly amused voice:

"I would choose one who can make notes of what the man may say."

Carlysle frowned. "Of course," he said in a hard tone. "That is understood."

Mallagin looked stupidly at Carlysle. Jo Gar watched the Chinese with eyes that were almost closed. Carlysle glanced at the Island detective as he moved towards the door of the room. He said:

"I'm sorry, Gar — but this is a police case."

Jo smiled a little. "I am sure it is being handled very well," he said in a peculiar tone, and went through the doorway.

The black closed car of Carlysle pulled away from the police station, cut across the Escolta and headed towards the Pasig.

After a time they were close to the river on a street running to the Spanish bridge.

A half block behind, Jo Gar sat in a machine he had hired from Cormanda. His small body was not relaxed; in his right hand he gripped a Colt. Abruptly Cormanda jerked his head and said in a rising voice:

"Jo — they're slowing down —"

The Island detective leaned forward, caught a glimpse of two red lights, across the road. He said in a swift voice:

"They were not repairing — at dusk —"

The Carlysle machine had almost reached the two lights. It halted. Jo Gar said:

"Stop, Cormanda —"

The small, open car stopped. The chauffeur of the car ahead got to the street and looked back at the car in which Cormanda and Jo Gar sat. He gestured towards the two red lights. Jo Gar spoke softly to his own driver:

"Get down — Cormanda — it is not good —"

The first machine-gun started a staccato clatter from an alley on the right. Almost instantly there was the drum of a second one — from a shuttered window on the left. Metal started to make sound. The chauffeur ran a few feet and sprawled to the street. At that moment, the Chinese sprang from the car, doubled over and ran to a door nearest the car. He disappeared. The other occupants of the car were crouched, out of sight, below the metal sides.

Jo Gar slipped out the right side of the small car and bent his body forward. He ran back over the street, keeping his short arms close to his sides and his head low. Suddenly he turned and moved down a second alley. One machine-gun had stopped drumming, but the other was still beating sound against the quiet of the night.

In the darkness of the alley Jo Gar paused for a second. He breathed heavily as he got his head slightly exposed and looked towards the Carlysle machine:

"The Chinese — was lying —"

A door shot open — the figure of the Chinese was pitched into the alley. Almost instantly it jerked, half spun. Then the man dropped to the pavement. The second machine-gun started to clatter again.

Jo Gar muttered: "And yet — they murdered him!"

Cormanda was reversing the small car now. It whined back from the red lights and the drum of bullets. Jo Gar swung back into the alley, moved rapidly along it. At the far end he saw the Pasig water and the silhouette of a *sampan.*

The machine-gun fire died. No sound but the whine of the reversing car came from the street behind the Island detective. He thought: They got the diamonds, but they were forced to kill. Ramon Delgado, Mattlien, Juan Arragon. And now the Chinese, perhaps others. Why do they trap and kill? Is it because they must leave the Islands? He thought: It is because they are clever and must clear the way.

He reached the row of *sampans,* moored abreast. There was a narrow path between piled, rotted planks and empty fish baskets. It led towards the next alley. Jo Gar gripped his Colt firmly and moved along it. At intervals he stopped and listened. The street he had left was very quiet. Only the river sounds reached his ears.

He had almost reached the next alley when he saw a faint shadow. It was directly ahead — moving slowly.

A machine made sound in the distance; the engine getting into a roar — and dying gradually. A voice reached the ears of the Island detective; it sounded much like Carlysle's, raised hoarsely.

And then the shadow ahead of him became a figure. Jo Gar lifted his automatic and said very quietly:

"Raise your arms!"

The figure swung towards him — he caught a glimpse, in the wavering, reflected light from a *sampan,* of a brown, lean face and wide, staring eyes. The man drew his breath in sharply — his hands swung upward. But the left one went up first, and the right brushed the belt of his soiled duck trousers as it moved.

Jo Gar said sharply: "No!"

The reflected light caught the gleam of the blade. Jo Gar steadied the muzzle of his automatic and squeezed the trigger. He rocked back on his heels, curved his body to one side. The other man's right wrist made swift movement, even as his

body jerked convulsively. The knife dug its blade point into the wood of a basket within six inches of Jo's left arm.

The man sank to his knees and pressed both hands against his belt, at the stomach. He groaned. Jo Gar stepped out from the piled baskets and jerked a small flashlight from his pocket. For a second he stood close to the man who had fallen, and listened for sound from the alley ahead. There was none. But in the distance voices were calling.

He flashed the beam on the one hunched near his feet, widened his almond shaped eyes. Then he moved the beam to the knife that had been thrown. He breathed very slowly:

"Malay —"

He kneeled beside the groaning man, held the gun close to him. He said quietly, in the Malay tongue:

"Why was the Chinese murdered?"

The man widened his eyes and shook his head. Jo Gar smiled coldly and pressed the muzzle against the man's right side.

"If I shoot again — you will die," he said. "You were with others — what were their names?"

The Malay shook his head. He was muttering to himself. Jo Gar said:

"The Chinese told the police that a man named Cantine committed the great robbery and murder. He was lying — and yet he was murdered. Why?"

The Malay was getting his breath with difficulty now. There were footfalls in the alley from which he had come. Jo Gar lifted his head, and heard the voice of Lieutenant Mallagin, cautioning one of his men. The Island detective spoke softly:

"Quickly — the police come. I am not of them. Why was the Chinese killed?"

The eyes of the man hunched beside him were staring. He said weakly, in his own tongue:

"His family — was given money. He was to lie — and then to die. He was — very poor."

Jo Gar straightened a little and sighed. Then he lowered his head again.

"Who made — the arrangement?" he asked quietly.

The Malay shook his head. His body relaxed a little; he rolled over on his back. He said very weakly:

"It was — the one who walks badly — always in white —"

His lips closed; he shivered — cried out a little. There was a convulsive movement of his body, then it was still. From the alley Mallagin called:

"Who — is that?"

Jo Gar narrowed his eyes and rose. He was thinking: The one who walks badly — always in white. But he said in a steady voice:

"It is Señor Gar — I have shot one of them."

He heard the surprised exclamation from Lieutenant Mallagin. The Filipino came in close, stared down at the dead man. Carlysle, breathing heavily, was behind the lieutenant.

"The Chinese is dead — the chauffeur is dead," he said. "One of my

men is wounded. Mallagin and I escaped. You followed us?"

Jo Gar nodded. He said quietly: "This one tried to knife me — I was forced to shoot. He did not die instantly."

Carlysle's eyes widened. He said eagerly: "He talked?"

Jo nodded. His voice was almost toneless. "Cantine did not commit the robbery or murders," he said. "The Chinese was paid to lie to you — and then to die."

Carlysle stared at Jo. "The driver — paid to lie and then —"

Jo Gar shook his head, "He was not the driver," he said slowly. "I spoke to him about machines — he knew very little. I was suspicious, and followed when you got word that one of Cantine's men had been hurt."

Carlysle breathed heavily. "You think it was a plan — to throw us off —" Jo Gar smiled a little. He glanced down at the dead man.

"If this man had not talked — you would have been after Cantine and his men," he said quietly "a wrong scent."

Carlysle nodded his head very slowly. "He said nothing about who —"

Jo Gar shook his head slowly. "I have told you what he said," he replied, and closed his eyes.

When he opened them, Carlysle was looking down at the dead man and frowning.

"We shall have to watch the boats," he said grimly. "They have the diamonds — and they have killed many men." He looked narrowly at the Island detective. "They got away with their machine-guns — all but this man," he said. "You will help us, Señor Gar?"

Jo Gar smiled with his thin lips. His colorless eyes seemed to be looking beyond the American head of police.

"No," he said. "It is — a police matter."

Carlysle stiffened. "Juan Arragon was your friend," he reminded.

Jo Gar stopped smiling. "It is so," he agreed. "But I will not help you, Señor Carlysle."

The American turned away, muttering something that the Island detective did not hear. Lieutenant Mallagin moved after his chief. Jo Gar looked down at the figure of the Malay and breathed very softly:

" 'The one who walks badly — always in white.' "

He sighed, and his eyes half closed. He glanced towards the knife handle, protruding from the basket of wood. River odors were in his nostrils — a pony whinnied in the distance. Jo Gar said very slowly, in a half-whisper:

"For Juan Arragon — I will help — myself."

Leaves from the Editors' Notebook

"WITH THE AUTHOR'S COMPLIMENTS"

by ELLERY QUEEN

UNLIKE the seven ages in Shakespeare's "strange eventful history" of man, there are but four ages in the evolution of a bibliomaniac.

In the first, the fledgling book collector surrounds himself with a wild miscellany of volumes, caring not a whit for edition or condition. His only interest is, properly, in the reading, and for this "dangerous amusement" (George Bernard Shaw) any well-printed text will suffice. Naturally, this golden age is the least sophisticated, and therefore the purest-in-heart — a sort of bibliochildhood in which the callow collector attains to no subtler title than that of Book Lover.

But if the virus has bitten deeply, the collector soon develops alarming symptoms. Each time he glances at the hodge-podge of odds-and-ends on his shelves he suffers a gnawing pain, which is relieved only when he replaces his nondescript copies with first editions. Ah, fateful flowering! — the Book Lover can now call himself a Connoisseur.

Then if the disease proves incurable, the collector enters the third stage of development: he must now possess not only first editions but first editions in the finest state of preservation. He seeks those bygone pristines which are still as brilliant as the day they came off the press — yea, even unto the original dust-jackets. The Connoisseur has now graduated to the more esoteric sphere of Fanatic — the highest rank of bibliophile, though there are some who spell it bibliofool.

Mint first editions: treasure-houses of jeweled words. Behold how good and how pleasant it is for books to dwell together, their bindings unfaded, their hinges uncracked, their pages unblemished (and too often unread). Immaculate first editions: to what higher level can a book collector aspire? Yea, verily, to that paradise of print in which the collector combs the markets, haunts the auctions, to buy those rare first editions which are not only correct on every "point" but are also *inscribed by the author*.

Thus hath the book collector grown to the stature of a full-fledged Bibliomaniac — and may the Lord have mercy on our soul!

For we have reached, in collecting first editions of detective stories, that fourth heaven of bibliolatry.

The irresistible lure of a first edition inscribed by the author is easy to

explain. When an author, especially a famous one, writes a personal message on the flyleaf of one of his own books, he is really writing a letter — and who does not prize handwritten letters from the great? Moreover, every subsequent owner of that book has the deep satisfaction of possessing a truly unique copy: for there is only one book in the world containing your particular inscription, and you have it.

Have you ever wondered, however, just what an author writes when he inscribes a copy of his book to a friend, reader, or collector? Are the inscriptions of brilliant authors brilliant? Are witty authors witty? It is a sad truth that in the vast majority of instances even the most scintillating authors seldom rise above a weak variation of "with the best wishes." As we look through the first editions in the Queen collection, we find such inscriptions as: *Yours sincerely, Irvin S. Cobb; with the kind regards of Arthur Conan Doyle; with the compliments of the author, Allan Pinkerton; with greetings and good wishes from R. Austin Freeman; with the regards of the author, Anna Katharine Green Rohlfs* (one of the few women who signed both her maiden a d married surnames); *Yours truly, R(obert) W. Chambers;* and *with best wishes, Mary Roberts Rinehart.*

These might be called the run-of-the-mill inscriptions — highly desirable to the book collector however banal in thought. But as we dig deeper among our precious first editions, representing the sweat, tears and, yes, the blood of half a lifetime's devotion to duodecimos, we also come upon unusual and revealing inscriptions which glitter more and more brightly with the passing years. These flyleaf fancies, these auctorial afterthoughts, often relate to a hitherto unrecorded anecdote about a famous author, and sometimes, as you will see, the author even lets his (or her) hair down.

For example, we have in front of us now a first edition of Israel Zangwill's THE BIG BOW MYSTERY (1892), that great cornerstone in the history of the detective story. In the upper right-hand corner of the flyleaf, written at a forty-five degree angle, the author penned: *Don't read the last page in the middle. I. Zangwill.* When you consider that this book founded the whole locked-room school of detective fiction — the first in which a "mystery-monger ever murdered a man in a room to which there was no possible access" — you realize the extraordinary significance of Zangwill's inscription. For in these eight simple words, written before the turn of the century, Israel Zangwill summed up the entire philosophy of the detective story: to readers he said, "Play fair with the author" and to authors he said, "Play fair with the reader."

How sound is Zangwill's advice, and warning, especially today! It is always a new wonder to rediscover an old truth. The principl s which govern the technique of any art form

are precisely the principles which govern all living. It is relatively unimportant that the survival of the pure detective story depends on the golden rule of fair play — but it is of incalculable importance that the survival of mankind, in this atomic age, depends on the very same golden rule!

This suggests a curious commentary on the state of the world: of all genus homo inhabiting our muddled planet, the subspecies called detective-story writer is without doubt the most peace-loving. Despite his daily preoccupation with violence and sudden death, no detective-story writer — even the bloodthirstiest on paper — has ever been known to commit murder in real life.

In chronological order we next come to Richard Harding Davis's IN THE FOG (1901), a memorable book which stands today as a perfect blend of Anglo-American storytelling. Once upon a time, the tale goes, a celebrated collector cornered Richard Harding Davis after a banquet in the author's honor, handed him a first edition of IN THE FOG, and asked him to sign it. Davis, in a receptive mood, struggled to avoid the hackneyed "with best wishes." He thumbed through the thin volume until his eyes lit on the last line of text on the very last page — and his troubles were over. Just before the final page in the book is a glossy-paper insert showing a color illustration, its blank white back directly facing the last page. Across this snowy expanse, exactly opposite the last line of text, Richard Harding Davis merely repeated in longhand the final line of his own story — "*You sign it,*" *he said. Richard Harding Davis.* To such ingenious lengths are some famous authors driven to satisfy their admirers!

One of the most versatile of contemporary inscribers is Vincent Starrett, that gentleman-and-scholar who has made a fine art of writing about books and bookmen. We have never seen a Starrett inscription that was either trite or threadbare. The one in our first edition of his rarest book, THE UNIQUE HAMLET: A HITHERTO UNCHRONICLED ADVENTURE OF MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES (1920), reads: *For Scott Cunningham, some years after publication and some hours before daylight. Vincent Starrett.*

Where were Messrs. Cunningham and Starrett on that inscribed occasion, "some hours before daylight"? Roaming the streets of Chicago, like modern Haroun-al-Raschids? — or "out bumming," as O. Henry described his own legendary night prowling in Bagdad-on-the-Hudson. Or were Messrs. Cunningham and Starrett attempting to recapture a night "out of the irrecoverable past," the two of them curled up in the recesses of easy chairs, garbed in dressing-gowns and smoking long cherrywood pipes, the glow of cannel coal in the grates, the blinds drawn, the echo of ghostly cabs seeping in from the mist and fog outside, the gasogene (or its modern equivalent)

doing double duty — all in some Chicago version of 221B Baker Street? Surely that must have been it — we would not believe otherwise.

