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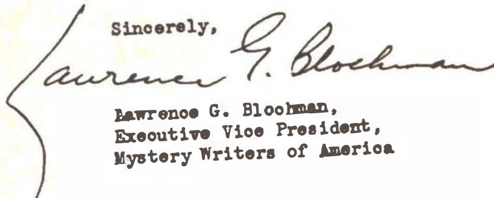
April 20, 1950

Mr. Lawrence E. Spivak
Publisher
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
570 Lexington Avenue
New York 22, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Spivak:

I am indeed happy to tell you that Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine has again been honored by the members of Mystery Writers of America in their vote for distinguished achievement in the mystery field during 1949. By nation-wide ballot of nearly three hundred MWA members, the Edgar Allan Poe Award for the year's outstanding contribution to the mystery short story goes to Ellery Queen, as editor of EQMM. The "Edgar" will be presented at MWA's Fourth Annual Edgar Allan Poe Awards Dinner tonight, which, as you know, is the 109th birthday of the detective story--the anniversary of the first publication of Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Congratulations!

Sincerely,



Lawrence G. Blochman,
Executive Vice President,
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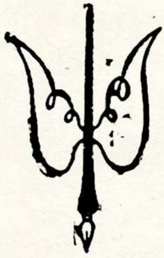

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MORE THAN 50 MILLION BOOKS AND MAGAZINES SOLD TO ENTHUSIASTIC READERS

"HOW VARIOUS IS THE SCENE"

By all odds the question most frequently hurled at a detective-story writer is: Where in the world do you get your ideas? *It is not without a deep sense of poetic justice that the answer stems from the 'tec tradition born in "The Purloined Letter": for the answer is so clear that it is invisible, so obvious that it is unsuspected. Detective-story ideas are everywhere — literally, all around us. So the answer to the question, following the 'tec technique of hiding something in the least-likely-place, lies in the question itself. Where in the world does a detective-story writer get his ideas? In the world . . . It is as simple as that — and as basically realistic. Out of a detail of characterization, out of a scientific fact, out of a newspaper clipping, out of an odd circumstance — out of anything and everything can emerge a detective short story or novelette or full-length novel. For example, we once overheard someone say: "She's the kind of woman who brings out the worst in a man." Out of this scrap of dialogue we eventually developed a 100,000-word novel.*

One of the most popular springboards for plot is background — deliberately choosing an unusual setting against which most of, or all, the action of the story takes place. Again delving into our own personal experience, we are reminded of the first three Queen books, and how at that time we consciously selected locales and backgrounds which had never previously been used in detective stories. THE ROMAN HAT MYSTERY *dealt with murder in a theatre, during the performance of a play;* THE FRENCH POWDER MYSTERY *opened in a department-store window, and most of the important action occurred in the mammoth store; and* THE DUTCH SHOE MYSTERY *utilized a hospital for the first time in detective fiction — remember, this was twenty years ago. All through homicidal history writers have exploited the atmospheric and technical advantages of an interesting background. Agatha Christie's* AND THEN THERE WERE NONE *is an example of the geographical approach — the marooned-on-an-island gambit; Frances Noyes Hart's* THE BELLAMY TRIAL *has its setting, from beginning to end, in a courtroom; and John Dickson Carr's* THE BLIND BARBER *took place, if memory serves, on a transatlantic liner.*

It has always seemed to us that the use of a specific background is best suited to the novelette length. In a short story of 6000-to-8000 words there is not enough room to do more than sketch in the background — too many details of setting would fog the main story line, and slow it down. In a

full-length novel — 70,000 words or more — persistent preoccupation with locale often leads to a cumbersome and too-long-drawn-out motif. But in the novelette of 20,000 words the setting can easily be the cohesive factor, tying up the characterization, action, and mood into one tight unit.

The editors of "American Magazine" have realized the dramatic values of a carefully selected scene, and have pursued an extremely successful course in assigning definite backgrounds to the authors of "American" novelettes. For example, Lawrence G. Blochman was once asked to write a novelette in which murder shattered the proverbial peace and quiet of the New York Public Library; Kelley Roos was commissioned to depict crime at a Greenwich Village Art Show, at the lake in Central Park, and in the vicinity of Columbia University; Rex Stout has handled homicide in a fencing salon and at a flower exhibit; Hugh Pentecost was once detailed to deal with death at the submarine base of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and with the titanic traffic in New York harbor.

We don't know whether or not Philip Wylie wrote "Ten Thousand Blunt Instruments" as a definite assignment, or whether it was his own criminological conception; however it started, the story appeared originally in "American" and is a perfect case in point. Background is the dominating detectival device, since the action occurs in the halls and galleries of the Museum of Natural History, among the gigantic skeletons of Man's remote ancestors. There are monsters in this story, and perhaps the dead ones are the most ominous . . .

TEN THOUSAND BLUNT INSTRUMENTS

by PHILIP WYLIE

BECAUSE she had no patience with what she regarded as a weakness in herself, she went into the big room. A tolerance for weakness — for timidity, especially — should be reserved for other people, Gail thought. There wasn't anything new about her phobia. She'd felt it when she was a kid — on her first trip to a museum. She had felt it in college when her geology class went to Belvidere Hall to inspect the fossils. She felt it now.

Outside, the early winter afternoon was dim with foreknowledge of night. There was light, ample in its way, in the gigantic chambers of the American Museum of Natural History. But the electricity threw shadows. And the windows let in a diffusion of darkness, a murk that emphasized the wrong things and made the reassuring ones indefinite.

Copyright, 1944, by Philip Wylie. Reprinted from American Magazine

Gail entered the Jurassic Hall as if she were pushing against a barrier, and stared willfully at the monstrous skeletons of the dinosaurs. Her skin prickled. Her mouth was a little dry. She tried hard to analyze the cause of this panicky, meaningless sensation: the bones had no flesh; eyes did not roll in the bowl-sized sockets; these horns, teeth, jaws, and articulated vertebrae had been dead — in the earth — for millions and millions of years. Perhaps that was the incubus: the millions of years.

"Hello, beautiful!"

The voice did not startle Gail. Rather, it steadied her. It made her remember that people — men and women and children — were moving calmly through the haunted chamber of dinosaurs. The corners of her lips twitched. She turned. It was a boy in the uniform of the Army Air Force. Second looie. He had a nice, Middle-Western face — open and tanned. Or maybe, she thought, it was the voice, not the face, that had prairies in it.

"Mashing is undignified," Gail said. "It's not for officers."

He grinned. "Kind of dead in here." It was kind of dead. Horribly dead. Thirty-million-years dead. Gail nodded.

"I thought — maybe — you'd like to go to a livelier place. Where I've been the last six months, blondes — green-eyed ones — are scarce."

"I'm sorry, Lieutenant. But in about ten minutes I'm due back at work upstairs."

"You mean you work in this mausoleum?" He didn't believe her.

"In it," she said. "Not for it. I work for the War Department. They send us up here, occasionally, to find out things. I'm a researcher."

"Oh." He thought it over. "Well, in that case, far be it from me to interfere. I don't suppose — later on —?"

"I'm putting in day and night on this assignment, Lieutenant. Sorry. And I haven't any blonde friends — with or without green eyes. I don't know anybody at all in New York."

He sighed exaggeratedly. "Me, either. Well — win the war, sister!"

The young woman's eyes were bright, a shade overbright. They fastened on the wings spread proudly on the boy's breast. "*You* win it, Lieutenant! Good luck — and good hunting, when the time comes!"

They separated, each feeling that New York was a little less huge and inhospitable.

She walked up the broad stairs, beyond the last floor on which the public was admitted. The quality of light changed and its quantity diminished as she entered a shabby interior corridor along which were offices of some of the executives and scientists of the Museum. At a door marked, "Dr. Horace Jordan, Zoology," she paused and braced herself again — but not with fear, this time. She was amused, wistful, and perhaps a trifle maternal. She turned the time-stained knob.