An even more provocative, and disturbing, question is raised by Arthur Train's inscription in a first edition of his TUTT AND MR. TUTT (1920): *To Hon. Herbert Hoover with the kindest regards and very best wishes of the author. Arthur Train.* Yes, we have that book, but under what strange circumstances was this unique presentation copy offered for public sale? Did Herbert Hoover weed out his books before taking up residence in the White House, disposing of the detective stories as too low-brow for a Presidential library? If so, it reveals much about the man. Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin D. Roosevelt read and enjoyed detective stories, and were proud to admit it publicly.

The literary snobbishness from which detective fiction has long suffered in America has been deplored by no less a giant than W. Somerset Maugham. Many times in print Maugham has defended the detective story with the same cool passion that characterizes his own literary work. In 1944 Maugham wrote: "I have a notion that when the historians of literature come to discourse upon the fiction produced by the English-speaking peoples during the first half of this century, they will pass somewhat lightly over the productions of the serious novelists and turn their attention to the immense and varied achievement of the detective writers."

During Maugham's last visit to New York we had lunch with him at the Plaza — a meeting which fulfilled one of our oldest and deepest ambitions. We spent two hours together, and what do you think we talked about? At Maugham's own insistence, about detective stories! And just before we said goodbye, that charming man inscribed our first edition of his AH KING (1933) by writing under the half-title: *by W. Somerset Maugham who couldn't write a detective story if he tried.* The prodigious modesty of that man! Surely his inscription is a perfect example of British understatement — for W. Somerset Maugham has written some of the most expert detective-crime short stories of our time. One of them — *Footprints in the Jungle* — is included in the very book in which he so humbly disclaimed his own great talent, and his ASHENDEN (1928) is the finest group of secret service stories in the English language.

Inscribed books often come into being as the result of odd and unexpected quirks of fate. We remember reading an announcement one morning that Dashiell Hammett was planning to give a course in The Mystery Story at a downtown New York school. We decided to attend the first lecture. When we reached the corridor outside the classroom, a few minutes before class time, we saw Hammett stalking up and down like a lean and hungry white-maned

lion. Since this was probably Hammett's first excursion into teaching, he was naturally nervous; he was probably asking himself how in the name of Sherrington Hope he could talk for two solid hours about the detective story!

Hammett's greeting was to throw his arms around our neck, as if he had just met a long-lost friend. He promptly shunted us into the room, gave us an assistant-engineer's seat at the lecturer's table, and midway through the session switched his 'tec train of thought into an Open Forum. We found ourselves at the throttle as a Visiting Ferretman — a part we have enacted many times since, and always with pleasure.

Later that evening, in a quiet corner at Luchow's, Hammett commemorated the event by inscribing a first edition of his DEAD YELLOW WOMEN (1947): *For Ellery Queen — and, [censored], was I glad to see him again. Dashiell Hammett.* On another occasion, in the same quiet nook at Luchow's, Hammett wrote on the flyleaf of his THE MALTESE FALCON (1930): *For Ellery Queen, with all due thanks for his help in keeping the stuff from dying on the vine. Dashiell Hammett* — a generous acknowledgment of our role in rediscovering and reprinting the early Hammett short stories which might otherwise have lapsed into biblivion.

And now we come to the most fabulous presentation copy among all the books of detectivedom. Unfortunately, the Queen library cannot boast its ownership, but if we were given the choice of adding a single inscribed first edition to the Queen collection, we should unhesitatingly choose this one. The inscription itself is the most commonplace imaginable: except for the names of the donor and the recipient, the entire inscription consists of only two words — "To" and "from." Yet there is not a bloodhound bibliomaniac this side of the happy hunting grounds who could conceive, even in his wildest dreams of biblio-bliss, of a more desirable "association" copy.

The book is a first edition of THE MOONSTONE (1868), still ranked by many critics as the best and most important detective novel ever written. The inscription, written in a bold, flowing hand at the top of the half-title of Vol. 1, reads simply:

To Charles Dickens from Wilkie Collins

To think that we could have owned that copy in 1943! All we needed at that time were sufficient expendable greenbacks — mere medium of exchange — to pay the price asked for the three-volume set in Scribner's Rare Book Catalogue Number 126: $2,250. Many philosophers tell us that money cannot buy the best things in life; no doubt this is true, but money can buy some treasures that make strong men weep, or tremble with ecstacy. Which poor mortal among us would ask for anything more?

GUMSHOE GHOSTS

When a detective-story writer dies, his detective usually dies with him. We say "usually" because there are some notable exceptions. For example, Barry Perowne was given permission, long after Hornung's death, to continue the Raffles cracksmanship in book form. Then there is radio: the Great God Radio snaps its kilocycles in disdain at the grim realism of death. In radio, seven days a week, Death Takes a Holiday — for although Conan Doyle has long since proved his spiritualistic theories one way or the other, Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty appear almost weekly in a brand-new tussle; and Earl Derr Biggers, who joined his ancestors more than fifteen years ago, can hear (if there are celestial superheterodynes) Charlie Chan mix philosophy and ferreting in tales which Mr. Biggers never wrote; and S. S. Van Dine, who crossed the Sleuthian ferry a decade ago, must wonder mightily at the transformation in Philo Vance as he is now depicted on the air in stories which Van Dine would never have countenanced, except over his dead body.

There are others, and in nearly every instance any resemblance between the original character and the radio-Zombie is purely accidental. We are thankful, as we write these sad words, that Auguste Dupin, Dr. Thorndyke, Father Brown, and Uncle Abner do not yet live an etheric life after death — a false, distorted, and illusion-killing existence contrived by anonymous radioteers who (how can we believe otherwise?) have never even bothered to read about their protagonists in the original text.

So, for most great detectives of the past whose creators have cashed in their criminological chips, the number of tales is fixed. They live, defiantly and definitively, in cherished books. Occasionally, however, an "unknown" story comes miraculously on the scene, and of these discoveries EQMM has built a treasure-house, and opened the doors wide. But, alas, like treasure-trove in real life, the great "finds" are not unearthed by mere wishful thinking: it still takes blood, sweat, and 'tec tears.

There are only three Dupin tales — as indefatigable researchers have established after nearly a century of detectival digging. There are no "unknown" Dr. Thorndyke stories, although we expect to bring you soon an "inverted" investigation which has never before been published in the United States. There was only one "missing" Father Brown story, and we gave you that rarity last year in TWENTIETH CENTURY DETECTIVE STORIES *(World, The Living Library). And all attempts to track down*

a "new" Uncle Abner tale have ended in a criminological cul-de-sac.

Yes, of these particular Old Masters, that's all there is, there isn't any more. But there are other memorable manhunters whose adventures, buried in dusty magazines, have not been perpetuated in book form. One of them is the irritable, massive-domed wizard, with the forbidding squint and grotesque spectacles — Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, proud possessor of one of the most appealing sobriquets in all fiction — The Thinking Machine!

We cannot tell you what a deep pleasure it is to reprint, for the first time in more than forty years, an "unknown" story about that grand old man who wore a No. 8 hat and who was without doubt the most inflexible logician of his era.

THE LEAK

by JACQUES FUTRELLE

"REALLY great criminals are never found out, for the simple reason that the greatest crimes — their crimes — are never discovered," remarked Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen positively. "There is genius in the perpetration of crime, Mr. Grayson, just as there must be in its detection, unless it is the shallow work of a bungler. In this latter case there have been instances where even the police have uncovered the truth. But the expert criminal, the man of genius — the professional, I may say — regards as perfect only that crime which does not and cannot be made to appear a crime at all; therefore one that can never under any circumstances involve him, or anyone else."

The financier, J. Morgan Grayson, regarded this wizened little man of science — The Thinking Machine — thoughtfully, through the smoke of his cigar.

"It is a strange psychological fact that the casual criminal glories in his crime beforehand, and from one to ten minutes afterward," The Thinking Machine continued. "For instance, the man who kills for revenge wants the world to know it is his work; but at the end of ten minutes comes fear, and then paradoxically enough, he will seek to hide his crime and protect himself. With fear comes panic, with panic irresponsibility, and then he makes the mistake — hews a pathway which the trained mind follows from motive to a prison cell.

"These are the men who are found out. But there are men of genius, Mr. Grayson, professionally engaged in crime. We never hear of them because they are never caught, and we

never even suspect them because they make no mistake. Imagine the great brains of history turned to crime. Well, there are today brains as great as any of those of history; there is murder and theft and robbery under our noses that we never dream of. If I, for instance, should become an active criminal —" He paused.

Grayson, with a queer expression on his face, puffed steadily at his cigar.

"I could kill you now, here in this room," The Thinking Machine went on calmly, "and no one would ever know, never even suspect. Why? Because I would make no mistake."

It was not a boast as he said it; it was merely a statement of fact. Grayson appeared to be a little startled. Where there had been only impatient interest in his manner, there was now fascination.

"How would you kill me, for instance?" he inquired curiously.

"With any one of a dozen poisons, with virulent germs, or even with a knife or revolver," replied the scientist placidly. "You see, I know how to use poisons; I know how to inoculate with germs; I know how to produce a suicidal appearance perfectly with either a revolver or knife. And I never make mistakes, Mr. Grayson. In the sciences we must be exact — not approximately so, but absolutely so. We must know. It isn't like carpentry. A carpenter may make a trivial mistake in a joint, and it will not weaken his house; but if the scientist makes one mistake, the whole structure tumbles down. We must know. Knowledge is progress. We gain knowledge through observation and logic — inevitable logic. And logic tells us that two and two make four — not sometimes but all the time."

Grayson flicked the ashes off his cigar thoughtfully, and little wrinkles appeared about his eyes as he stared into the drawn, inscrutable face of the scientist. The enormous, straw-yellow head was cushioned against the chair, the squinting, watery blue eyes turned upward, and the slender white fingers at rest, tip to tip. The financier drew a long breath. "I have been informed that you were a remarkable man," he said at last slowly. "I believe it. Quinton Frazer, the banker who gave me the letter of introduction to you, told me how you once solved a remarkable mystery in which —"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the scientist shortly, "the Ralston Bank burglary — I remember."

"So I came to you to enlist your aid in something which is more inexplicable than that," Grayson went on hesitatingly. "I know that no fee I might offer would influence you; yet it is a case which —"

"State it," interrupted The Thinking Machine again.

"It isn't a crime — that is, a crime that can be reached by law," Grayson hurried on, "but it has cost me millions, and —"

For one instant The Thinking Machine lowered his squint eyes to those of his visitor, then raised them again. "Millions!" he repeated. "How many?"

"Six, eight, perhaps ten," was the reply. "Briefly, there is a leak in my office. My plans become known to others almost by the time I have perfected them. My plans are large; I have millions at stake; and the greatest secrecy is absolutely essential. For years I have been able to preserve this secrecy; but half a dozen times in the last eight weeks my plans have become known, and I have been caught. Unless you know the Street, you can't imagine what a tremendous disadvantage it is to have someone know your next move to the minutest detail and, knowing it, defeat you at every turn."

"No, I don't know your world of finance, Mr. Grayson," remarked The Thinking Machine. "Give me an instance."

"Well, take this last case," said the financier earnestly. "Briefly, without technicalities, I had planned to unload the securities of the P., Q. & X. Railway, protecting myself through brokers, and force the outstanding stock down to a price where other brokers, acting for me, could buy far below the actual value. In this way I intended to get complete control of the stock. But my plans became known, and when I began to unload everything was snapped up by the opposition, with the result that instead of gaining control of the road I lost heavily. This same thing has happened, with variations, half a dozen times."

"I presume that is strictly honest?" inquired the scientist mildly.

"Honest?" repeated Grayson. "Certainly — of course. It's business."

"I shall not pretend to understand all that," said The Thinking Machine curtly. "It doesn't seem to matter, anyway. You want to know where the leak is. Is that right?"

"Precisely."

"Well, who is in your confidence?"

"No one, except my stenographer."

"Who is he, please?"

"It's a woman — Miss Evelyn Winthrop. She has been in my employ for six years in the same capacity — more than five years before this leak appeared. I trust her absolutely."

"No man knows your business?"

"No," replied the financier grimly. "I learned years ago that no one could keep my secrets as well as I do — there are too many temptations. Therefore, I never mention my plans to anyone — never — to anyone!"

"Except your stenographer," corrected the scientist.

"I work for days, weeks, sometimes months, perfecting plans, and it's all in my head, not on paper — not a scratch of it," explained Grayson. "When I say that she is in my confidence, I mean that she knows my plans only half an hour or less before the machinery is put into motion. For instance, I planned this P., Q. & X. deal. My brokers didn't know of it; Miss Winthrop never heard of it until twenty minutes before the Stock Exchange opened for business. Then I dictated to her, as I always do, some short letters of instructions to my agents. That is all she knew of it."

"You outlined the plan in those letters?"

"No; they merely told my brokers what to do."

"But a shrewd person, knowing the contents of all those letters, could have learned what you intended to do?"

"Yes; but no one person knew the contents of all the letters. No one broker knew what was in the other letters. Miss Winthrop and I were the only two human beings who knew all that was in them."

The Thinking Machine sat silent for so long that Grayson began to fidget in his chair. "Who was in the room besides you and Miss Winthrop before the letters were sent?" he asked at last.

"No one," responded Grayson emphatically. "For an hour before I dictated those letters, until at least an hour afterward, after my plans had gone to smash, no one entered that room. Only she and I work there."

"But when she finished the letters, she went out?" insisted The Thinking Machine.

"No," declared the financier, "she didn't even leave her desk."

"Or perhaps sent something out — carbon copies of the letters?"

"No."

"Or called up a friend on the telephone?" continued The Thinking Machine quietly.

"Nor that," retorted Grayson.

"Or signaled to someone through the window?"

"No," said the financier again. "She finished the letters, then remained quietly at her desk, reading a book. She hardly moved for two hours."

The Thinking Machine lowered his eyes and glared straight into those of the financier. "Someone listened at the window?" he went on after a moment.

"No. It is sixteen stories up, fronting the street, and there is no fire escape."

"Or the door?"

"If you knew the arrangement of my offices, you would see how utterly impossible that would be, because —"

"Nothing is impossible, Mr. Grayson," snapped the scientist abruptly. "It might be improbable, but not impossible. Don't say that — it annoys me exceedingly." He was silent for a moment. Grayson stared at him blankly. "Did either you or she answer a call on the 'phone?"

"No one called; we called no one."

"Any apertures — holes or cracks — in your flooring or walls or ceilings?" demanded the scientist.

"Private detectives whom I had employed looked for such an opening, and there was none," replied Grayson.

Again The Thinking Machine was silent for a long time. Grayson lighted a fresh cigar and settled back in his chair patiently. Faint cobwebby lines began to appear on the dome-like brow of the scientist, and slowly the squint eyes were narrowing.

"The letters you wrote were intercepted?" he suggested at last.

"No," exclaimed Grayson flatly.

"Those letters were sent direct to the brokers by a dozen different methods, and every one of them had been delivered by five minutes of ten o'clock, when 'Change begins business. The last one left me at ten minutes of ten."

"Dear me! Dear me!" The Thinking Machine rose and paced the length of the room.

"You don't give me credit for the extraordinary precautions I have taken, particularly in this last P., Q. & X. deal," Grayson continued. "I left positively nothing undone to insure absolute secrecy. And Miss Winthrop, I know, is innocent of any connection with the affair. The private detectives suspected her at first, as you do, and she was watched in and out of my office for weeks. When she was not under my eyes, she was under the eyes of men to whom I had promised an extravagant sum of money if they found the leak. She didn't know it then, and doesn't know it now. I am heartily ashamed of it all, because the investigation proved her absolute loyalty to me. On this last day she was directly under my eyes for two hours; and she didn't make one movement that I didn't note, because the thing meant millions to me. That proved beyond all question that it was no fault of hers. What could I do?"

The Thinking Machine didn't say. He paused at a window, and for minute after minute stood motionless there, with eyes narrowed to mere slits.

"I was on the point of discharging Miss Winthrop," the financier went on, "but her innocence was so thoroughly proved to me by this last affair that it would have been unjust, and so —"

Suddenly the scientist turned upon his visitor. "Do you talk in your sleep?" he demanded.

"No," was the prompt reply. "I had thought of that too. It is beyond all ordinary things, Professor. Yet there is a leak that is costing me millions."

"It comes down to this, Mr. Grayson," The Thinking Machine informed him crabbedly. "If only you and Miss Winthrop knew those plans, and no one else, and they did leak, and were not deduced from other things, then either you or she permitted them to leak, intentionally or unintentionally. That is as pure logic as two and two make four; there is no need to argue it."

"Well, of course, I didn't," said Grayson.

"Then Miss Winthrop did," declared The Thinking Machine finally, positively; "unless we credit the opposition, as you call it, with telepathic gifts hitherto unheard of. By the way, you have referred to the other side only as the opposition. Do the same men, the same clique, appear against you all the time, or is it only one man?"

"It's a clique," explained the financier, "with millions back of it, headed by Ralph Matthews, a young man to whom I give credit for being

the prime factor against me." His lips were set sternly.

"Why?" demanded the scientist.

"Because every time he sees me he grins," was the reply. Grayson seemed suddenly discomfited.

The Thinking Machine went to a desk, addressed an envelope, folded a sheet of paper, placed it inside, then sealed it. At length he turned back to his visitor. "Is Miss Winthrop at your office now?"

"Yes."

"Let us go there, then."

A few minutes later the eminent financier ushered the eminent scientist into his private office on the Street. The only person there was a young woman — a woman of twenty-six or -seven, perhaps — who turned, saw Grayson, and resumed reading. The financier motioned to a seat. Instead of sitting, however, The Thinking Machine went straight to Miss Winthrop and extended a sealed envelope to her.

"Mr. Ralph Matthews asked me to hand you this," he said.

The young woman glanced up into his face frankly, yet with a certain timidity, took the envelope, and turned it curiously in her hand.

"Mr. Ralph Matthews," she repeated, as if the name was a strange one. "I don't think I know him."

The Thinking Machine stood staring at her aggressively, as she opened the envelope and drew out the sheet of paper. There was no expression save surprise — bewilderment, rather — to be read on her face.

"Why, it's a blank sheet!" she remarked, puzzled.

The scientist turned suddenly toward Grayson, who had witnessed the incident with frank astonishment in his eyes. "Your telephone a moment, please," he requested.

"Certainly; here," replied Grayson.

"This will do," remarked the scientist.

He leaned forward over the desk where Miss Winthrop sat, still gazing at him in a sort of bewilderment, picked up the receiver, and held it to his ear. A few moments later he was talking to Hutchinson Hatch, reporter.

"I merely wanted to ask you to meet me at my apartment in an hour," said the scientist. "It is very important."

That was all. He hung up the receiver, paused for a moment to admire an exquisitely wrought silver box — a "vanity" box — on Miss Winthrop's desk, beside the telephone, then took a seat beside Grayson and began to discourse almost pleasantly upon the prevailing meteorological conditions. Grayson merely stared; Miss Winthrop continued her reading.

Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, distinguished scientist, and Hutchinson Hatch, newspaper reporter, were poking round among the chimney pots and other obstructions on the roof of a skyscraper. Far below them the slumber-enshrouded city was spread out like a panorama, streets dotted brilliantly with lights,

and roofs hazily visible through mists of night. Above, the infinite blackness hung like a veil, with star-points breaking through here and there.

"Here are the wires," Hatch said at last, and he stooped.

The Thinking Machine knelt on the roof beside him, and for several minutes they remained thus in the darkness, with only the glow of a flashlight to indicate their presence. Finally, The Thinking Machine rose.

"That's the wire you want, Mr. Hatch," he said. "I'll leave the rest of it to you."

"Are you sure?" asked the reporter.

"I am always sure," was the tart response.

Hatch opened a small hand-satchel and removed several queerly wrought tools. These he spread on the roof beside him; then, kneeling again, began his work. For half an hour he labored in the gloom, with only the flashlight to aid him, and then he rose.

"It's all right," he said.

The Thinking Machine examined the work that had been done, grunted his satisfaction, and together they went to the skylight, leaving a thin, insulated wire behind them, stringing along to mark their path. They passed down through the roof and into the darkness of the hall of the upper story. Here the light was extinguished. From far below came the faint echo of a man's footsteps as the watchman passed through the silent, deserted building.

"Be careful!" warned The Thinking Machine.

They went along the hall to a room in the rear, and still the wire trailed behind. At the last door they stopped. The Thinking Machine fumbled with some keys, then opened the way. Here an electric light was on. The room was bare of furniture, the only sign of recent occupancy being a telephone instrument on the wall.

Here The Thinking Machine stopped and stared at the spool of wire which he had permitted to wind off as he walked, and his thin face expressed doubt.

"It wouldn't be safe," he said at last, "to leave the wire exposed as we have left it. True, this floor is not occupied; but someone might pass this way and disturb it. You take the spool, go back to the roof, winding the wire as you go, then swing the spool down to me over the side of the building, so that I can bring it in through the window. That will be best. I will catch it here, and thus there will be nothing to indicate any connection." Hatch went out quietly and closed the door.

Twice the following day The Thinking Machine spoke to the financier over the telephone. Grayson was in his private office, Miss Winthrop at her desk, when the first call came.

"Be careful in answering my questions," warned The Thinking Machine when Grayson answered. "Do you know how long Miss Winthrop

has owned the little silver box which is now on her desk, near the telephone?"

Grayson glanced round involuntarily to where the girl sat idly turning over the leaves of her book. "Yes," he answered, "for seven months. I gave it to her last Christmas."

"Ah!" exclaimed the scientist. "That simplifies matters. Where did you buy it?"

Grayson mentioned the name of a well-known jeweler.

Considerably later in the day The Thinking Machine called Grayson to the telephone again.

"What make of typewriter does she use?" came the querulous voice over the wire.

Grayson named it.

While Grayson sat with deeply perplexed lines in his face, the diminutive scientist called upon Hutchinson Hatch at his office.

"Do you use a typewriter?" demanded The Thinking Machine.

"Yes."

"What kind?"

"Oh, four or five kinds — we have half a dozen different makes in the office."

They passed along through the city room, at that moment practically deserted, until finally the watery blue eyes settled upon a typewriter with the name emblazoned on the front.

"That's it!" exclaimed The Thinking Machine. "Write something on it," he directed Hatch.

Hatch drew up a chair and rolled off several lines of the immortal practice sentence, beginning, "Now is the time for all good men —"

The Thinking Machine sat beside him, squinting across the room in deep abstraction, and listening intently. His head was turned away from the reporter, but his ear was within a few inches of the machine. For half a minute he sat there listening, then shook his head.

"Strike your vowels," he commanded; "first slowly, then rapidly."

Again Hatch obeyed, while the scientist listened. And again he shook his head. Then in turn every make of machine in the office was tested the same way. At the end The Thinking Machine rose and went his way. There was an expression nearly approaching complete bewilderment on his face.

For hour after hour that night The Thinking Machine half lay in a huge chair in his laboratory, with eyes turned uncompromisingly upward, and an expression of complete concentration on his face. There was no change either in his position or his gaze as minute succeeded minute; the brow was deeply wrinkled now, and the thin line of the lips was drawn taut. The tiny clock in the reception room struck ten, eleven, twelve, and finally one. At just half-past one The Thinking Machine rose suddenly.

"Positively I am getting stupid!" he grumbled half aloud. "Of course! Of course! Why couldn't I have thought of that in the first place?" . . .

So it came about that Grayson did not go to his office on the following morning at the usual time. Instead, he called again upon The Thinking Machine in eager, expectant response to a note which had reached him at his home just before he started to his office.

"Nothing yet," said The Thinking Machine as the financier entered. "But here is something you must do today. At one o'clock," the scientist went on, "you must issue orders for a gigantic deal of some sort; and you must issue them precisely as you have issued them in the past; there must be no variation. Dictate the letters as you have always done to Miss Winthrop — *but don't send them!* When they come to you, keep them until you see me."

"You mean that the deal must be purely imaginative?" inquired the financier.

"Precisely," was the reply. "But make your instructions circumstantial; give them enough detail to make them absolutely logical and convincing."

Grayson asked a dozen questions, answers to which were curtly denied, then went to his office. The Thinking Machine again called Hatch on the telephone.

"I've got it," he announced briefly. "I want the best telegraph operator you know. Bring him along and meet me in the room on the top floor where the telephone is at precisely fifteen minutes before one o'clock today."

"Telegraph operator?" Hatch repeated.

"That's what I said — telegraph operator!" replied the scientist irritably. "Goodbye."

Hatch smiled whimsically at the other end as he heard the receiver banged on the hook — smiled because he knew the eccentric ways of this singular man, whose mind so accurately illuminated every problem to which it was directed. Then he went out to the telegraph room and borrowed the principal operator. They were in the little room on the top floor at precisely fifteen minutes of one.

The operator glanced about in astonishment. The room was still unfurnished, save for the telephone box on the wall.

"What do I do?" he asked The Thinking Machine.

"I'll tell you when the time comes," responded the scientist, as he glanced at his watch.

At three minutes of one o'clock he handed a sheet of blank paper to the operator, and gave him final instructions.

There was ludicrous mystification on the operator's face; but he obeyed orders, grinning cheerfully at Hatch as he tilted his cigar up to keep the smoke out of his eyes. The Thinking Machine stood impatiently looking on, watch in hand. Hatch didn't know what was happening, but he was tremendously interested.

At last the operator heard something. His face became suddenly alert.

He continued to listen for a moment, and then came a smile of recognition.

Less than ten minutes after Miss Winthrop had handed over the typewritten letters of instruction to Grayson for signature, and while he still sat turning them over in his hands, the door opened and The Thinking Machine entered. He tossed a folded sheet of paper on the desk before Grayson, and went straight to Miss Winthrop.

"So you did know Mr. Ralph Matthews after all?" he inquired.

The girl rose from her desk, and a flash of some subtle emotion passed over her face. "What do you mean, sir?" she demanded.

"You might as well remove the silver box," The Thinking Machine went on mercilessly. "There is no further need of the connection."

Miss Winthrop glanced down at the telephone extension on her desk, and her hand darted toward it. The silver "vanity" box was directly under the receiver, supporting it, so that all weight was removed from the hook, and the line was open. She snatched the box and the receiver dropped back on the hook. The Thinking Machine turned to Grayson.

"It was Miss Winthrop," he said.

"Miss Winthrop!" exclaimed Grayson, and he rose. "I can't believe it!"

"Read the paper I gave you, Mr. Grayson," directed The Thinking Machine coldly. "Perhaps that will enlighten her."

The financier opened the sheet, which had remained folded in his hand, and glanced at what was written there. Slowly he read it aloud: "PEABODY — Sell ten thousand shares L. & W. at 97. McCRACKEN Co. — Sell ten thousand shares L. & W. at 97." He read on down the list bewildered. Then gradually, as he realized the import of what he read, there came a hardening of the lines about his mouth.

"I understand, Miss Winthrop," he said at last. "This is the substance of the orders I dictated, and in some way you made them known to persons for whom they were not intended. I don't know how you did it, of course; but I understand that you did do it, so —" He stepped to the door and opened it with grave courtesy. "You may go now."

Miss Winthrop made no plea — merely bowed and went out. Grayson stood staring after her for a moment, then turned to The Thinking Machine and motioned him to a chair. "What happened?" he asked briskly.

"Miss Winthrop is a tremendously clever woman," replied The Thinking Machine. "She neglected to tell you, however, that besides being a stenographer and typist she is also a telegraph operator. She is so expert in each of her lines that she combined the two, if I may say it that way. In other words, in writing on the typewriter, she was clever enough to be able to *give the click of the machine the patterns in the Morse telegraphic code* — so that another telegraph operator

at the other end of the 'phone could hear her machine and translate the clicks into words."

Grayson sat staring at him incredulously. "I still don't understand," he said finally.