Dr. Jordan was bent over his desk

as usual. And, as usual, maps were spread out upon it and the green-shaded droplight was burning. His thin, sensitive face was concentrated, but the squeak of the door lifted it. He smiled politely, but his eyes, which were brown and luminous, had no extra shimmer of welcome for her. "'Afternoon, Miss Vincent."

"I missed you yesterday." Gail hung her coat and umbrella on the hatrack. To do so, she had to walk around three tables which were a crowded chaos of books, specimen jars, rolled maps, bones, piled photographs, and dusty collecting cases. Dr. Jordan's office, like so much of the Museum; was big, venerable, and dark.

He watched her. "I went over to Jersey. My sister's place. I'd left a lot of junk in her cellar — junk from the African trip I made in '38. I got out some notes, and last night, at home, I sketched this map for you. The country beyond Ujiji."

The country beyond Ujiji. It was a romantic phrase. And there was, Gail thought, a good deal of romance in Dr. Jordan and his life, even though he hid it behind a scientific manner only moderately tempered by his use of slang. She knew that, as far as she was concerned, she would gladly put down all her chips if he gave even half a sign of noticing that she was a girl — as well as a researcher. But he didn't.

It had been that way for Gail almost from the moment she had spotted him, months ago, standing uncertainly in the colonel's office in the War Department in Washington. At that time, she had known only that he was a famed zoologist, a formidable hunter, an authority on vast stretches of the Dark Continent, and a well-born New Yorker — things everybody knew. But she found out afterward that he was a great deal more that she admired in men: shy but resourceful, modest but willing to take responsibility, reticent about himself but a fascinating talker on a myriad of other subjects. And she had liked his looks, his intentness, the attention he paid to what was said, his smile, which was the shy kind, too, but merry, and always waiting to be evoked.

"In *Who's Who*," Gail once said to a girlfriend, "his biography sounds tough and dashing; but he's one of the gentlest people you ever met."

Looking at him now, Gail felt that, and more. She could fall in love. He couldn't, probably. He was an habitual bachelor. He was in love with his absorbing and sometimes dangerous work. He wasn't a ladies' man. He didn't even like her, especially. He was always a little impatient, as if he hoped her assignment would soon end and he could return to his own labors.

"This" — he pointed with a fountain pen — "is what I was talking about. I marked the altitude here. You can see — the valley's flat for about forty miles. You could put plenty of airports there — which, I take it, is what the War Department is coyly interested in."

Gail flushed slightly. "It's on the new flyway for India —"

"Exactly. It's grass — easy to clear. Hard ground. Pinsch and Felton were there in '28 and I queried them. They say the drainage is superb and the rainy season short. Ten months of ideal visibility. A road could be pushed through from Ujiji. The army engineers who built the Alaska Highway, for instance, would think any such chore was a cinch. No tsetse flies here, either. I checked that with Ralston. I'd say, in all the parts of Africa I know, this would make the best permanent installation for air transports and for military ferrying."

Gail peered. "Railroad's been moved, up by Ujiji."

"Lake level changed. Yeah. Condition of the railroad is only fair. But good enough."

"The War Department will be grateful," the girl said.

"The War Department," Dr. Jordan replied, sitting up straight and grinning a little, "could have gotten all this and much more information a great many years ago, without bothering a busy scientist who is in the middle of a job and who has been moved by sheer patriotism to consider his favorite stretch of country in terms of military airports."

"The Department didn't have the funds years ago," Gail replied defensively.

"It wouldn't have cost anything. It was all on file."

"Where?"

"In Berlin." He chuckled.

"Oh. How do you know?"

"Because the Germans have been getting ready for this war a long time. Only a few miracles like the Battle of Britain, the Russians, and the victory in Africa, have kept all this territory" — he pointed to the map — "from becoming an Axis airport on a main Axis flyway. They were there surveying and inspecting in '38 when I was."

"I'd better hear more about that." Gail hurried to the small, tidy desk which had been assigned to her. She picked up a notebook and some pencils, and came back to sit beside the zoologist. "Colonel Frain'll want to give the information to G-2."

He yawned. "Okay. But it's just a few years late. When I was there last time hunting my zebras and so on, this area had two other parties in it. They claimed to be Boers. Maybe they were Boers. I dunno. But I do know that they pretended to be hunting game and they had more scientific equipment than guns, by ten times. And one of them had a habit of humming the *Horst Wessel Song* when he was preoccupied. So they were Nazi Boers — if they were Afrikanders at all. They were doubtless doing, not very obviously, some leg work for the German geopolitician. They quarried around, too, and left the district governor with the impression that they'd found oil-bearing shale. They think a long way ahead, those Nazis."

"The War Department'll appreciate that too, Dr. Jordan."

His eyes, brown, steady, but almost always abstracted, showed a brief and surprising trace of anger. "Sure. Now. But in '38, when I went to Washington and tried to tell 'em our potential enemies were already preparing to carve up Africa, they booted me out of the place. Said I was a nut."

"Yes. We have been very blind in this country," Gail said soberly.

"Oh, well." He shrugged. "Let's get on with the work. The sooner —" He stopped.

"The sooner we do, the sooner you won't have a lady researcher nagging you." Gail smiled.

He said, "Exactly." He described the "Boers" who had been advance agents of Greater Germany.

Gail finally made herself stop thinking that a girl could fall in love with a man like that, if he were just a little less like that. A little more human. The afternoon steeped itself in successive shades of darkness until, some time after the closing bells had sounded on the floors below, it was night.

"I've got a dinner date," Dr. Jordan said.

"I'm going to slip out later."

"Then you'll be back?"

"Yes. If I may, I'll copy those notebooks you brought from Jersey."

"Sure. Anything. I'll be in later, myself. But I'd like to do my own work for a while, if you don't mind."

She smiled. "Okay. The War Department'll give you a recess, Doctor. . . ."

When she returned from her solitary supper her footsteps echoed through the great, darkened halls. Some were open. Metal gates had been pulled across the entrances of others. The stone floors rang faintly with the pacing of the guards. In limitless penumbras she could see curled mastodon tusks and leg bones as high as herself. She shivered, and hurried toward the higher floors.

Lights shone in some of the offices. Old Dr. Weber was working with his door open. Fat Dr. Pinsch and fatuous Dr. Felton, the geologists, were talking earnestly in the latter's room. At the far end of the immense corridor Gail could see the gaunt frame of Dr. Beal as she fumbled with her key. Gail had left the light on in Dr. Jordan's place, not because she was afraid of falling over the objects in it, but just because she was afraid, always, at night in the old building.

A few big flakes of snow had left drops of water on the collar of her coat. She shook them off and went to work under the truncated cone of yellow that fell downward from the green shade.

An hour later Dr. Jordan walked briskly down the hall. He looked, Gail thought, positively jaunty. But the personality which had been his at his "dinner date" seemed to melt as he entered his office. "Hard at it, I see," he said. Without waiting for an answer, he stripped off his coat, put on an apron, and began to rummage through a bone heap on one of the far tables.

Another person, she thought, might have told her about the dinner. She went on copying, quietly. At ten o'clock, or thereabouts, he crossed the room. "Going to slip down to Akeley Hall and check some data."

She didn't notice how long he was absent. When he came back he made a few jottings on a pad; then he put on his coat and hat. "Don't stay all night," he smiled. "I must admit, you're the hardest-working female I ever knew! But they tell me that around three A. M. the dinosaurs start walking."

It was a purely accidental statement, meant as a joke, but she felt her flesh crawl. "I'll quit in a little while, now."

He nodded and said, "Good night, Miss V."

She worked on for a while, until a voice came through the door, which Dr. Jordan had left open. "Hello, bright eyes!"