The Thinking Machine rose and went to Miss Winthrop's desk. "Here is an extension telephone with the receiver on the hook. It happens that the little silver box which you gave Miss Winthrop is just tall enough to lift this receiver clear of the hook, and the minute the receiver is off the hook the line is open. When you were at your desk and she was here, you couldn't see this telephone; therefore it was a simple matter for her to lift the receiver, and place the silver box underneath, thus holding the line open permanently. That being true, the sound of the typewriter — *the striking of the keys* — would go over the open wire to whoever was listening at the other end. Then, if the striking of the keys typed out your letters and, by their frequency and pauses, simultaneously tapped out telegraphic code, an outside operator could read your letters at the same moment they were being written. That is all. It required extreme concentration on Miss Winthrop's part to type accurately in Morse rhythms."

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Grayson.

"When I knew that the leak in your office was not in the usual way," continued The Thinking Machine, "I looked for the unusual. There is nothing very mysterious about it now — it was merely clever."

"Clever!" repeated Grayson, and his jaws snapped. "It is more than that. Why, it's criminal! She should be prosecuted."

"I shouldn't advise that, Mr. Grayson," returned the scientist coldly. "If it is honest — merely business — to juggle stocks as you told me you did, this is no more dishonest. And besides, remember that Miss Winthrop is backed by the people who have made millions out of you, and — well, I wouldn't prosecute. It is betrayal of trust, certainly; but —" He rose as if that were all, and started toward the door. "I would advise you, however, to discharge the person who operates your switchboard."

"Was she in the scheme, too?" demanded Grayson. He rushed out of the private office into the main office. At the door he met a clerk coming in.

"Where is Miss Mitchell?" demanded the financier hotly.

"I was just coming to tell you that she went out with Miss Winthrop just now without giving any explanation," replied the clerk.

"Good day, Mr. Grayson," said The Thinking Machine.

The financier nodded his thanks, then stalked back into his room.

In the course of time The Thinking Machine received a check for ten thousand dollars, signed, "J. Morgan Grayson." He glared at it for a little while, then indorsed it in a crabbed hand, *Pay to the Trustees' Home for Crippled Children*, and sent Martha, his housekeeper, out to mail it.

THE ONE AND ONLY PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

Last year Alfred A. Knopf published two very welcome omnibus-collections — THE COLLECTED TALES OF A. E. COPPARD *and* TALES OF HORROR AND THE SUPERNATURAL *by Arthur Machen. The dust-jacket of the Coppard book described the author as the "outstanding modern master of the short story"; the dust-jacket of the Machen volume described that author as "one of the great masters of the horror story." There is, of course, a distinction, but despite the hairline of difference both claims are remarkably near the truth. The appearance of the two books, in the same year, reminded us that neither author has yet been represented in EQMM — an unforgivable oversight, which we now proceed to remedy. In this issue we bring you one of A. E. Coppard's finest crime stories, and in the next issue you will find a startling short story by Arthur Machen — one, incidentally, that is* not *included in the Knopf collection.*

In the Foreword which Mr. Coppard wrote especially for the Knopf omnibus the author makes some cogent observations on the questionable kinship between the novel and the short story (compare with Philip MacDonald's theory on page 48 in this issue). Mr. Coppard says: "First, I want to crush the assumption that the short story and the novel are manifestations of one principle of fiction, differentiated merely by size, that the novel is . . . the important piece of work . . . the short story being merely a remnant, the rag or two left over. In fact the relationship of the short story to the novel amounts to nothing at all."

Now, read Mr. Coppard's "A Broadsheet Ballad." Here, in our opinion, is one of the richest plot ideas ever straitjacketed into 3000-odd words — a basic idea so brimming with possibilities for development, so suggestive of integrated plot and counterplot, that it could easily have been used as the skeleton-pattern for a full-length novel. (Indeed, we would have given a Queen's ransom to have been the first to conceive the basic idea!) Yet Mr. Coppard insists that fundamentally the short story and the novel have nothing whatever in common; and Mr. MacDonald maintains that while the short-short and the novel unquestionably possess consanguinity, the true short story cannot be enlarged to the scope of a full-length novel.

Think it over: you may decide, as often happens, that the most widely separated view-points are not as far apart as they sometimes appear on the surface . . .

But no literary disagreement, in theory or practice, can possibly lessen your enjoyment of Mr. Coppard's story. It is a work of art, and in the last analysis a literary work of art does not depend for its perfection on the

number of words the author has used; it depends infinitely more on the unique and subtle alchemy of the author's mind, which transmutes base facts into golden words, which transforms something common into something precious.

A BROADSHEET BALLAD

by A. E. COPPARD

AT NOON the tiler and the mason stepped down from the roof of the village church which they were repairing and crossed over the road to the tavern to eat their dinner. It had been a nice little morning, but there were clouds massing in the south. Sam, the tiler; remarked that it looked like thunder. The two men sat in the dim little taproom eating, Bob, the mason, at the same time reading from a newspaper an account of a trial for murder.

"I dunno what thunder looks like," Bob said, "but I reckon this chap is going to be hung, though I can't rightly say for why. To my thinking he didn't do it at all; but murder's a bloody thing and someone ought to suffer for it."

"I don't think," spluttered Sam as he impaled a flat piece of beetroot on the point of a pocket-knife and prepared to contemplate it with patience until his stuffed mouth was ready, "he ought to be hung."

"There can't be no other end for him though, with a mob of lawyers like that, and a judge like that, and a jury too — why the rope's half round his neck this minute; he'll be in glory within a month, they only have three Sundays, you know, between the sentence and the execution. Well, hark at that rain then!"

A shower that began as a playful sprinkle grew to a powerful steady summer downpour. It splashed in the open window, and the dim room grew more dim and cool.

"Hanging's a dreadful thing," continued Sam, "and 'tis often unjust I've no doubt, I've no doubt at all."

"Unjust! I tell you — at the majority of trials those who give their evidence mostly knows nothing at all about the matter; them as knows a lot — they stays at home and don't budge, not likely!"

"No? But why?"

"Why? They has their reasons. I know that, I knows it for truth — hark at that rain."

They watched the downfall in complete silence for some moments.

"Hanging's a dreadful thing," Sam at length repeated, with almost a sigh.

"I can tell you a tale about that,

Sam, in a minute," said the other. He began to fill his pipe from Sam's brass box, which was labeled cough lozenges and smelled of paregoric.

"Just about ten years ago I was working over in Cotswold country. I remember I'd been in to Gloucester one Saturday afternoon and it rained. I was jogging along home in a carrier's van; I never seen it rain like that afore, no, nor even afterwards, not like that. B-r-r-r-r! it came down. Bashing! And we come to a cross-roads where there's a public-house called the Wheel of Fortune, very lonely and onsheltered it is just there. I see'd a young woman standing in a porch awaiting us, but the carrier was wet and tired and angry or something and wouldn't stop. 'No room,' he bawled out to her, 'full up, can't take you!' and he drove on. 'For the love of God, mate,' I says, 'pull up and take that young creature! She's — she's — can't you see!' 'But I'm all behind as 'tis,' he shouts to me; 'you know your gospel, don't you — time and tide wait for no man?' 'Ah, but dammit all, they always call for a feller,' I says. With that he turned round and we drove back for the girl. She clumb in and sat on my knees; I squat on a tub of vinegar, there was nowhere else, and I was right and all, she was going on for a birth. Well, the old van rattled away for six or seven miles; whenever it stopped, you could hear the rain clattering on the tarpaulin, or sounding outside on the grass as if it was breathing hard, and the old horse steamed and shivered with it. I had knowed the girl once in a friendly way, a pretty young creature, but now she was white and sorrowful and wouldn't say much. By and by we came to another cross-roads near a village, and she got out there. 'Good day, my gal,' I says, affable like, and 'Thank you, sir,' says she — and off she popped in the rain with her umbrella up. A rare pretty girl, quite young, I'd met her before, a girl you could get uncommon fond of, you know, but I didn't meet her afterwards, she was mixed up in a bad business. It all happened in the next six months while I was working round these parts. Everybody knew of it. This girl's name was Edith and she had a younger sister, Agnes. Their father was old Harry Mallerton, kept the British Oak at North Quainy; he stuttered. Well, this Edith had a love affair with a young chap, William, and having a very loving nature she behaved foolish. Then she couldn't bring the chap up to the scratch nohow by herself, and of course she was afraid to tell her mother or father: you know how girls are after being so pesky natural, they fear, oh, they do fear! But soon it couldn't be hidden any longer as she was living at home with them all, so she wrote a letter to her mother. 'Dear Mother,' she wrote, and told her all about her trouble.

"By all accounts the mother was angry as an old lion, but Harry took it calm like and sent for young William, who'd not come at first. He lived close by in the village, so they went down

themselves at last and fetched him.

" 'All right, yes,' he said, 'I'll do what's lawful to be done. There you are, I can't say no fairer, that I can't.'

" 'No,' they said, 'you can't.'

"So he kissed the girl and off he went, promising to call in and settle affairs in a day or two. The next day Agnes, which was the younger girl, she also wrote a note to her mother telling her some more strange news.

" 'God above!' the mother cried out, 'can it be true, both of you girls, my own daughters, and by the same man! What ever were you thinking on, both of ye! What ever can be done now!' "

"What!" ejaculated Sam, "both on 'em, both on 'em!"

"As true as God's my mercy — both on 'em — same chap. Ah! Mrs. Mallerton was afraid to tell her husband at first, for old Harry was the devil born again when he were roused up, so she went for young William herself, who'd not come again, of course, not likely. But they made him come, oh yes, when they told the girls' father.

" 'Well, may I go to my d-d-d-damnation at once!' roared old Harry — he stuttered, you know — 'at once, if that ain't a good one!' So he took off his coat, he took up a stick, he walked down the street to William and cut him off his legs. Then he beat him until he howled for his mercy, and you couldn't stop old Harry once he were roused up — he was the devil born again. They do say as he beat him for a solid hour; I can't say as to that, but then old Harry picked him up and carried him off to the British Oak on his own back and threw him down in his own kitchen between his own two girls like a dead dog. They do say that the little one, Agnes, flew at her father like a raging cat until he knocked her senseless with a clout over head; rough man he was."

"Well, a' called for it, sure," commented Sam.

"Her did," agreed Bob, "but she was the quietest known girl for miles round those parts, very shy and quiet."

"A shady lane breeds mud," said Sam.

"What do you say? — Oh ah! — mud, yes. But pretty girls both, girls you could get very fond of, skin like apple bloom, and as like as two pinks they were. They had to decide which of them William was to marry."

"Of course, ah!"

" 'I'll marry Agnes,' says he.

" 'You'll not,' says the old man. 'You'll marry Edie.'

" 'No I won't,' William says; 'it's Agnes I love and I'll be married to her or I won't be married to e'er of 'em.' All the time Edith sat quiet, dumb as a shovel, never a word, crying a bit; but they do say the young one went on like a — like a —"

"The jezebel!" commented Sam.

"You may say it; but wait, my man, just wait. Another cup of beer. We can't go back to church until this humbugging rain have stopped."

"No, that we can't."

"It's my belief the 'bugging rain won't stop this side of four o'clock."

"And if the roof don't hold it off, it 'ull spoil they Lord's commandments that's just done up on the chancel front."

"Oh, they be dry by now." Bob spoke reassuringly and then continued his tale. " 'I'll marry Agnes or I won't marry nobody,' William says, and they couldn't budge him. No, old Harry cracked on, but he wouldn't have it, and at last Harry says: 'It's like this.' He pulls a halfcrown out of his pocket and 'Heads it's Agnes,' he says, 'or tails it's Edith,' he says."

"Never! Ha! Ha!" cried Sam.

" 'Heads it's Agnes, tails it's Edie,' so help me God. And it come down Agnes, yes, heads it was — Agnes — and so there they were."

"And they lived happy ever after?"

"Happy! You don't know your human nature, Sam; where ever was you brought up? 'Heads it's Agnes,' said old Harry, and at that Agnes flung her arms round William's neck and was for going off with him then and there, ha! But this is how it happened about that. William hadn't any kindred, he was a lodger in the village, and his landlady wouldn't have him in her house one mortal hour when she heard of it; give him the right-about there and then. He couldn't get lodgings anywhere else, nobody would have anything to do with him, so of course, for safety's sake, old Harry had to take him, and there they all lived together at the British Oak — all in one happy family. But they girls couldn't bide the sight of each other, so their father cleaned up an old outhouse in his yard that was used for carts and hens and put William and his Agnes out in it. And there they had to bide. They had a couple of chairs, a sofa, and a bed and that kind of thing, and the young one made in quite snug."

" 'Twas a hard thing for that other, that Edie, Bob."

"It was hard, Sam, in a way, and all this was happening just afore I met her in the carrier's van. She was very sad and solemn then; a pretty girl, one you could like. Ah, you may choke me, but there they lived together. Edie never opened her lips to either of them again, and her father sided with her, too. What was worse, it came out after the marriage that Agnes was quite free of trouble — it was only a trumped-up game between her and this William because he fancied her better than the other one. And they never had no child, them two, though when poor Edie's mischance came along I be damned if Agnes weren't fonder of it than its own mother, a jolly sight more fonder, and William — he fair worshipped it."

"You don't say!"

"I do. 'Twas a rum go, that, and Agnes worshipped it, a fact, can prove it by scores o' people to this day, scores, in them parts. William and Agnes worshipped it, and Edie — she just looked on, 'long of it all, in the same house with them, though she never opened her lips again to her young sister to the day of her death."

"Ah, she died? Well, it's the only way out of such a tangle, poor woman."

"You're sympathizing with the wrong party." Bob filled his pipe again from the brass box; he ignited it with deliberation; going to the open window, he spat into a puddle in the road. "The wrong party, Sam; 'twas Agnes that died. She was found on the sofa one morning stone-dead, dead as a adder."

"God bless me!" murmured Sam.

"Poisoned!" added Bob, puffing serenely.

"Poisoned!"

Bob repeated the word "poisoned." "This was the way of it," he continued. "One morning the mother went out in yard to collect her eggs, and she began calling out: 'Edie, Edie, here a minute, come and look where that hen have laid her egg; I would never have believed it,' she says. And when Edie went out, her mother led her round the back of the outhouse, and there on the top of a wall this hen had laid an egg. 'I would never have believed it, Edie,' she says; 'scooped out a nest there beautiful, ain't she? I wondered where her was laying. 'Tother morning the dog brought an egg round in his mouth and laid it on the doormat. There now, Aggie, Aggie, here a minute, come and look where the hen have laid that egg.' And as Aggie didn't answer, the mother went in and found her on the sofa in the outhouse, stone-dead."

"How'd they account for it?" asked Sam after a pondering awhile.

"That's what brings me to the point about that young feller that's going to be hung," said Bob, tapping the newspaper that lay upon the bench. "I don't know what would lie between two young women in a wrangle of that sort; some would get over it quick, but some would never sleep soundly any more, not for a minute of their mortal lives. Edie must have been one of that sort. There's people living there now as could tell a lot if they'd a mind to it. Some knowed all about it, could tell you the very shop where Edie managed to get hold of the poison and could describe to me or to you just how she administrated it in a glass of barley water. Old Harry knew all about it, he knew all about everything, but he favored Edith and he never budged a word. Clever old chap was Harry, and nothing came out against Edie at the inquest — nor the trial neither."

"Was there a trial, then?"

"There was a kind of a trial. Naturally. A beautiful trial. The police came and fetched poor William. They took him away and in due course he was hanged."

"William! But what had he got to do with it?"

"Nothing. It was rough on him, but he hadn't played straight and so nobody struck up for him. They made out a case against him — there was some onlucky bit of evidence which I'll take my oath old Harry knew something about — and William was done for. Ah, when things

take a turn against you it's as certain as twelve o'clock, when they take a turn; you get no more chance than a rabbit from a weasel. It's like dropping your matches into a stream, you needn't waste the bending of your back to pick them out — they're no good on, they'll never strike again. And Edith, she sat in court through it all, very white and trembling and sorrowful, and when the judge put his black cap on, they do say she blushed and looked across at William and gave a bit of a smile. Well, she had to suffer for his doings, so why shouldn't he suffer for hers? That's how I look at it."

"But God-a-mighty — !"

"Yes, God-a-mighty knows. Pretty girls they were, both, and as like as two pinks."

There was quiet for some moments while the tiler and the mason emptied their cups of beer. "I think," said Sam then, "the rain's give over now."

"Ah, that it has," cried Bob. "Let's go and do a bit more on this church or she won't be done afore Christmas."

CASE OF THE LANDLADY'S BROTHER

by ERIC AMBLER

THERE are, at New Scotland Yard, patient, disillusioned men whose business it is to examine the work of England's great army of anonymous-letter writers. To those men the daily outpouring of the stupid and vicious, the frustrated and the spiteful, the wicked and the weak-minded, flow in a turgid stream. They read, they classify, they file. One letter in a thousand may possibly be worth more than momentary consideration. But it is the remaining nine hundred and ninety-nine which determine Scotland Yard's views on the anonymous letter as an aid to the detection of crime. Assistant Commissioner Mercer can scarcely be blamed for the attitude which he adopted toward the case of the landlady's brother.

Yet it must be admitted that, even had there been no question of anonymous letters, Mercer would have disliked the case from the beginning. The reason is simple. The case was brought to his notice by Dr. Jan Czissar.

A wound to his self-esteem is unpleasant enough even for an ordinary man. For an assistant commissioner at Scotland Yard it is positively demoralizing. And when it is considered that Dr. Czissar had inflicted on him not one such wound but four, Mercer must be excused. On the subject of the refugee Czech detective he was not quite sane. On four separate occasions Dr. Czissar had been able to prove, politely but irrefutably, that Scotland Yard in general and Assistant Commissioner Mercer in particular were not infallible. The regrettable truth is that had Dr. Czissar not been the protégé of the powerful Home Office official, Mercer would not have allowed him within a mile of his office.

It so happened that on the afternoon on which Dr. Czissar chose to intrude for the fifth time into the affairs of Scotland Yard, Mercer was feeling pleased with himself. He had just brought a difficult case to a triumphant conclusion. The commissioner had congratulated him.

And then Dr. Czissar was announced.

A minute later he heard the flapping of Dr. Czissar's long drab raincoat echoing along the corridor outside and waited. The doctor walked into the room, halted, clicked his heels and intoned loudly: "Dr. Jan Czissar. Late Prague police. At your service!"

"How are you, doctor? Please take a seat."

The round, pale face relaxed. The mild, brown eyes enlarged behind the thick spectacles.

"I am well, thank you, Assistant Commissioner Mercer." He sat down. "Quite well; but a little worried. Otherwise I would not take your time.

It is about a very curious case which I wish to speak to you."

Mercer steeled himself. "Yes?" He laughed with ghastly jocularity. "What has the Yard done this time, doctor? Let another murderer slip through its fingers?"

Dr. Czissar looked shocked. "Oh, no, please. I think that that is most unlikely. Everything is most efficient here. There is, I think, a murder to be considered, but I do not think that Scotland Yard has failed. The police do not know of this case. I must explain that it is only because of my landlady that I know of it."

"Your landlady?"

"I live in Metternich Square in Bloomsbury. It is a very nice house. Very clean and there are only four other lodgers — university students. It is owned by my landlady, Mrs. Falcon. It is this lady who, knowing that I have some experience in police matters, brought the matter to me for my advice. And so now, Assistant Commissioner Mercer, I bring it to you for advice, if you will be so kind."

Advice! Dr. Czissar was asking *him* for advice! Mercer could scarcely believe his ears.

"Of course, doctor. Anything we can do."

"You are so kind. May I tell you about this case?"

"Yes. Please do."

"It begins," said Dr. Czissar solemnly, "with a death. On June 20th my landlady's brother, Captain Pewsey, died suddenly at his house in Meresham, a town twenty miles from London. It was a very distressing thing for my landlady, who was very fond of her brother in spite of his faults. You see, assistant commissioner, he drank too much whiskey. About five years ago he married a woman much younger than he was. Mrs. Falcon thinks that this Mrs. Pewsey did not make him happy.

"About a week before his death, he went to a doctor in Meresham and complained of his heart. The doctor found a little cardiac weakness and advised him to drink less whiskey and to live carefully. There was no great danger, he said, but it would be well if the captain avoided excesses.

"For several days the captain drank less whiskey; but on the night of the 20th of June he spent the evening with a friend who was a widower, Mr. Stenson.

"The captain was in the business of selling life insurance policies and he met Mr. Stenson through selling him a policy. It seems that the friendship continued through the game of golf.

"The first part of that evening of the 20th the captain spent with Mr. Stenson and other men at the golf club; but, at about ten o'clock, the captain and Mr. Stenson left together and walked toward their houses. Mr. Stenson's house was reached first and the captain went in with him to have a drink. Soon after eleven o'clock the captain left and went to his own house. It seems that he was then a little drunk. His wife had already gone to bed, and she said afterward she heard him stumble along the passage

to his room. Then she went to sleep. In the morning when she went into his room, she found him sitting in an armchair in his room, still dressed. He was very blue in the face and seemed dead.

"She called the doctor immediately. He came and found the captain was indeed dead. The doctor was a little puzzled. He told Mrs. Pewsey that before signing the death certificate he would ask her permission to make a post-mortem examination. She was reluctant, but as he insisted, she agreed. He found death due to a respiratory failure, and, concluding that the cause of it had been the weakness of the heart, issued a certificate to that effect."

"A very cautious doctor," commented Mercer.

Dr. Czissar's mild eyes contemplated his. "Very cautious. Doctors should, always be cautious, I think. But a month ago Mr. Stenson married Mrs. Pewsey."

Mercer raised his eyebrows. "Quick work!"

Dr. Czissar nodded sadly. "That is what Mrs. Falcon thought. She heard about the marriage from a friend who lives at Meresham. She was most upset. She had rarely seen her brother since his marriage as she did not like Mrs. Pewsey.

"Mrs. Falcon showed these to me." He produced three sheets of writing paper. "There are three of them and they are marked in order."

Mercer took the sheets and selected number one. He read:

"Dear Mrs. Falcon:

"Your sister-in-law has married your brother's friend. So soon! Strange, is it not? I would ask a few questions if I were you. Why did your brother die? He was in the prime of life. He had the best years before him. Doctors don't know everything. Captain Pewsey was as strong as an ox.

"Yours truly,

"A FRIEND."

It was typewritten. Mercer glanced quickly at the remaining letters, saw that they were similar, and looked up.

"Well, doctor? We get plenty of this sort of thing here. Do you know who wrote them?"

Dr. Czissar nodded. "Oh, yes. Mrs. Falcon wrote them."

"To herself!"

"Yes. Mrs. Falcon is a kind woman but she is disappointed. She had hoped, I think, that her brother would leave her some money.

"Mrs. Falcon wished me to go down to Meresham and make a scandal with questions. I have been; and I have asked some questions."

The sad brown eyes blinked. "But, assistant commissioner, Mrs. Falcon makes no accusations. Nor do I think that she believes there is anything seriously wrong. She wishes only, as I have said, to make a scandal, to revenge herself on her sister-in-law. No, assistant commissioner, it is not Mrs. Falcon but I who make the accusation."

Mercer sat back. "And whom are you accusing, doctor?"

Dr. Czissar cleared his throat and

swallowed hard. "Attention, please!" he said sharply.

"The first fact is contained in Mrs. Falcon's letters to herself. Three months after the captain's death Mrs. Pewsey marries Mr. Stenson. 'So soon! Strange, is it not?' says Mrs. Falcon. It is, indeed, strange, assistant commissioner. It seems to me as if the idea of the marriage had been in the minds of Mrs. Pewsey and Mr. Stenson before the captain died."

"You can't prove that, doctor," said Mercer quickly.

"There is corroborative evidence, assistant commissioner. It is not easy to keep a secret in a small town like Meresham. Yet, had a member of the Meresham golf club not encountered Mr. Stenson and the lady in a London hotel the day after they were married, no one in Meresham would ever have known that the two had even spoken to one another. Yet, if all was well, they had no reason for secrecy.

"Another point. There was, I discovered, a great difference between the characters of Mr. Stenson and the captain. Mr. Stenson was very popular. He had money. He played golf well. He was noted for his sense of humor. He was handsome. The captain was most unpopular. He drank too much. He played golf badly. He was a bore. Nobody in Meresham could understand why Mr. Stenson put up with him. That he did so is most significant.

"I have interviewed Mrs. Pewsey's maid. The house is closed at the moment, but she was there on the night that the captain died. She says that she had never known him so drunk before. He fell on the stairs and stumbled along the passage to his bedroom. And he was talking to himself. He had never done that before. As he passed the door she heard one sentence clearly. He was mumbling, and then he said:

" 'Socrates! What's he mean, Socrates? My name's not Socrates.' She heard no more. But she heard enough, I think."

Mercer threw up his hands. "I'm sorry, doctor. I just don't understand. The man was very drunk. It overstrained his heart. He died. The doctor's autopsy proves it beyond doubt."

"You think that?" Dr. Czissar looked mournful. "The cause of death was a respiratory failure."

"Precisely. Loss of breath. Most of us die from it sooner or later." Mercer stood up.

Mercer smiled tolerantly. "Doctor," he said, "you asked me for my advice. I will give it to you. Go back to your landlady and tell her not to be stupid. And forget about the matter yourself. That is all, I think." He held out his hand.

But Dr. Czissar did not rise to take it.

"This, as I have said, is a case of murder, assistant commissioner," he said deliberately.

"In the first place we have the marriage of Mrs. Pewsey and Mr. Stenson. It is the second mistake they have made. Mrs. Falcon says her brother wrote to her nearly a year ago saying

his wife had asked for a divorce and that he had refused. I think we shall find that it is very soon after that that Mr. Stenson bought a life insurance policy from the captain and became strangely friendly with him. I think we shall find at the Hotel Metropolis, where they were seen after their marriage, that they had been there many times before.

"Next," pursued Dr. Czissar, "let us consider the manner of the captain's death. He was stumbling and staggering. The cause of death was respiratory failure. What is the link between these two facts? I will tell you. It is the word 'Socrates'."

"What!"

"You have heard of Socrates, assistant commissioner? Ah, yes. Then you may remember the description of his death. For a time he walks about, then his steps become difficult. Paralysis begins to creep up his legs. He is forced to lie down. The paralysis creeps higher to his chest. And then he dies — of a respiratory failure — paralysis of the lungs. There is only one poison which has that effect. It is the poison given to Socrates."

"You mean hemlock! But . . ."

"Hemlock is the name of the plant from which it is obtained, assistant commissioner. The actual poison is coniine. There are, I find, quantities of hemlock growing in Mr. Stenson's garden. There is no doubt, I think, that when the captain went into Mr. Stenson's house that night, he was given with his whiskey an infusion of hemlock.

"But Mr. Stenson made the first mistake. He has a sense of humor. He was nervous and worried. He tried to make a joke of the situation. He called the captain 'Socrates'."

"But," exploded Mercer, "even if this story is true, how on earth are we going to prove it?"

Dr. Czissar got to his feet with dignity. "I will not take up any more of your time now, assistant commissioner. I am sure that you will find a way. Coniine remains detectable in the body for many months. An exhumation and an autopsy by an experienced pathologist with no preconceived ideas is in order."

"But what about the woman?" demanded Mercer. "You say that they did the murder."

"Oh, yes. Mrs. Pewsey was certainly an accessory before the fact. There is no doubt in my mind that it was she who prepared the way for the death certificate by sending her husband to the doctor a week before his death. It is not difficult to upset a drinker's heart.

"It is Mr. Stenson for whom I am sorry," he went on. "I have heard so much about the English sense of humor. Now I understand it. I did not think that it would be so macabre, but I like it. It is piquant. Socrates!" He emitted an apologetic little giggle. "It is really very funny, do you not think so?"

"Yes," said Mercer. He felt that he was losing control of himself. He set his teeth.

"Yes," he repeated, "very funny."

HAIL AND FAREWELL

After three years as mystery critic of EQMM, Howard Haycraft resigns in order to move on to other fields — specifically, to serve in an editorial-advisory capacity to the new Mystery Guild, a monthly book club subsidiary of the Literary Guild. Since the Mystery Guild's first selections are being distributed at the same time this issue appears, Mr. Haycraft feels that it would not be seemly for him to continue as a reviewer, reluctant as he is to leave our staff.

Mr. Haycraft's letter to your Editor ends as follows: "I wish to express my gratitude to Ellery Queen for complete freedom of critical expression in the past three years, even on those rare occasions when we disagreed. Also to the many readers whose letters have given such encouraging evidence of the discriminating taste prevailing in the mystery public today. It's been nice knowing you!