Gail looked up and laughed. "Hello, Henry."

Henry Grant, the man standing in the doorway, was young, thin, and very blond. Like so many of the men who worked in the Museum, he seemed overzealous and underfed. He was a technician whom she had met soon after reporting for work — a boy from the Middle West — and, in a casually amiable way, he had been doing his best to improve his acquaintance with the girl.

"I'm busy," she said.

"That excuse is going to wear out, some day. I'm going home. I stopped by to see if you'd let me take you — and have a snack on the way."

She shook her head. "Not ready yet, thanks. Try again."

"Don't think I won't, lady! Getting along all right?"

"Well enough. I have to interview everybody in the place who's ever been in Africa, just about."

He laughed. "That's a pretty big job. You'd better change your mind and come along."

"Not tonight, thanks."

"Okay. 'Night."

She rose, when his footsteps had receded, and pushed the door shut.

He hadn't been gone long when there was a knock. Gail finished a sentence, and said, "Come in! Oh . . . Dr. Weber . . . Dr. Jordan's left for home."

Dr. Weber, against the light filtered from the hall, seemed more ancient, frail, and other-worldly than any of the great institution's staff. His thin, silvery hair floated above his gnome-like head; his eyes, bird-brilliant, changed from an expression of keen anticipation to one of childish disappointment. He held a coffee can, rusted so that the label was blurred, in both hands. "I thought I saw him a little while ago," he said uncertainly. "Down in Akeley Hall. I was in the Gallery, looking at the lesser koodoos."

"He was there," Gail answered. "But he's gone."

"Marvelous exhibit," the old man went on. "They all are. I like to look at them at night when there's nobody

around. It reminds me of the days when I worked in the field myself."

Gail felt a thrust of impatience at age, at the thoughtlessness of age and its minute preoccupation with its own affairs. But she knew that Dr. Jordan liked the old gentleman and that his earlier days, also, had been excitingly romantic — from the scientific standpoint. She was tired, she realized. She closed her book. "I like to look at the koodoos, too — and the lions and tigers and the elands — everything."

He came into the office. She saw, then, that the weight of the coffee can was considerable for its size. Dr. Weber's arms were shaking.

"Why don't you set it down?"

"Yes. Yes, I will. You don't know his home phone number?"

"Dr. Jordan's? I think it's in the book."

"M-m-m." He put the can on the desk beside the maps. "Still — it will keep, I suppose. I took care of things. I wonder how much young Horace knows about mineralogy?"

Dr. Weber tipped the coffee can. She could see then that it was full of glittering, yellowish crystals, the size of Brazil nuts.

"I wonder," he repeated. "This is rock he brought me from Africa. Said it was curious and so he chipped me some samples. That's like the boy. Thoughtful, always. Impulsive, too. Because it's really a very common substance. Quartz. SiO_2 — that is, with a mineral impurity that gives it the yellow cast. He'd kept it in storage some place, he said, until yesterday. Meant to bring it to me before."

He took a short pipe from his pocket. Its bowl had been burned down, so that it was irregular. She noticed his hands were shaking.

"I wish Horace were here," he continued, fingering the pipe. "Because I've really got to know — I"

"Know what?"

"Well — how much *he* knows about minerals. I'll tell you. He wanted an analysis. Well, we'll give him one. Be a joke on him if he really thought this stuff was anything — anything novel. Got a sheet of paper?"

She gave one to him. Chuckling, he wrote on it in large characters, "SiO_2." He put the paper on the doctor's desk and the can of rocks on the paper. He said, "Are you interested in minerals?"

"I'm afraid I don't know much about them."

"Pity." The old man walked toward the door. "Beautiful things, some of them," he said.

She heard his feet move slowly down the hall. She tried to return to her work. But after twenty or thirty minutes of effort she decided she was too weary. She put on her coat and her pert hat and went down the long, forbidding corridor. She rang for an elevator, and Ivers, one of the guards, finally came up in it.

Out on Central Park West it was cold and windy. The trees across the thoroughfare were a shrieking chorus, against the dimmed-out backdrop of

the buildings on Fifth Avenue, beyond the Park. She caught a bus and rode chillily to the small mid-town hotel where her expense allowance maintained her in modest comfort.

Gail Vincent was the last innocent person to see Dr. Weber alive.

His "disappearance," although noted on the following day, was the occasion for only minor alarm. Toward the end of a morning that had been busy for Gail and Dr. Jordan, they were interrupted by the Museum's vice-director, Dr. Thomas Evans. Unlike many of the scientists attached to the institution, Dr. Evans was well groomed and worldly, a fairly tall man with large, intelligent gray eyes and a taste in tweeds. He came in smilingly, apologized for disturbing them, asked Gail if the Museum was serving the War Department well, and plumed himself a moment over her enthusiastic reply. Then he said he was "somewhat concerned."

He sat down on a table edge and swung his legs. "We can't find old Paul Weber. His housekeeper phoned that he didn't come home last night. In the old days you might expect that Weber had bounded off to Tibet and had forgotten to tell us. But he's been sticking to routine for a good many years. Under the circumstances, I worry about him."

"He was here last night," Gail said. She told the vice-director about the call.

Evans turned to Jordan. "Were you in Akeley Hall? Did you see him?"

"I was down on the main floor, counting stripes on zebra legs. There was somebody up on the gallery. I saw a light on in —"

"He said the lesser koodoos," Gail said.

Dr. Jordan nodded. "About that spot." He smiled a little. "Old Paul loved to saunter around the Museum at night. Of course, he concentrated on the Hall of Gems. It was his own creation, somewhat, wasn't it?"

The vice-director nodded again. "What about this business of the can full of quartz?"

"Right behind you."

Evans tipped the can, and the collection of yellowish crystals clattered on the table top.

Dr. Jordan picked up the sheet of paper on which was lettered, "SiO_2." He showed it to Evans. "This is Paul's notion of a joke, I guess. I saw the stuff in an outcrop — up Ujiji way. Being a zoologist, not a specialist in minerals, I had a vague idea it might be interesting, and I thought of Paul, so I hammered some off and put it in this can. When I came back, with a big collection of animal specimens, I forgot all about these stones. They got sent over to my sister's place in Jersey and stored, and I came across them only day before yesterday; so I lugged 'em in to the Museum. SiO_2 means plain quartz, which was Paul's gentle way of telling me I had been wasting my time."

Dr. Evans said, "Anything to add, Miss Vincent?"

"Well, yes and no. He was terribly anxious to get in touch with Dr. Jordan last night. He considered phoning him at home. Then, for some reason, he decided not to. He said it would keep, or something of the sort. He seemed — well — excited."

Jordan shook his head. "Haven't the faintest idea why the old boy would be excited. Unless this stuff *is* special, after all."

"I'll have it looked at." Evans began scooping it into the can. "Meanwhile, we're running through the usual routine. Hospitals, and so on. The thing that disturbs me most is that he apparently didn't leave the building last night."

Dr. Evans added, "None of the guards let him out. Of course, it's possible that he went out unseen. There was a meeting here — a lecture — until after eleven. He might have gone out with the people who attended."

Dr. Jordan said quietly, "You've started a search here?"

"Naturally." Dr. Evans walked to the door. "I'll keep you informed. Meantime, I'd prefer that this remained confidential. No use setting up a hue and cry over what may prove to be, at worst, the normal sort of tragedy that overcomes us all in the end. I called on you two because Henry Grant told me he'd seen Paul turn in here yesterday evening."

Dr. Jordan sighed. "Golly, I hope nothing's gone wrong. That's a noble old boy, Evans. Wish we had more of 'em in this world. I owe Weber pretty nearly everything I am and do." He explained, casually, for Gail's benefit: "He was a friend of my father's. Got me interested in nature when I was a kid. Took me on trips. Took me camping. Saw what was just a kid's interest in living things, and made the most of it. Slanted me toward biology. And chaperoned me into this berth when I'd taken my degrees. He's one hell of a nice old gent!"