"One last word, if I may, in this farewell to reviewing. With full awareness of my own shortcomings, I am convinced that the one thing today's mystery story needs more than any other (for its own good) is published criticism that knows when the emperor doesn't have his clothes on — and isn't afraid to say so. Readers of EQMM are assured of that kind of criticism from Anthony Boucher, whose department begins in this issue."

Yes, Anthony Boucher takes over "Speaking of Crime," and Mr. Boucher's column will appear every other month from now on. It need hardly be mentioned that Mr. Boucher is one of the best qualified critics of the detective-mystery story in the history of the genre. He is a first-rank detective novelist in his own right — remember THE CASE OF THE BAKER STREET IRREGULARS *(by Anthony Boucher) and* ROCKET TO THE MORGUE *(as by H. H. Holmes). In the short-story form he created Nick Noble, an unforgettable dipso-sleuth who made his début in EQMM. He is one of our best anthologists — witness* GREAT AMERICAN DETECTIVE STORIES. *He is known to "constant readers" of EQMM as an expert translator — — of the Georges Simenon stories in particular. With Denis Green as collaborator, Mr. Boucher wrote the Sherlock Holmes radio show, and created the radio character, Gregory Hood. The number of literary and critical fields Mr. Boucher has worked in is really astonishing. As a fact-crime writer he contributed to* SAN FRANCISCO MURDERS, *edited by Joseph Henry Jackson. In the realm of fantasy Mr. Boucher is perhaps best known for his remarkable story, "The Compleat Werewolf"; and if you are a devotee of science-fiction, you undoubtedly have read Mr. Boucher's "Q. U. R." among many other excellent tales of time and space.*

Anthony Boucher served as detective-story reviewer on the "San Fran-

cisco Chronicle" from 1942 to 1947, and received the annual "Edgar" for the best mystery criticism of the year 1945 — one of the most coveted honors awarded by Mystery Writers of America (MWA).

To Mr. Boucher your Editor makes the same guarantee he made to Mr. Haycraft: the pages allotted to Anthony Boucher are his and his alone; he may write what he pleases and the way he pleases; he may agree with E.Q., or disagree with E.Q., as his honest judgment of detective fiction dictates; and we go on record again, publicly and in print, that never under any circumstances will we tie a string to Mr. Boucher's freedom of speech and pursuit of 'tec truth. To paraphrase Patrick Henry once more — if this be reason, Tony, make the most of it!

SPEAKING OF CRIME

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Homicidal Highspots of 1948

A BEST-OF-THE-YEAR LIST is in any case a debatable device (not one of the "ten best" novels of one year may rank with the twelfth best of another); and in this case it's doubly so: I wasn't writing the rest-of-the-year columns on which it should be based, and I've been learning that magazine deadlines and book publication dates can be reconciled only by means of a time machine.

With apology firmly planted, I can now go ahead and be dogmatic about The Best of 1948:

I can't recall a year when it was easier to pick the finest single book in the crime field. Robert M. Coates's WISTERIA COTTAGE (Harcourt, Brace) is a study of a paranoid murderer so plausibly detailed as to make you watch apprehensively for the revealing psychological symptoms in your best friend (or in yourself) and so admirable both literarily and clinically as to seem to say to all the authors of so-called "psychothrillers," "Look boys, this is how it's done." Not merely the best of 1948, this is one of the milestones in the history of murder fiction.

For other "bests," let's take them by categories:

In that vanishing category, the pure detective story (in which character and wit adorn a formal deductive plot): Carter Dickson's THE SKELETON IN THE CLOSET (Morrow), with further honors to Nicholas Blake's MINUTE FOR MURDER (Harper), Edmund Crispin's LOVE LIES BLEEDING (Lippincott), and E. C. R. Lorac's A SCREEN FOR MURDER (Crime Club).

In the hardboiled school, William L. Stuart's NIGHT CRY (Dial), a curiously

haunting tragedy, with an encouraging nod to Richard Ellington's mediumboiled IT'S A CRIME (Morrow) and Henry Kane's seemingly tongue-in-cheek ARMCHAIR IN HELL (Simon and Schuster).

In humorous homicides, Manning Long's SAVAGE BREAST (Duell, Sloan and Pearce) along with George Bagby's IN COLD BLOOD (Crime Club) and Margaret Scherf's MURDER MAKES ME NERVOUS (Crime Club).

In spy stories (a rather scarce item this year), Robinson MacLean's fresh and lively THE BAITED BLONDE (Mill), as American as Allan MacKinnon's more leisurely MAP OF MISTRUST (Crime Club) is British.

In the feminine romance-and-peril school, Ursula Curtiss's VOICE OUT OF DARKNESS (Dodd, Mead), a first novel in which Helen Reilly's daughter demonstrates that all the disquieting virtues of the Had-I-But-Knowners can be attained with crispness and restraint.

Among the "psychothrillers" (a term that would probably be bestowed on BEFORE THE FACT if it were issued today), you might take special notice of Leslie Kark's AN OWL IN THE SUN (Macmillan), Doris Miles Disney's THAT WHICH IS CROOKED (Crime Club), Alvin Schwartz's THE BLOWTOP (Dial), and Lawrence Goldman's WOLF TONE (Mill). There's intelligent use of psychiatric detection in Rosemary Kutak's I AM THE CAT (Farrar, Straus) and Anna Mary Wells's SIN OF ANGELS (Simon and Schuster), and a possibly needed warning on the perils of too much lay psychoanalysis in William O'Farrell's THE UGLY WOMAN (Duell, Sloan and Pearce).

Then there's a group of novels in which established authors have again this year done very well exactly what you expect them to. You'll find Poirot and fine plotting in Agatha Christie's THERE IS A TIDE (Dodd, Mead), solid Americana in A. B. Cunningham's DEATH HAUNTS THE DARK LANE (Dutton), erudite urbanity in Elizabeth Daly's THE BOOK OF THE LION (Rinehart), deep human warmth in the late Robert Finnegan's MANY A MONSTER (Simon and Schuster), an adroit blend of pursuit and puzzle in Eaton K. Goldthwaite's ROOT OF EVIL (Duell, Sloan and Pearce), a refreshing if exaggerated cynicism in Alexander Irving's SYMPHONY IN TWO-TIME (Dodd, Mead), civilized living in the Lockridges' MURDER IS SERVED (Lippincott), the conviction of documentary fact in Eleazar Lipsky's MURDER ONE (Crime Club), well-tempered toughness in Wade Miller's FATAL STEP (Farrar, Straus), and pure black magic in Cornell Woolrich's RENDEZVOUS IN BLACK (Rinehart) — and if it's a rewrite of his first book-form mystery story, who's complaining?

And a few standard practitioners have done even better than you expected. Frank Gruber's THE LOCK AND THE KEY (Rinehart) — not a mystery, but a Cain-style melodrama — is probably his solidest and best book yet. Nothing I've seen of Stephen Ransome's (under any of his several names) equals FALSE BOUNTY (Crime Club) for pace

and plotting. And Elinor Chamberlain's modern novels are easily topped by her Seventeenth-Century SNARE FOR WITCHES (Dodd, Mead), one of the season's most interesting experiments.

An oddity of the year was the high degree of suspension of disbelief often demanded from the reader. James G. Edwards BUT THE PATIENT DIED (Crime Club), Elizabeth Eastman's THE MOUSE WITH PINK EYES (Farrar, Straus), Craig Rice's THE FOURTH POSTMAN (Simon and Schuster), and Ellery Queen's TEN DAYS' WONDER (Little, Brown) were all based on motivations so implausible that the at best tenuous relationship between the whodunit and life seemed, to me at least, totally severed. In the last two cases no one is going to complain too loudly. Miss Rice has rarely been more entertaining (that Australian beerhound . . . !), and Mr. Queen has rarely written more solidly nor plotted more intricately (though the two don't always jibe); and it's such a pure pleasure to welcome them both back after long absences that I'm ashamed of myself for quibbling.

So much for the oldtimers; but it was an unusually good year for first novelists too. In addition to MacLean and Curtiss, already mentioned, important debutants include Mildred Davis with her eerie THE ROOM UPSTAIRS (Simon and Schuster), Stanley Ellin with the compassionate DREADFUL SUMMIT (Simon and Schuster), Alan Handley with the brash KISS YOUR ELBOW (McKay), William P. McGivern with fascinating facts on the pulp magazine business in BUT DEATH RUNS FASTER (Dodd, Mead), and John Reywall with THE TRIAL OF ALVIN BOAKER (Random), as plausible a novel-in-the-form-of-a-trial-transcript as I can recall. But for my own taste, the brightest, cleverest, and most generally agreeable of the year's firsts was Herbert Brean's WILDERS WALK AWAY (Morrow), not to be missed by anyone sharing my enthusiasms for locked rooms, Charles Fort, or New England food.

The most distinguished volumes of short stories in our field were the new and expanded edition of William Hope Hodgson's CARNACKI THE GHOST-FINDER (Mycroft and Moran), and Ellery Queen's fine selection of O. Henry's COPS AND ROBBERS (Bestseller). DEAD MAN BLUES (Lippincott) was a compelling group of William Irish shorts, chiefly from this magazine, and NIGHTMARE TOWN (Mercury) was the title of the annual "positively final collection of Dashiell Hammett stories."

The anthology market has dropped close to zero, but the year produced four volumes belonging on every anthology shelf: James Sandoe's tasteful and out-of-the-way MURDER: PLAIN & FANCIFUL (Sheridan), David C. Cooke's reliable BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR (Dutton), and Ellery Queen's distinctive TWENTIETH CENTURY DETECTIVE STORIES (World) and THE QUEEN'S AWARDS, 1948 (Little, Brown). And both the Sandoe and the first Queen contain long biblio-

graphical essays to make them as necessary to the scholar as to the entertainment-seeker.

It was a poor year for fact-crime. BOSTON MURDERS (Duell, Sloan and Pearce), edited by John N. Markis, contributed little beyond the fact that Boston spawns dull murderers. Far more rewarding is the reissue of the scarce 1880 LIFE OF SILE DOTY (Alved of Detroit), the unconsciously humorous autobiography of a petty career-criminal. Better for the fact-crime enthusiast than either is Shelley Smith's THE WOMAN IN THE SEA (Harper), a novel on the deeply moving Rattenbury-Stoner case (see the Sandoe anthology for F. Tennyson Jesse's essay on the facts) which sticks more detailedly to truth than any adaptation I've read since Winifred Duke's SKIN FOR SKIN; or Anthony Gilbert's THE MISSING WIDOW (Barnes), which, while based on no single case, conveys an authentic Notable-British-Trials feeling comparable to Roy Vickers' stories of the Department of Dead Ends.

One book I have kept postponing as I wrote this — simply because I frankly don't know whether it is one of the worst, or, next to the Coates, possibly the best of the year's crop. That is Robert Terrall's A KILLER IS LOOSE AMONG US (Duell, Sloan and Pearce). This study in neuroses on a bacterial warfare project is confused, strained, all but incoherent — and yet nightmarishly compelling. For the first time in over six years' reviewing, I feel I should wait six months and reread a whodunit before passing judgment. Which judgment may then very well be that here is a classic of bitter terror.

Best publicity release of the year: Doubleday's learned exposition of the hypothesis that halfcaste Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte is the natural son of Sherlock Holmes.

Best puzzle of the year: The identity of "Hampton Stone," author of THE CORPSE IN THE CORNER SALOON (Simon and Schuster), an astute study in Third Avenue and sex. Both the present and the former conductor of this column guessed Aaron Marc Stein and were wrong. Now *you* try.

Best line of the year: Agatha Christie's description of the financier who was "wellbred on his mother's side."

1948 miscellany: Mystery Writers of America added two new awards to their annual Edgars, for outstanding contributions to fact-crime and to the detective short-story. The former was won by Edward D. Radin; the latter was won by — aw shucks, you *peeked!* . . . Marie F. Rodell left the editorship of Bloodhound Mysteries for agenting; one of her first clients was the San Francisco chapter of MWA, which has, God help it, written a collaborative suspense novel. . . . The New York subway ads are featuring a garment (the precise gimmick of which I do not understand) called Suspants. (Howard Haycraft says, "Sounds like some of the stuff I've been reading.") . . . "The Pleasures of Publishing," that fine organ of the

Columbia University Press, published the result of a survey on what mystery readers think of what they read; maybe they have some copies left, if you write politely for volume XV, numbers 7 and 8. Its often surprising revelations are something no aficionado should miss. . . . Lost to the field in this year: Meredith Nicholson and Christopher Hale (Mrs. Frances Stevens). May they rest in peace. . . . Miss Edith Ngaio Marsh received the Order of the British Empire "for services in connection with drama and literature in New Zealand." . . . An all-Chopin program was performed in New York by Mikhail Sheyne, pianist. . . . Which somehow reminds me that Brett Halliday became a father. Other mystery writers producing offspring include Helen McCloy, Eleazar Lipsky, Ken Crossen, and one half of Ellery Queen. . . . Soviet novelist Alexander Fadeyeff, speaking before the World Congress of Intellectuals in Wroclaw last August, excoriated the "ideological expansionism" of America and included in his "smashing indictment" the works of Henry Miller, John Dos Passos, Jean Paul Sartre, and T. S. Eliot, together with "worthless American movies and trashy detective stories." And in October one M. Mendelson was quoted by "Pravda" as saying, "The New York Times contains reviews of twenty literary works intended for adult readers. About half of this number belongs in the category [and you can imagine the reading of this line] of the detective novel." The oddest thing about these attacks (and when and where did you last hear the whodunit denounced as a tool of decadent democracy?), is that the mystery story has remained surprisingly immune to the current wave of anti-Communist hysteria — much more so than, say, Hollywood. There's no rush to climb on the bandwagon and use the Reds for heavies as conveniently (and in some cases unthinkingly) as most of us did the Germans and Japanese. It is hereby suggested that MWA send Tovarishchi Fadeyeff and Mendelson a representative batch of whodunits — including a copy of the Holmes Canon with an underlining of the Master's exclamation, "Facts! I must have facts."