"He is," Evans agreed. "And I'd hate to have anything happen to Paul, myself. For that reason. And for the Museum, too. I don't like inexplicable events in my organization. . . . You don't remember anything else, Miss Vincent?"

Gail said she was afraid not. Paul Weber had walked away from the office at some time close to eleven o'clock. That was all she knew.

She and Dr. Jordan went back to work.

On the following morning, Thursday, they learned that the Bureau of Missing Persons had been notified. The matter rested there for the entire day. By then, word of the disappearance of the mineralogist was spreading via the grapevine that exists wherever there are human beings. An exhaustive search for the old man, performed by the guards and other employees, had yielded nothing whatever. He had been in the hall outside the office where Gail worked at some time near eleven, and then he had vanished. . . .

He might not have been found for months. As it happened, chance gave an entirely new face to the problem of the missing man. At a quarter of six, on that second day of his absence, Gail and Dr. Jordan were hurrying to finish up a report on edible game in a place called Nobanzi.

The afternoon had become night because of heavy overcast. A few snowflakes were falling and the wind was on the increase. Most of the Museum staff had left.

Suddenly, the low, hurried dictation of the zoologist was broken by a sound in the hall. It was a gasping groan, audible because their door was ajar. After it came dead silence.

Jordan's pencil stopped on a page of his notes. "What's that?"

Gail, transfixed for an instant, rose and rushed to the door. At first she thought the long corridor was empty. Then she saw the figure of a man, a hundred feet away, leaning against the wall. She ran toward him, followed by Jordan. He passed her before they reached the leaning man, and said loudly, "Good lord, Taylor! What's the matter?"

Taylor was short and portly and bald. He had turned as pale as paper. In the muddy light that suffused the corridor, a diamond dust of perspiration glinted on his cheeks, his brow, and his bald head. He merely pointed a shuddering finger in a rubber glove.

The object at which he pointed was a long, waist-high box, painted a battleship gray. There were five or six such boxes in the corridor, and Gail had noticed them before, but only casually. The hand-lugs of this box had been turned, and its lid removed. It was brimful of an opaque, brownish liquid from which rose a reek of carbolic. Not a box, then, but a tank. A tank filled with preservative.

Gail had a horrible hunch, and so did Dr. Jordan. His face also paled and grew tense. He cast his eyes about in the passageway, stepped to a heap of shelving, picked up one of the boards and began to stir the dark fluid. Something stuck briefly above the surface — a huge hand, covered with fur. Gail gasped.

"Gorilla," Jordan said sharply. He prodded again. He lifted above the liquid, for a mere split second, another object. There was no mistaking the dripping awfulness of it. He let it fall back.

He turned to Gail. "You okay?"

She gathered herself. "Yes."

"Take Taylor into my office. I'll go for Evans." He addressed the bald-headed man. "You've had a bad shock, Taylor. Go into my room and sit down."

Dr. Jordan was very calm. Very collected. He kept his lips firm. He was thinking — thinking swiftly. He wasn't afraid. But he had room for emotion, and he expressed just a little of it: "That — that" — he gestured at the tank — "that old man was my best friend, in a way. I — I loved the old guy! And whoever has done this to him is going to pay for it. I am going to make him pay!"

Gail knew that he would if it was humanly possible. She thought that she wouldn't want him to feel any other way about it. He was brimming over with a decent and bitter passion. She glanced at Taylor and back toward Dr. Jordan. He was running up the hall.

Gail took the limp scientist by the elbow and led him along to Dr. Jordan's door. No one else had as yet appeared in the hall. Gail put Mr. Taylor in a chair and went back to make sure of that fact. Down the long passage she could see the open tank. And then, far beyond, a door closed. Martha Beal, the biologist, walked toward Gail without seeing her, turned at a side passage, and vanished.

Gail closed Dr. Jordan's door. She poured a glass of water for Taylor.

"I'll be all right," he said. "I was just terrifically startled."

"Of course."

Minutes passed. She heard Evans and Jordan walk past — and walk past again, later, in the opposite direction. Under her ministrations, Taylor was beginning to recover.

Finally, the two men came in. Evans was haggard. Dr. Jordan seemed more abstracted than usual. But he said, "Still okay, Miss Vincent?" with the trace of a smile.

"Yes. And Mr. Taylor's better, I believe."

Taylor unfolded a clean handkerchief and wiped his forehead. "I was stunned —"

Evans lighted a cigarette with a wavering match. "This," he said nervously, "is a pretty terrible thing! It'll make headlines. It'll reflect all sorts of things — on me! A museum should house science, sense —" He realized how incoherent he sounded and made an effort to control himself. "Well, Taylor, what happened? How come you were poking into that tank?"

"I was doing an article on comparative anatomy. Anthropoids. There were a couple of points about gorillas I wanted to check, and I knew we had this one up here. I phoned Shollt for permission, but he'd gone. I felt sure he wouldn't object, so I simply came up, opened the tank, and reached in. I got" — he broke off and drew a long breath — "what Jordan did. I suppose you observed" — his voice rose as he addressed Jordan alone — "that there was clear evidence of a hard blow on the head?"

"We've phoned for the police," Evans said heavily. "That's all we can do for the moment. They'll want to question you, Taylor, first, no doubt. You'd better pull yourself together for it. I, naturally, will explain that what you did was mere routine. Quite all right." He dropped suddenly into one of the desk chairs. "But who on earth would murder Paul Weber?"

"The police," Jordan said softly, "will want to know who *could have.* I mean," he continued, "who was here the night Paul vanished? You were in your office, Evans. I was. Gail Vincent, here. I saw old Pinsch around that night when Weber disappeared. Felton, too, of course. They're in-

separable. Henry Grant looked in here. So there's Grant —"

"That's futile speculation." Evans stopped studying his own thoughts. "There was a lecture that night, remember? A hundred-odd people attended. Tickets were a cinch to get hold of. Anybody who came to the lecture could have sneaked out, ducked the guards, and hidden around to waylay Paul Weber."

"Point is," Jordan answered, "could and would just 'anybody' have known we had preservative in these tanks and where they are and how to get into them — let alone how to transport a body to them?"

The talk went on. A police car wailed its approach out on the cold street. Dr. Evans went to meet the men, and brought back a sandy-haired, blue-eyed man of middle age.

"This," the vice-director said, "is Lieutenant Grove . . . Dr. Jordan — Mr. Taylor — Miss Vincent, from Washington."

Lieutenant Grove let his eyes examine each of the three. Then he got out a cigar, bit it, lighted it, and said, "All right. Shoot."

They told him, in turn, all they knew about Paul Weber's activities on the presumptive night of his murder. Grove listened carefully. At last he said, "I think, Dr. Evans, we'll have to begin with the usual methods. Comb the place. Try to find the weapon of assault. Try to find, if possible, the exact place where he was attacked —"

Evans stared at the officer. "You'd be able to clean up that job in about ten years."

The policeman frowned. "My boys on Homicide are trained —"

"I'm not impugning them. I simply mean that the enormousness of the plan you outline hasn't occurred to you. The weapon, for example. I'd say — and I imagine the casts of the wound will bear me out — that it was the usual blunt instrument. Curved, but not round. The skull fracture is plain. Curved like a chair arm — like the surface of a mastodon rib. At a guess, there are ten thousand such blunt instruments in the Museum.

"As to the scene: Weber liked to roam the Museum at night. It's fairly well guarded and most of the exhibition halls are closed off with gates. But keys could be stolen — manufactured. The guards could be dodged. On this floor, the fifth, there are offices and labs. On the sixth, more labs, the department of experimental biology. There's a big basement with a cafeteria, machine shop, paint shop, carpentry shop, restrooms, nurses' rooms, the heating plant, and a pipe maze nobody understands except the man in charge.