"The Good Prospect" is the third story by Thomas Walsh to appear in EQMM, and no three stories have ever revealed so clearly the development, the private-eye progress, of a detective-story writer. The first tale was called "Hard Guy," and like its title it was a tough, terse yarn of the hardest-boiled school. This represented the earliest period in Thomas Walsh's apprenticeship. As time went on, Mr. Walsh mellowed a little: he still wrote in the savage style, in the staccato accents, of pulp realism, but a deeper and quieter note began to creep in. This middle period was illustrated by "Getaway Money," the second story in EQMM. Now we bring you an example of Thomas Walsh's third period. "The Good Prospect" shows no trace of Thomas Walsh's blood-and-thundery beginnings; the hard lacquer that made Thomas Walsh's early protagonists "hard guys" has been replaced by a softer finish. Now Mr. Walsh's story springs from real character, and from a genuine understanding of how real people think and act and talk. Detective McCann and Joe Nolan and Elizabeth are not puppets made out of hardwood, and painted in hard, bright colors: they have human feelings, which include sympathy and sentiment — and the terrible gnawing of anxiety.

As Thomas Walsh's compassion grew, his sense of form sharpened. In "The Good Prospect" Thomas Walsh attempted a difficult trick of technique, and he pulled it off with quiet brilliance. "The Good Prospect" tells two interrelated stories at the same time: what happened to Joe, and what happened when Detective McCann investigated what happened to Joe. The intertwining, dovetailing, and meshing is beautifully executed: you will be walking a 'tec tight-rope as you read . . .

THE GOOD PROSPECT

by THOMAS WALSH

McCann should have passed the buck with this girl whose name was Elizabeth Nolan, who was thin and tired-looking and too worried to be pretty, who faced him across the table and spoke in a low voice, her dark eyes fixed on him, her breathing unsteady despite the way she fought to control it. McCann should have used his head; he should have told her that the precinct house was no place to come with her story. Missing Persons, downtown, handled those jobs. This Joe, this husband of hers who hadn't come home last night — well, there wasn't anything mysterious about him, or his reasons, or his absence. He'd married her, yes.

And then he'd lost his job, and there was a baby on the way, and things got so tough this Joe just ducked out. That happened — oh, a hundred times a year — and there wasn't a thing in the world McCann could do about it. Not a thing.

But McCann didn't tell her those things, of course; he couldn't, maybe, because she reminded him of his own Edie, and maybe because twenty years on the Force hadn't hardened his heart.

She had a picture — a small snapshot — and as McCann looked at it she tried to supplement the photo haltingly. Joe Nolan was twenty-four, five feet ten, a hundred and forty-five pounds. He had dark hair and eyes, no distinguishing marks. He was, or three months before he had been, an accountant. Then he'd lost his job, and he hadn't been able to find another, not in that line. He'd tried, of course, but in the end he had answered an ad in the paper. Jarrett & Sons wanted salesmen; it was May, and soon people would be buying electric refrigerators.

Joe Nolan didn't believe everything in the ad, of course. He thought he might, with luck, sell two refrigerators a week. That didn't seem very difficult at first, because everybody at Jarrett's was very nice, and they even had a school to train men who had no experience. There was no salary; but every refrigerator he sold would give him a straight ten per cent commission. Two would mean something close to forty a week.

"And there'll be more some weeks," Elizabeth told him, very surely. "People like you, Joe. You get on well with them. I know you're going to make out fine."

Joe thought so too, before doors began to close against him, before people said, "No, no," and slammed them without even listening to what he had to say: before little white cards, stuck up neatly over the bell, said salesmen or canvassers needn't ring, before Joe knew what he was up against. There were eight men in Joe's crew, and that first month there were only two refrigerators sold. Neither of them was credited to him.

But the beginning was, their crew manager insisted, the most difficult time. He was a short, jolly little man, named Russell, and he never lost heart.

That was fine until Joe came home, alone, at night. Elizabeth always came out to the landing after he rang, and leaned over the railing, so that he could see her face dimly against the high shadows that hovered in the stairwell above her. He knew what she came out for, although she never asked; after he'd climbed up the stairs and kissed her he'd be very cheerful about some new prospects, about people who were going to buy, next week, next month. Most of the time he had no prospects; and when he contacted the Cramers, when they got interested, he didn't say a word about them, because it seemed almost too good to be true, and because he didn't

want Elizabeth to know a thing about it until he had the papers signed and the deposit in his pocket. It was, till then, to be a secret.

McCann turned in the information he had to the Missing Persons Bureau that morning; and then, since he didn't have much to do, since the pinched face of Elizabeth Nolan, so like his oldest, his Edie, if she were worried and alone, plagued him, he stopped in at Jarrett's, though he was sure it wasn't going to do him any good. The crew had just returned from canvassing; they were in the basement, in the employees' quarters, listening to a brisk and hearty little man named Russell, who was giving them what sounded to McCann like a pep talk. He wasn't greatly concerned over Joe Nolan, for he knew fellows like that were drifters. They came and went. They never got anywhere. Eying the crew, Mr. Russell said he had a good idea why Joe Nolan hadn't come to work that morning. Probably he just lay down and quit, like a yellow dog.

McCann didn't like this Russell much; he didn't tell him that Joe Nolan hadn't been home either. "Keep your lip buttoned, mister," he said, "or someday someone might button it for you."

The hospitals and the morgue were out too, he discovered later that afternoon. Nobody resembling Joe Nolan had been in an accident, or taken to either place, and that, McCann thought, was all he could be expected to do for her. It was up to the Missing Persons Bureau now, and when he stopped in to see Elizabeth Nolan later that afternoon he meant it to be only for a moment.

The chances were, he said, that everything was going to be all right. But a little thing sometimes gave them a lead; and if she could think of anything unusual he'd done, any remark he'd made, it might help them. If they had money in the bank, and he'd taken that —

He hadn't. She got the bankbook from the bureau drawer, and showed it to McCann, without seeming to understand what he meant by the remark. Their one room and kitchenette faced east; it was shadowed now and hot, its windows looking out over backyards and clothes-lines.

Across from him, on a couch that at night must be their bed, Elizabeth Nolan folded a letter over and over in her slim fingers. It had come that afternoon, addressed to Joe, from his old firm; and she had opened it because she was afraid, because she hoped it — Her lips quivered wordlessly.

Muttering something, McCann took it from her hand. Four or five typewritten lines were all it contained, and as he read them he cleared his throat, for he could see easily how this would make her feel — now, when Joe had not been home. Due, it said, to the improvement in business conditions, they were able to take on their old employees again. Mr. Nolan's former job was waiting for him, at the same salary; he could report

in Monday morning, at nine sharp.

McCann tried to change the look on her face by questioning her gently again. But she could recall nothing, save that once or twice he'd been — queer, teasing her about a secret that he couldn't tell to anyone, not yet. In the quiet room, desperately, she forced herself to remember.

"The secret?" McCann asked.

Mr. Russell was a convincing man. He could make you see how the law of averages always worked out, how the whole thing was mathematical. He could tell the crew now that a hundred thousand electric refrigerators would be sold in the city that summer. All over, people would be looking at Jarrett's newspaper display, and wishing they had one. There was the market; all the crew had to do was bring it into the open. If they rang enough doorbells —

Joe thought that perhaps he hadn't been ringing enough doorbells. The crew canvassed in the morning, from nine to twelve, because the housewives had their husbands and kids out of the way then, and were nearly always at home, cleaning the house up. Mr. Russell, from his wide experience, knew it was the best time to get them to answer the door. Afternoons were no good. They were taking a nap then, or out to the movies — they rarely answered rings. So afternoons the crew hung around the store, or followed up earlier prospects, or even called on friends, for Mr. Russell could show you that if they were good friends they'd be only too glad to help you. Some afternoons, if you were worried about your wife, and about a bankbook that had less than eighty dollars in it, you might have done the thing Joe Nolan did. You might have gone out and canvassed alone, to make sure that you'd ring enough doorbells.

The second afternoon Joe did that, he rang the Cramers' doorbell. It was a porched brick house, one of a row of porched brick houses in a quiet suburban street. The first moment, after Mrs. Cramer opened the door, went like all the others — the countless others. Mrs. Cramer took the folder and the cards he held out, said curtly, "Not interested," and started to close the door. Then for some reason, looking at his face, she stopped.

She was a tall woman, dark and thirty, with sullen black eyes and a narrow sullen mouth. There was something odd about the way she looked at him, as if she weren't listening to his words, as if she were puzzled by something about him. But Joe was too busy talking to pay much attention to that — he scarcely noticed it, absorbed in the effort of remembering Mr. Russell's words of advice, and how they should always harp on economy, economy, economy, when they spoke to women. He wasn't quite sure that it was the right method to adopt with Mrs. Cramer; she didn't seem to be listening to him at all. But Mr. Russell, after all, knew his business, because Mrs. Cramer admitted,

when he'd finished, that she'd been thinking of buying a refrigerator; they needed one; if he came to talk to her husband some evening that week perhaps they could reach an agreement.

They didn't, not that first night. William Frederick, Mr. Cramer, was a dark man just his own size, only two or three years older. He had a clipped mustache, and horn-rimmed glasses, with an expression in the eyes behind them that Joe couldn't place. Fright, he might have said, if that hadn't been absurd. Once, indeed, turning suddenly with his big leather salesbook, he saw them staring at each other silently, with a touch of amazement. But Joe put that down to his nerves; he was shaky all the time he was talking. The rich, telling phrases of Mr. Russell, so effective and subtly eloquent in imaginary interviews, creaked now, and seemed to sprawl out flatly before him.

But Mr. Cramer soon became friendly; he made Joe a highball, and asked him about his work. He supposed that the salesmen turned in their list of prospects at the store, so that their manager could check them every so often, and find out how they followed up their openings. Wasn't that the way they worked? He didn't know until Joe told him what some stores did — waited until a fellow had supplied them with a lot of leads, and then fired him before he could make the sale. With the names and addresses in the file, the manager got the credit, and the sale; the store saved the commission. Mr. Cramer nodded. His name, then, wouldn't be turned in by Joe?

Joe grinned slightly. "Not until I make the sale — if I do."

Mr. Cramer assured him that he would make it. In a week or so they'd be ready to buy, and no one but Joe would get their order. At nine, when Joe left, he walked out with him to the porch and talked a moment there. Fenner & Lisle's employed him — the wholesale grocers. Sometime, he thought, they'd need an accountant, and he would keep his ears open for Joe. That is, if he'd like a salaried job again.

Looking up at him, Joe could only stutter. If something like that — William Frederick Cramer pulled away from him, his face gleaming in the shadow. It wasn't, he muttered, at all certain; he shouldn't bank on it, or excite his wife about something that might never come to pass. He shouldn't tell her a word about it — not until it was definite. Women built their hopes so high that they were crushed if something went wrong.

Joe could see that too, plainly enough to be sure that he'd never tell her a word of this. He hadn't even told her about the sale; and he wouldn't, until it was put through.

Fine, Mr. Cramer said, shaking hands — fine. Just for a moment, after his good night, Joe was struck with something very familiar about Mr. Cramer, an angle, a facet of his expression brought out by the light from the hallway falling across his features

as he turned. But on the walk home the faint impression faded from his mind; he could think only of the job.

"Take your time now," McCann said. "Don't get excited. Just think back, Mrs. Nolan; try to remember anything unusual that happened. A little thing — maybe something he said, or something he did — might help us a lot. He wouldn't have gone out with some friends last night, and drank maybe a bit too much?"

The light, tremulous quiver that answered him moved and vanished across Elizabeth Nolan's pale cheeks. Joe wouldn't do that; he would never stay away all night, all day, without a word. And she couldn't think of anything unusual; unless the dentist —

McCann prodded his plate with a faint scowl. He didn't like to talk or even think of dentists. But what was out of the way about this one?

Elizabeth Nolan wasn't sure. It had happened three or four days ago, and at the time it didn't seem important; it was just a bad tooth that was bothering Joe. This Tuesday, when he came home, the tooth was out. He told her that he'd gone to a city clinic; but this morning, in his coat, she had found a card.

It was on the dresser now, and in a moment McCann had it propped across his blunt fingers. It all sounded funny. Why would this Joe lie about a city clinic? Dr. August Rapp, by his address, wasn't doing any free work, not in that section. McCann knew it well; he knew it took a good practice, high fees, to stay there. The point was odd; it defied logic. Why would the boy lie? Getting up, he thanked the girl, and told her not to worry, trying to sound reassuring when he said it. On the street, after a brief period of fretful thought, he caught a cab and gave the driver Dr. August Rapp's address.

It was then about three o'clock, Friday afternoon.

The second time Joe visited the Cramers a back tooth ached dully against his jaw. Mr. Cramer was, apparently, off that afternoon, for he opened the door for Joe, and was sympathetic when he heard about the tooth. It should, he thought, come right out, for something like that, if it was neglected —

He stopped there for a moment, thoughtfully, with a slight frown and then lit a cigarette.

"Here," he said slowly. "I can fix that up. You're worried about the money, of course. Isn't that it?"

It seemed that Fenner & Lisle's had a company dentist, who took care of the employees. And William Frederick Cramer had good teeth; he had never been to see this dentist himself. His point was simple; all Joe had to do was to see this dentist, and to say he was William Frederick Cramer. Mr. Cramer himself would make the appointment, the next morning, and Joe could call his wife in the afternoon, so that she could give him the dentist's name, and the time

for his appointment. The whole thing wouldn't cost him a nickel.

At first Joe protested, because it didn't seem right, and because somehow or other Mr. Cramer might get into trouble with the company. But that, Mr. Cramer said, was impossible, as long as he told no one, not even his wife. For women — well, he knew how Myra spread things around, sometimes without thinking about it at all. If Joe would promise to keep it entirely to himself, who could find out? The dentist had never seen him; he would of course accept him without question as William Frederick Cramer. If he kept it to himself, there was no chance to slip up.

And it was all right, even absurdly easy, though Joe all the time felt a little ashamed. Dr. Rapp didn't ask him any questions; after Joe had given his name to the nurse as Mr. Cramer, he was ushered into the inner office, where the doctor pulled his tooth, and marked some others out on a chart he had. There was an upper molar that he thought should be looked after. Next Tuesday, at four, Mr. Cramer could have another appointment.

Joe said he'd phone if he could make it, since there was no sense pushing the thing too far, or taking advantage of Mr. Cramer's kindness. Dr. Rapp merely nodded, and from the desk picked up a card with his name and phone number on it, under his address. It didn't strike Joe at the time as an odd thing for a company dentist to do; when it was in his pocket he forgot all about it. He knew he wouldn't be coming back.

Dr. Rapp was pretty positive at first that he'd never had a patient named Nolan. It wasn't until McCann showed him the photo Elizabeth Nolan had given him that his eyes changed and showed interest. This was Cramer, he said — he'd seen him Tuesday. In the morning his wife had come in, to make the appointment, and to pay for the extraction — a fact which Dr. Rapp had thought at the time to be a bit strange, since most men preferred to pay their own bills. McCann nodded absently, thanking him; later he came back from the corridor to find if this Cramer had left his address. He hadn't; but in the phone book there was only one William Frederick Cramer listed.

It was then just twenty minutes past four.

Thursday night when he went to close the sale with Mr. Cramer, so many things happened that the actual events were rather hazy in Joe's mind. Mr. Cramer was waiting in the living room for him, dressed and shaved, with a suitcase at his feet. He was leaving that night for Albany, since he had to be there in the morning, on business; but the startling news he had for Joe was that he wanted him to go with him. There was an opening in the Albany office which he had just got wind of that day; and he knew Old Higgins very well. If Joe came with

him now, so that he could be there in the morning to present himself when the office opened, Mr. Cramer was pretty sure he could land the job.

Joe thought, the first thing, of Elizabeth; it was the only detail that made him hesitate. But Mrs. Cramer said she'd be glad to take the trolley over and tell her what had happened, and after that there was no reason to stop. In half an hour they were out on the road, in Mr. Cramer's small coupe, doing forty through a quiet countryside.

They didn't talk very much until they were clear of the city; Mr. Cramer seemed a little worried now about the dentist. He said if they ever found out about that at Fenner & Lisle's they'd fire him, and he wanted to know if Joe had told anyone, even his wife. Three or four times he brought that up; and every time Joe assured him that he hadn't mentioned it to anyone.

But something else was really occupying his mind. Mr. Cramer had shaved off his mustache — tired of fooling with the darn' thing he said — and now more than ever his features troubled Joe with an elusive sense of familiarity. This time, however, it worried him only briefly before it was clear, so astonishingly clear, that it seemed incredible he had never been able to place it before. The mustache helped to reveal it now, of course; but even then —

In his excitement he grasped Mr. Cramer's arm, with an uncertain laugh.

"Maybe I'm a little dizzy about the job and all," he said. "I thought you looked kind of familiar, though I could never just place it. The mustache being off has made it easier, I guess. You look an awful lot like me, Mr. Cramer. I bet if I had your glasses on I could fool your wife."

Mr. Cramer smiled. "Nonsense," he said.

"It isn't," Joe went on earnestly. "If I had your glasses on —"

Something tense came up under Mr. Cramer's smile; a thin cord tightened along his jaw. Somewhat sharply he said he'd never noticed it. It was absurd.

When Mrs. Cramer opened the door for him, perhaps a minute after his ring, McCann had rid himself of his cigar. He looked a middle-aged, guileless fat man, who could murmur something about reading a meter without being questioned.

Mrs. Cramer was neither nervous nor friendly. It was pleasant and quiet, sunnily peaceful; in a way, McCann felt ashamed of himself. He thought he had a bad mind — a suspicious mind.

Nevertheless, he went out, after visiting the cellar, through the living room, as if he didn't remember what door he'd used coming in. That was a pleasant room, too. But the thing that caught McCann's eyes like a blaze of lightning was a framed picture on the upright piano. For an amazed moment McCann stared at it; and in the street, after he had rounded

a corner, he took the snapshot of young Nolan out of his pocket to stare at it in turn. Without the mustache, without the glasses, the two pictures might have been those of twins.

At first McCann figured that was screwy. This Nolan, he thought, might be married to both of them. He'd read of things like that, of men having two families in the same town, a couple of miles apart. Only there was a catch to that, since young Nolan had been married to Elizabeth over a year now, and he'd never been away from home before — not for one night. If this Cramer had vanished a year ago, about the time young Nolan had married Elizabeth —

The newsman could check that. Every night, he said, Mr. Cramer came down for a late copy of the paper — every night but last night. McCann, prodding his plate thoughtfully, asked about the mustache. Cramer had one of those?

The newsman looked at him curiously. "Until two or three days ago. I was kidding him when he came down without it, he looked so young. What you want to know for?"

McCann grunted: "I'm writing a book." His trolley came then and he ran for it, but all the time he stayed aboard he kept worrying about this thing. It didn't seem to have any edges that would help fit it into place. The mustache placed William Frederick Cramer and it placed young Nolan. They were different men. Two or three days ago, perhaps the very day Joe Nolan went to the dentist, this Cramer shaved it off. Why? Why the dentist?

He was the solving piece, McCann thought — fit him in and the rest would follow. Teeth were as good identification, almost, as fingerprints.

McCann got off the street-car then, slowly, looking very pale, and telling himself he was crazy. Something like that — Still, from a booth he called headquarters, and then his home, to tell Molly he wouldn't be there for supper.

At seven he called headquarters again. In a moment he hung up, something heavy and cold pressing around his heart. The last thing of all fitted in — the fact that in the American Eagle Mutual Company, William Frederick Cramer was insured for fifteen thousand dollars.

They were going so fast that it was chilly in the car; the wind rushed at them from the darkness with a drowsy snarl. Joe was just beginning to drowse when Mr. Cramer stopped the car.

"Carburetor trouble — always have it. I better look at it. You sit here."

He got out, closing the door behind him, and raised the motor hood. Then he bent forward, his figure dark cut against the fanned-out yellow streams of the headlights laned before them, his head turned slightly toward Joe, as if he weren't looking at the motor at all.

Joe couldn't tell what had changed. He thought it was the stillness — the

immense woods' stillness — that made him jumpy. Then he saw the car parked ahead, and the sight of it brought a relief so great that his heart pumped inside him in one great bound.

"Maybe," he said, "you better dim your headlights. It looks like there are some petters ahead of us."

Mr. Cramer almost jumped. He glanced back across his shoulder to stare a moment at the dim reddish glow of tail reflectors showing faintly in the deep shadow of a clump of trees. Then he muttered something and leaned down below the hood, his right hand coming out of his pocket empty.

In a moment or two he got back into the car. "It'll hold," he said. "Now we better push on."

Mr. Cramer stopped only once more, for gas; at eight o'clock they were in Albany. There he thought it might be better if he saw Mr. Higgins first, alone. Joe could take the car and store it at a parking lot, and then meet him at five, after his own business was done, outside Fenner & Lisle's. That would, he thought, be best. The personal interview mightn't be necessary.

At five Joe was waiting with the car before Fenner & Lisle's warehouse.

Mr. Cramer appeared about six, long after the other men had gone home. And he didn't come from the main building, but rounded the corner from, he said, the private offices. He looked very tired, very pale, as if he hadn't slept at all; and his exhaustion made him irritable, despite the great news he bore. The job was Joe's; it was all set now; he had the papers. Next Monday Joe was to report at the New York branch.

At seven they were clear of Albany, speeding southward in the gathering spring dusk, a few minutes after McCann had had his call from headquarters, and just as he was facing Mrs. Cramer once more on the porch.

"What I don't know," McCann was saying, "I can guess." His fat face wasn't kind or guileless any more; it was drawn down tightly around his mouth. "I guess you needed money — maybe your husband was out of work — and so you picked young Nolan because you saw right away how much he looked like your husband. Then you gave him some song and dance about going to this dentist and using your husband's name, so that if anything ever came up Rapp could identify him as William Frederick Cramer.

"The very day young Nolan went to the dentist your husband shaved off his mustache, so that would fit. Probably a lot of people told him it made him look younger; it usually does. Whatever kind of accident you planned to rig up on Nolan, he'd be dead, and he'd look a hell of a lot like your husband, and anyone who saw him would just say how young he looked. They'd put down any difference to the mustache and the glasses. You both thought there wouldn't be any trouble collecting insurance; someway or other you'd

talked this Nolan into not telling anyone about you, even his wife. That made it perfect. Nobody knew he was coming here; when he was found he'd have your husband's glasses on, and his license in his pocket. There wouldn't be any identification question; he'd be brought here, and buried as soon as possible. In another town, where no one knew you, you could join up again, with fifteen thousand dollars in your pocket. Neither of you ever figured on a leak."

She listened to him silently, looking out to the street, with her hands in her lap. It was hard to say just how McCann knew he had her, how he knew that any minute now she was going to crack.

"You got one chance," he said. "Maybe not much of a one. If young Nolan's dead I can't help you; even if he isn't I can't promise anything. But if we stop it before it's done, the charge won't be murder. That's worth thinking about. Where'd your husband take him?"

She watched McCann for a moment with queer, glazed dark eyes, and then she began to cry. The license number and the make of William Frederick Cramer's car she whispered dully, clutching his arm, swearing between his questions that she knew nothing. Nothing! If anything had happened —

McCann had all he wanted when a dark coupé pulled up before the house and two men got out. They greeted him and sat stolidly on the porch, on either side of Mrs. Cramer, while he went inside and used the telephone.

"Shoot it to the state cops," he said. "Have them cover every road out of Albany. His idea is to knock off the kid and leave him in the car, so that it will look like a hitchhiker did it. Maybe it's over already; he could have pulled the job last night. Only if he did, someone would have found the body by this time. I think we've still got a chance. He'll dawdle along and do the job pretty late, on a side road — that's the safest way. Somewhere near a railroad too, so he can get away easy. It's fifty-fifty we can get him first. Step on it, Larry."

Then McCann hung up, wiping his face with a hand that shook slightly. There was nothing more he could do now — nothing but sit out there and wait, and hope that when he saw Elizabeth Nolan, very soon now, he could tell her everything was fine, there was nothing to worry about, her Joe would be home okay. Monday morning he'd be back to work at his old job, at a salary.

Mr. Cramer had evidently been drinking that afternoon. His breathing was heavy and sour, his face flushed; every time a car passed he glanced at it quickly out of the corners of his eyes.

Once they stopped for gas, and behind the car Mr. Cramer spoke in a low tone to the attendant. He seemed to be asking something about the railroad, though Joe didn't pay much attention. He felt angry, both at himself and at Mr. Cramer; he wondered

why he was jumpy again, and what was biting Cramer to make him act this way. Tiredness, maybe. If he hadn't slept all last night —

Outside the village they hit a dirt road, leading right. Mr. Cramer stopped just inside it.

"Take the wheel," he said. "I'm sick of driving. Go straight up this road."

It didn't look like a short cut, but Joe didn't argue.

"I should have relieved you before," he said. "I guess you're tired. You look bad, Mr. Cramer."

"Do I?" the other man asked harshly. "Well, I'm fine. I'm okay. I'm all right."

Joe tightened his own mouth. This Cramer, he thought, seemed to be getting screwy. Why would a remark like that make him so sore? They went up the road and came out over a low hill, above a railroad, with a dark field on their left, and a white farmhouse ghostly against it, one window framed in dim yellow. Cramer cursed when he saw it. They went on, bumping over ruts. They went past the house, a mile into woods. Cramer took his hand out of his pocket and held it down against his leg.

"All right," he said. "All right. Stop the car."

He was half swung around in his seat to face Joe; his words were as thick as his breathing. His expression was so queer Joe thought he was sick.

"I'll help you out," he said.

Cramer only shook his head. He got out by himself, leaving the door open, so that Joe could see his hand, and the gun in it.

"What is it?" he asked. "What's the matter?"

The feeling of last night — the disturbed emotion of quiet and loneliness that stretched endlessly around them — thickened his lips as if they were held away from his gums with pads of cotton. This Cramer, he thought — Behind them a car whined for the hill and Cramer looked back toward it, his face as pale as modeled wax.

"I am sick," he said, wetting his lips. "I'm sick, Joe. I carry this gun for Fenner & Lisle's, but I haven't got a license for it. I came in here to get rid of it, Joe. I'm going to throw it in the field. Just let this car get by."

The headlights got painfully bright on the mirror; in another moment, going very slowly, the car slipped by. It was a light coupé, dark-colored, very like the one that had passed them going the other way, before they turned off the state road. Joe thought that as he saw it, but he felt he was wrong. Why would it have turned to follow them? He had a sudden, crazy impulse to shout out at it, to ask it to stop. He didn't. It went by.

"You can do it now," he said.

The panic that had almost made him yell out deepened when he saw Cramer's face. It didn't help at all to tell himself that he was crazy, that Cramer was all right, a swell guy. He was thinking that no one in the world, not Jarrett's nor Mr. Russell nor even Elizabeth knew he had ever met the Cramers.

Cramer didn't throw away the gun. After the other car had gone over the hill beyond them, he raised it and pointed it at Joe. His face was covered with perspiration, and his eyes looked frenzied.

"Okay," he said, with a chatter in his words. "Don't move."

"Wait a minute," Joe said. "Wait a minute. Don't point that thing —"

He was feeling with his left hand for the catch on the door behind him, but he couldn't find it.

"Look out," Joe said. "Don't —"

Then he knew it wasn't any use to talk any more. He knew that Cramer was going to kill him. There wasn't time to think of Elizabeth, there wasn't time to be frightened.

"Hey," he said, and tried to grab the gun, as he saw by the crazy twitch of Cramer's lips that he was going to fire. Plunging at him from behind the wheel, he saw the flash, he heard the report; slivers of glass from the windshield bit deep into his cheek. Then he was on Cramer, fighting, and Cramer was suddenly very big, and very strong, and he had turned into two men, confused and struggling in a shaky mass on the running board.

In a moment the second man, the big man, had Cramer flat against the hood, and was twisting the gun out of his hand. When he had it clear, he tossed it across the car and straightened Cramer up with a hand at his collar. This second man was in the uniform of a state trooper, and as he saw him clearly Joe remembered how slowly the other car, the coupé, had been going — slow enough for a man to swing off, behind them, where he wouldn't be picked off by the headlights.

It must have been the coupé, for it was coming back to them now over the brow of the hill, while William Frederick Cramer sat on the running board, his head in his hands, and a little spot of blood on a knuckle of his right one, where the trooper had crushed it against the car, just before he fired.

(Continued from back cover)

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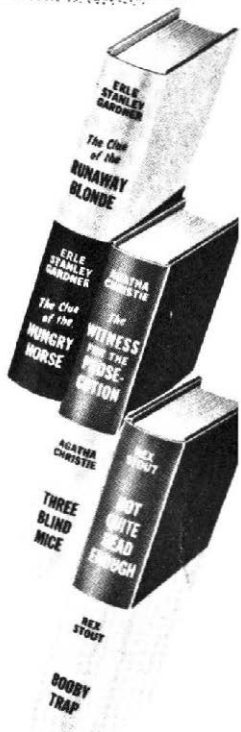

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