"There are various staircases and many elevators — one that'll carry whole elephants. Has to be. The four floors under this are exhibits — thirteen of the total twenty-three *acres* of floor space, Lieutenant! And then there are some higher rooms, and the building interconnects in such a way that you can get from one part to most any other by way of the roof.

I've been here, myself, for twenty-two years, and I'd say, at a guess, that there's a good ten per cent of the floor space here that I don't know a thing about! So, you see —"

Grove whistled softly. "All right. I'm convinced. We'll just have to do the best we can. Now . . . on the night Weber disappeared — Tuesday — the following people are known to have been here." He consulted a memorandum book. "You, Dr. Evans. You, Jordan. Taylor — you weren't here? You, Miss Vincent. Felton and Pinsch, geologists. Henry Grant, a technician. Martha Beal, biologist. A medical man named Garrison Lombardo. The guards. From what I've gathered, I take it you're all surprised that Dr. Weber was murdered."

It was, oddly enough, Taylor who first answered. "Astonished. He has spent his life here. Privately wealthy, and sometimes eccentric. Opinionated and possessed of a temper, yes. But a magnificent scientist. He's a widower — has been for a decade. No children. The shocking part of this whole business is that — well, Paul Weber simply wasn't the kind of man who — who gets —"

"— who gets murdered?" Grove finished.

"Yes."

"In an individual case," the lieutenant said, "you never know what the type is until the thing's done. *Maybe* Weber hadn't an enemy, but *somebody* hit him with something, and hid him away in a gorilla storage tank, where —"

"Weber did have enemies, of sorts," Evans said uncertainly.

The policeman turned. "Who?"

Dr. Evans frowned. "I am not making accusations, you understand. Simply telling facts. In a professional way, Pinsch and Felton were bitter enemies of Weber. It began — oh — before my time. Maybe a quarter of a century ago, when Pinsch and Felton were young men. They quarreled about the manner of the formation of the Atlas Mountains —"

"Ye gods!" The man from the Homicide Squad was disgusted. "We can't start checking back on old technical feuds!"

"This was different. It got into a lot of scientific journals. In the end, old Paul Weber more or less won the argument. Only, by the time he won, he was so sore at Pinsch and Felton he took pains to try to show them up as fools. Then they had a battle in the newspapers about water-supply sources for New York City. That was in the nineteen-teens. It was a geological argument, but it ended up with Pinsch swinging on Weber at a mass meeting; and Weber — he was in his early fifties and wiry — swung back and knocked Pinsch off the platform.

"Later they argued over the air-carriage of loess from the Gobi Desert and a lot of other topics. Felton sued Weber, once, for libel. Weber sued Pinsch, once, for slander. The thing has calmed down in the last decade, although they seldom speak and always take pains, when referring to

each other in monographs, to use the most slurring terms that the form permits."

"Felton and Pinsch," supplemented Jordan, "are a fairly ornery pair. You never know how deep that sort of thing goes, either. Weber may have been up to some new insult or trick — may even have wanted to rope me in on it. I never cared especially for the two geologists, and the old boy knew it."

"I'll see them," Grove said thoughtfully, "and take you along, Dr. Evans."

The vice-director nodded. "One more person ought to be considered."

"I thought of her, too," Jordan murmured.

"Martha Beal. She and Weber were in love a long time ago. Engaged to be married. She was his technical assistant, one of the first women to be employed in that capacity here. The engagement broke off overnight, nobody ever knew why, and she moved to another department. Ever since, she's hated old Weber. Martha Beal is a very intelligent, shrewd, hardworking woman. She might have cracked —"

"Easily," the lieutenant agreed. "She'll be number three on my list." He turned to the vice-director. "I'm going to have to have somebody here, Doctor, as a liaison between me and my men and you and your staff. Somebody who knows the Museum and the personnel and can be trusted."

Evans smiled a little. "Jordan?"

The zoologist looked at Gail. "I've already been deputized to the U. S. Government."

Gail said, "I suspect that as soon as my colonel reads the papers he'll wire for me to come back to Washington."

"Which," said Lieutenant Grove, "in view of your importance as a witness, the New York Police Department might oppose."

Evans smiled more openly. "In which case, Jordan —"

"In which case, all right! I loved old Paul. I'll like finding whoever did that to him!"

The police officer walked to the door, where he stopped and turned. "Incidentally, what is your work, Jordan? What, for instance, were you doing down there on the main floor of Akeley Hall night before last?"

Jordan's eyes flickered. "I was standing in front of a stuffed Hippotigris with a flashlight. I was making a comparison of the legstripe patterns on the Equus burchelli and the grevyi."

Lieutenant Grove stared, and then snorted. "This is a fine job for a cop!"

Evans opened the door wider. "Jordan's talking about zebras. Come on, Lieutenant. Taylor? Coming?"

When they had gone, Dr. Jordan creaked back his desk chair and looked thoughtful. "Where do we start?"

"Where do *you* start?" Gail smiled a little. "I never had anything to do with crime."

"You're a researcher, a gal with scientific training. You've been G-2-ed, and FBI-ed. That lieutenant from Homicide — Grove — won't ever get anything out of this."

"I wouldn't be sure."

"He won't. He's a good fellow, and bright, too. But he isn't a scientist. This business goes back to obscure things that happened long ago. It involves people, ideas, situations that Grove doesn't know anything about. No police officer does. It involves a knowledge of the Museum. For instance, nobody would dare transport Paul's body to this floor late at night. It would be too conspicuous; somebody might be working here.

"The body had to be carried up here at a time and in a way which wouldn't be noticed. And there's one good way — those zinc-covered roller tables we use to carry big specimens. We wheel them around continually. We cover them with sheets so as not to discomfit the visitors. Now, pretty nearly anybody could roll such a load into an elevator, roll it off on this floor, and wait his chance to open the gorilla tank and put the body in.

"The lieutenant wouldn't understand that. He'd think we would remember, because, in his mind, the rolling table would have a human corpse on it. But, in ours, the business is normal. See what I mean?"

"Of course." Gail thought a moment. "If he was killed while he was wandering around on the floors below, he probably would have been hidden overnight — there are simply millions of places — and moved up here later on."

"Right."

"What do you intend to do? I mean, how will you start?"

"With some dinner," Jordan answered. "Join me?"

Upon their return they put into action the plan they had devised. First, Gail sat under the green-shaded lamp and described, step by step, Dr. Weber's call on the evening on which he had last been seen.

Jordan listened carefully and asked a few questions. But when she had finished he shook his head. "I don't get it. I mean, what excited him. . . . Let's go to Akeley Hall."

A policeman stood outside. He let them in. Dr. Jordan turned on a flashlight. A few bulbs were burning, far overhead. Otherwise, the vast panoply of African habitat groups was dark.

"I stood here," Jordan said, "and counted those stripes." He shone his light on the leg of a zebra. "I knelt to do it. There was somebody up above on the gallery. His back was toward me. I didn't even look, directly. I was concentrating and in a hurry. There was a smell of pipe smoke. I'm sure of that, now that I'm here. Paul's, I think. So he was up there when I was here — just as we both thought. He may have gone back again. Let's look it over."

They left the lower room and went up to the gallery entrance. It was unlocked. It was dark in the gallery, but not too dark for shadowy visibility. Gail was not afraid — only the dinosaur bones had the power to intimidate her — but she moved closer to Dr. Jordan.

"Old Paul," he said, "if it was old Paul, must have been standing right here."

"It's so real," Gail said, "that you can almost smell the African air."

"The fellows who made it would appreciate that compliment. . . . Now. If we assume Paul came back again we might imagine his attack occurred somewhere around here. Of course, we have no way of knowing exactly, or even approximately, when he was killed. I daresay the fact that he was put in that preservative will prevent even the police examiner from determining the hour of death with any accuracy. . . . Shall we look around?"

Gail found herself searching painstakingly along the floor. Dr. Jordan had provided her with an extra flashlight and she used it, but without any feeling of effectiveness. Hundreds, probably thousands, of strangers had walked through the gallery since the night of the mineralogist's disappearance. She searched the floor, the protective rail in front of the glass, the molding beneath it, and the railing around the edge of the vast balcony which overhung the main chamber.

Then she stopped, pushed her flashlight close to the foot of the railing. "Here's something!" she called.

Dr. Jordan came hastily.

The pool of light held on the railing-base. In it were a half-dozen spots, smaller than pennies, and dark. "I thought —" she said.

The zoologist bent low. "You're right! Blood!" From his pocket he took a penknife. He hunted for an envelope, and produced an electric-light bill. He removed the bill and carefully scraped into the envelope a couple of the dry blemishes. Then, with great care, he examined the gallery for a distance of a few yards.

"I don't know much about blood," he said. "Human, that is. But plenty of people around here do. Martha Beal, for example."

"Under the circumstances —" Gail began.

"Under the circumstances, she might be exactly the right person."

They went back to the spot where they had found the blood and knelt over it for a final scrutiny. Gail was very conscious of Dr. Jordan kneeling there close to her. She thought that the sense of urgency which Dr. Jordan's nearness gave her was the kind of emotion men had — one perhaps not suitable to a girl.

He glanced up in time to see her looking at him. He blushed, so she knew he had interpreted her expression correctly.

He went on looking at her. "It's pretty swell of you," he said evenly, "to come here with me on a job like this. You're the kind of person, Miss V., that a fellow —"

He didn't get any farther. Gail saw a figure loom up behind him — suddenly and silently. She lost track of her bewildering feelings in the second it took to snatch his arm and pull him away. She half screamed, "Look out!"

Dr. Jordan jumped toward her and past her, like a cat. He spun and came up standing. Then he said, shakily, "Oh! It's you, Ivers! Lord, you scared us half to death!"

The Museum guard was big-boned, Irish, and somewhat amused at the havoc he had caused. "I've got on sneakers," he said. "Dr. Evans, and the cops, too, told me to keep a sharp lookout. I heard somebody muttering in here. So of course I gumshoed in."

"The next time you gumshoe around me," Dr. Jordan said, "you're likely to get slugged."

Ivers apologized. "I'll remember. Made me nervous, what happened to Dr. Weber. Make anybody nervous. Not that I cared for him —"

"What was the matter with him, Ivers?"

"Fussy. Nosy. Always prowling around at night. Always getting us to open things up for him."

Jordan shrugged. "Okay. . . . Come on, Miss V. We'll hunt up Martha Beal." They walked from the gallery. "Irritation," he said to Gail as they waited for an elevator, "is not a motive for murder. But I suppose one of the guards could have killed Paul — if there's a fiend among 'em."

They went up to their floor and walked down the familiar corridor again, Gail still shaken from her fright at the looming appearance of Ivers, and from the emotions which he had interrupted. There was a light burning in Martha Beal's office. The door was open. But they had not reached it when Gail felt a repetition of the alarm which had accompanied Ivers' sudden materialization.

She had passed a space between ceiling-high specimen cases which lined that part of the corridor and, after going by, she had found herself entertaining the notion that somebody had been pressed back, hiding, in that space. It was just an impression — a sense of whiteness where a face might have been. She halted.

Dr. Jordan went ahead, and peered into the office. "Martha?" He turned. "Not in."

"I think —" Reluctantly, uncertainly, Gail made herself walk back. Martha Beal was pressed between the towering cases as stiffly as a mummy.

Dr. Jordan saw her, and said, "Good heavens!"

The woman stepped out of the recess. "I hoped you wouldn't notice me."

"We wanted to talk to you," Gail stammered.

"Exactly. And I wanted privacy. Well, you found me, so come in."

Gail realized that there would be no more explanation than that. The woman was going to let them think what they would. She couldn't have been hiding for long, Gail reflected. Around her workbench were the paraphernalia of an experiment left unfinished.

Miss Beal was tall and very gaunt. Her eyes were a washed-out shade of blue. Her hair had been dark red once, but it was now raddled with

gray — long, knotted, and untidy.

About her was a curious aspect both of desuetude and fanatical energy. Her present expression was so rigid that Gail barely returned her look and deliberately let her eyes stray to the wilderness of material in the room. There was everything, she noted, from shrunken human heads to headache remedies — from big brown bottles of acid to old shoes, a party hat, and a boomerang. It was a room in which Martha Beal not only worked but also had her principal existence.

Dr. Jordan, meanwhile, had been introducing Gail. Both women merely nodded, at his words. "I called here, Martha — or we did — because we wanted you to do us a favor."

"Naturally."

"It's about Paul. You've heard that —?"

"Yes. I heard."

Dr. Jordan was disconcerted. "The police," he explained haltingly, "asked us to do what we could to help. Miss Vincent and I were about the last people to see Paul alive. In my office, in her case; in Akeley Hall, in mine. We've been looking in Akeley Hall, and we found —" He told her about the blood.

She sat silent until he had finished. Then she said, "And you want me to examine it for you? Make sure it's human? Type it, if I can?"

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Martha."

"Why?"

Dr. Jordan flushed. "Well, I know —"

"You know *nothing!*" Her eyes gathered bitter light and darted from the man to the woman. "You speak to me of Paul with emotion, with grief! What do you know about either one? The emptiness of both have been the fullness of my days! And now it's going to be a public topic! The police will dig it up, drag it out of me like a confession drawn from the victim of torture! I loved him!

"Yes, I was mad about him! He was the only man I ever had a chance to be mad about! I saw him every day, every hour. He appreciated me. My mind. We laughed at the same things. I let myself think that he was falling in love with me. And I made *him* think so. He wasn't, but how could he know that? I was ugly, even then. Unfeminine! Finally I was so sure of myself I gave him a chance to break the engagement. Casually, easily, because I was testing the strength of the false thing I had created. And he *broke* it!"

Martha Beal began to weep. Gail did not move. She wished she was somewhere else. In a moment, however, the disturbed woman went on:

"I hated him, after that! I fed myself on hate and anesthetized myself with work. And only tonight, when that talky, attractive woman in ichthyology told me about the discovery did my hatred begin to die down." She stifled the last vestige of a sob. She pushed back her hair. "Give me the blood!"

Dr. Jordan reluctantly handed her

the envelope with the transparent window. He nodded to Gail.

"Don't go," Martha Beal said. "I can give you the first part of the report in no time."

They sat uncomfortably while she tapped out the brown powder, added a drop of liquid, and dexterously adjusted a microscope. "I can tell you Paul's blood type," she said in a low, heavy tone while she worked. "There's nothing about Paul Weber I can't tell you. He gave an emergency transfusion here once. He's Type Three." She peered into the eyepiece. "This is blood — yes. Human. The rest will take considerable time."

Dr. Jordan was standing, at last. "I'm sorry, Martha, that we were the cause of bringing all this up."

She didn't say a word.

They went out.

In the hall Dr. Jordan wiped his forehead. "More than I bargained for. I wanted to see her, but —"

"She's a little unbalanced about Paul."

"Just a touch."

"And that business of hiding. I thought maybe you'd ask her —"

"People don't usually ask Martha much. They wait to be told. But it's one to file and consider. One for Grove. Gosh! When I saw you seeing her, I felt my spine wilt!"

He opened his office door.

Inside, sitting at his own desk, was the lieutenant. "Been waiting for you two," he said. "Have some questions to ask. Incidentally, congratulations on finding the bloodstains!"

Jordan bristled. "How in the name —?"

"Just routine, Doctor. Number one, of course, was to check the places where the victim was last seen. My men collected a couple of blood samples while you were having supper. Number two was to keep an eye on the people who had last seen the deceased, although they were supposedly working for me."

Jordan grunted. "At least, we know where he was when he was attacked."

The lieutenant shook his head. "Maybe. Even probably. But we don't *know*. As a scientist, you'd doubtless say we did. As a cop, I say that all we know is that a few drops of somebody's blood got spattered at the bottom of the railing a couple of days ago. The cleaners missed them. The murderer, if he wiped up after the crime, also missed them. But several hundred people went by there. The blood might have come from a kid who cut his finger."

Gail said, "Better tell him about Martha Beal."

They told him.

He thought it over. "What was your feeling, Jordan?"

"That she'd do anything, if she wanted to."

"That's the impression I got. . . . Miss Vincent?"

"She's a bizarre sort of woman. She embarrasses you, deliberately. A little bit out of her head. She'd been crying. At first, I thought it was for Paul. After she talked I realized it was from self-pity."

"That's what women usually cry from," Grove said cynically. "I ought to know. . . . See here. I want to ask you." He fished a piece of paper from his pocket. It was scribbled with notes that ran in all directions, as if they had been written against his knee and against walls. "Question number one: What sort of suit was Felton wearing Tuesday?"

Jordan said, "Good lord! That *is* a question! Brown, I believe."

Gail laughed. "Blue. Blue serge."

Grove glanced at her. "The point comes up because I've been questioning the guards who see people leave here. I asked them to try and remember anything peculiar about the people I mentioned. I got a zero, except that one of the guards said Felton was wearing a gray suit and stood around a while, apparently because he hated to go out in all the weather. I tried to check that point, but I got various answers. Pinsch couldn't remember what his pal wore. I haven't asked Felton himself, yet. Somebody else said black. But we've got gray, blue, black, and brown."

"I'm not positive," Gail said, thinking. "Not when I try to visualize it."

"It goes to show," the lieutenant interrupted, "that people's memories aren't worth anything when you pin them down. A point you both might bear in mind. . . . Next: What do you know about Dr. Lombardo? He was around here Tuesday night."

Gail shook her head.

Jordan reflected. "Garrison Lombardo's a popular lecturer. Audiences are crazy about him. I was never very friendly with him, myself. He's an M.D., you know; they're rare on the staff. Specializes in tropical diseases. I was going to take Miss Vincent in to see him next week. He can add a lot to our dossier on Africa for the War Department. Only, I was going to warn Miss V. that the eminent specialist has an eye for ladies."

"You can skip that," Gail said.

Grove grinned and looked at them inquiringly. "Okay. But you know nothing about his personal affairs? Didn't you know, for instance, that he's a gambler? That there's a rumor out he's lost thirty thousand dollars and is being hounded for it?"

"No," Jordan said.

"Do you know if, by any chance, Paul Weber has mentioned Lombardo in his will?"

"I suppose he mentioned all of us, more or less," Jordan replied. "Funny, I hadn't thought of it. Paul was pretty well fixed, you know. He located a lot of mines in his earlier days. He was as good a businessman as he was a mineralogist. And . . ."

"Well?"

"Come to think of it, Paul might have made a special bequest to Lombardo. Lombardo once saved his life. In Africa. Lombardo was studying tsetses, and heard that a white man was very sick in the jungle. He went in, and found Paul dying and nursed him around."

"M-m-m-m," Grove said. He referred to his list. "The next question: Grant."

Jordan shrugged. "I know still less about him. He's a technician. Trained in the Middle West, St. Louis, or Kansas City. Good man. Been here two or three years. Keeps his mouth shut, and minds his own business."

"What kind of technician? Would he have access to the gorilla tanks?"

The zoologist grinned. "Lieutenant, you mustn't get thinking of those tanks the way the newspaper headlines do! To us, there's nothing gruesome or dramatic about them, any more than there is about handcuffs to you. . . . Sure; Grant would know about the tanks. They were merely equipment. They weren't locked."

Grove answered the grin with twinkling eyes. "Okay. We cops have found out a few things, though. Grant, for instance, has been in court twice since coming to Manhattan."

"What for?"

"Street fighting."

"That youngster! Fighting?"

"In Yorkville. Before Pearl Harbor. He got into tangles —"

"You mean he's a Nazi?"

"He was fighting pro-Nazis. He started one minor riot by heckling a Bundist soapbox speaker."

The policeman smiled at the doctor. "You're on our blotter, too, I discovered."

Jordan glanced at Gail and flushed darkly. "It was an impulse."

Grove addressed the girl: "Imagine! Same charge: assault. He was let off with a caution."

Gail stared incredulously at the scientist.

He was still red, but he grinned. "Did I hang one on that guy! It was at the zoo here in the Park. Some ignorant busybody told some kids that a raccoon was a panda. I corrected him. The oaf argued with me. One thing led to another. He swung, and I flattened him, and he began yelling for help. He charged me with assault and I countercharged, and it came to nothing in the end."

The lieutenant folded his page of scrawled notes. He pushed back the doctor's chair. "Well, I'm tired and I bet you two are. . . . Did you bring that gorilla to America?"

Jordan frowned. "I dunno. I brought one for Shollt. It might be the same. Why?"

"Felton, I think it was, said you did. You did bring back a terrific load of stuff?"

"Yeah. I usually do."

Grove was at the door. "You birds get your stuff through customs easily, I take it?" He waited for Jordan's nod. "Be a marvelous chance for smuggling."

Jordan's eyebrows lifted. "It would. Matter of fact, I've had offers."

"Offers?"

"Well, one offer. Last trip. Chap in Freetown, a Britisher, tried to persuade me to cart home a lot of ivory. It was undoubtedly ivory taken illegally, though he told me the old cock-and-bull story about getting it from the place where elephants go to die."

Still the lieutenant did not leave. "Where'd you put that can of quartz?"

Both Gail and the doctor glanced at the cluttered table upon which the coffee can had stood. Jordan said, "Guess Evans came for it. He said he was going to have it examined."

"He didn't. I phoned him while you were talking to Martha Beal."

"It was there when we went out to dinner," Gail said.

The lieutenant's voice was troubled: "That's what I thought. Somebody walked in between eight and nine, and took it. As usual around here, it could have been anybody. . . . Good night, Jordan. 'Night, Miss Vincent. If I were you two I wouldn't stand in any dark rooms with your backs turned!"

Jordan pondered after the policeman had departed. Presently he took a key ring from his pocket and crossed the gloomy office. A chest stood under windows which overlooked the frozen Park. He unlocked it. "This is a rather nice case," he said modestly. "It belonged to a friend of mine, long since gone to his reward. Before that, it belonged to a rajah. Teak. For guns. I keep a few here — the old problem of no room at home. Want a look-see?"

The guns shone dully under a layer of dusty grease. Dr. Jordan picked out a medium-sized pistol and wiped it with waste. For a few minutes he worked expertly. He took cartridges from a box, inserted them, and dropped the pistol into his side jacket pocket. "You never know," he said.

They walked from the night-hung building together, for which the girl was glad. Jordan tried to take her mind off the doings of the long day. "Where's your home, Miss Vincent?"

"Washington."

"Family live there?"

"I haven't any family. Father died before I can remember. Mother ran a millinery shop in Detroit. She died four years ago."

"I see. Can I drop you? I'm taking a cab."

"Thanks."

Gail arrived at the Museum at a quarter of nine the next morning. It was an unsettled day — raw, with an indecisive threat of cold rain or wet snow. She ached a little from nervousness and lack of sleep. All night long she had kept wakening to mull over the events of the day before.

At the museum, she hurried from the elevator down the hall and turned into the office corridor. She banged squarely into somebody who had been making a turnabout, ricocheted, and looked up. It was Dr. David Felton. He had been pacing in front of the offices — pacing so anxiously he hadn't paid attention to her quick feet. That was all very plain in his manner. He began muttering apologies. His smooth, black pompadour was rumpled. He gesticulated. "Sorry. I've been waiting for Jordan."

"As a rule he doesn't get in till around ten." She took out her key and unlocked her door.

Dr. Felton was behind her. "I thought he might, though, today. I — er — maybe I'll wait."

He was wearing a gray suit today, she noticed automatically. Whatever kind he'd worn on the suspected night, it was gray now. Gray, mussed, and with a hole burned in the trouser-leg — by nervous smoking, no doubt.

Felton sat down. "Awful. Awful thing! I wasn't precisely a friend of the deceased, but to think of him wandering as usual out there in the gallery! And then clubbed to death!"

He rose and began to pace again. Gail wondered how he knew Dr. Weber had been killed in the gallery. It was not common knowledge, so far as she was aware. She eyed him, and he seemed to blanch under her scrutiny. "Won't wait, after all," he said curtly. "Thanks just the same!" He hurried from the room.

Gail sat down at her desk and thought that over. Presently she rose and followed him. He had gone back to his office. The door was shut. She could hear him on the telephone. His words weren't discernible but they sounded worried. She wondered if his colleague, Dr. Pinsch, were in the building. His office was a few doors away. She walked toward it, and Pinsch's voice came through the glass panel distinctly: "Of course not, Dave! Keep your shirt on!"

The voice inside the office lowered; Gail leaned against the door to try to catch the words. But she could hear nothing.

Then the door flew open, she lost her balance, and was forced to lunge into the office to regain it. Dr. Pinsch held the knob, looking angry and a little frightened. He was a small, fat man, sharp-eyed and sharp-tongued. He had stepped aside to let her stagger through the door. He said, "Well?"

Gail tried her best to dissemble: "I was coming to call on you. I have a list of things to ask you and Dr. Felton — about water tables in the Ujiji country."

His expression became crafty. "And another list to ask us about the murder of Paul Weber? I've already heard you and Jordan are stool pigeons for the police. I can't say that the staff appreciates it. It's surprising — in Jordan. You, coming from Washington, might be expected to be listening through keyholes."

Gail faced him. "All right! I was listening. Not because I work for the Government. But because I'm willing to help find out who killed a nice old man. You should be willing, too."

Dr. Pinsch grinned wryly. He pushed a chair beside his desk. "Sit down. Evans said you'd be interviewing me one day. Which is it — murder or geology?"

Gail said, "I'm embarrassed."

"You should be. Caught people usually are! I was talking to Dave. Dave Felton. He's frantic at the moment. The police called on him last night. As they did me. They have every reason to think that both he and I detested Weber, because we did. They have no reason to think we did away with Weber, because we didn't. But their attentions have seriously perturbed my friend. . . . And now we'll discuss Africa, if you wish."

She listened, and made the proper answers. He had covered up as neatly as possible for the telephone call and for Felton's nervous condition. She also thought that he would make an unpleasant, dangerous enemy. There was no way to tell exactly how his lifelong feud with Weber had affected him. It had enraged Dr. Felton. But Dr. Pinsch was different. For one thing, he was brainier.

She accepted his material, promised to come back when she had digested it, and left him as soon as she could.

Henry Grant and Garrison Lombardo had also been in the Museum that night. She knew them both. Her researches into the private counsels of Felton and Pinsch had been interesting; so she decided to continue.

Henry Grant's office, on the sixth floor, was unlocked and deserted. Like the other shops and labs, it was odorous and crammed with miscellaneous apparatus: chemicals, armatures on which specimens were mounted, fossil rocks, imitation trees and flowers, and wooden bases glued together and held by clamps. Henry was a super-repairman, as well as a taxidermist of a highly specialized sort. His coat and hat were in the room, on a hook; in his coat pocket was a copy of a magazine dealing with natural history. It had a pterodactyl on the cover.

A woman in a smock glanced in at the door, said, "Where's Mr. Grant?" and answered herself: "Down working on the deep-sea exhibits, isn't he?"

Gail said, "I'm sure I don't know," and went down to the main floor.

There were not many visitors in the exhibition halls as yet. The room which depicted life under the sea had been roped off. From behind the barrier came sounds of hammering. Gail ducked under the rope. In the faint, bluish light which represented sunshine fathoms below the surface of the sea, weird animals "swam" overhead and on all sides: sharks, turtles, and a gigantic manta ray.

Henry saw her and stopped hammering. "Hello, bright eyes!"

"'Morning."

"Studying submarine fauna? Is the War Department planning to tell divers what to look out for along the African coast? Or are you working for the Navy now?" He laughed, and then coughed.

Gail smiled. "I came to see you."

Henry jumped down from a perch behind the manta ray and put his hammer in a toolbox. "Good! Time for it, too."

"I came on account of Paul Weber."

"Oh." He was disappointed. "I thought you were going to wheedle me into buying you a cup of coffee in the cafeteria."

She shook her head. "Some day —"

"Your 'some days' don't show up often." His good humor was strained by his chagrin. "I don't know a blooming thing about Paul Weber. Hardly said ten words to him since I came to work here. And the police have already investigated me. Why bother about these old dead men, bright eyes, when there's us lively young fellers around?"

"He was a nice old man. Dr. Jordan was mighty fond of him."

"Jordan, eh?" Henry said speculatively. "You falling for teacher? Jordan's hardly your type. Too stuffy." He coughed again.

"He is not!"

"All right. He is your type, then. And I'm not. And I'm busy."

"You didn't see anybody Tuesday night after you looked in on me?"

"No, Miss Holmes, I didn't." Henry was peevish. "Frankly, no. I went home. I caught a cold. I had to wait half an hour for a bus. As I told the police, I worked late on the so-called night in question. Some kids had knocked a slab of fossil rock off a pedestal, and Dr. Evans buttered me into staying overtime to mend it, and I did. But I didn't see any killers sneaking up on old Weber and I didn't see any ghouls hauling his body up to the tank."

"Oh, all right," Gail said. "You don't need to be snippy."

"I'm not snippy! I've got a cold. And I don't like pretty-girl busybodies going around asking questions. Why do you bother your head with things like —? . . . Lookee. When I get over this cold and you get over your crush on Jordan, suppose we take in a movie?"

"Sure. You just decide what movie and I'll go meekly. I'm going now, in fact."

"So long, bright eyes!" He coughed.

There was still Garrison Lombardo, the M.D. Like Dr. Pinsch and Dr. Felton, he was on her list of staff members to interview for the War Department. Henry had been disappointing, but Dr. Lombardo might add something to the material she had collected from the two geologists.

He received her in a courtly manner. He would be delighted to put at her disposal any information he had about tropical medicine. The Ujiji country was fascinating from a clinical standpoint. It was refreshing to find that so charming and attractive a young lady had given her services to her country in this terrible emergency.

She took careful notes as Africa was discussed. He paced the floor, smiling, showing his white teeth, delicately brushing back his curly hair and fingering his mustache. She led the discussion away from African diseases to the topic of Dr. Weber's murder by such easy stages that Lombardo seemed unaware of the change.

His eyes rolled expressively. "What a loss! And what a terrible thing to do! The poor old man!"

"You were here?"

"Unfortunately. And the police have already discovered the fact."

"I suppose you didn't notice anything?"

"No. No, I didn't." He sighed and shook his head. "I didn't see Paul that evening. As it happens, though, I have what the police might consider an adequate motive for wanting him dead. It is a personal matter. Such minds, the police have! He was my friend. But they insist that I might have destroyed him. Could I — would

I — kill my friend and also sink him in a tank of preservative? It's unthinkable! The trouble is" — he smiled broadly — "I also had what they call an opportunity. I was not in my office, on Tuesday, for quite a while."

"Oh?" Gail said.

"I was stealing."

"Stealing?"

He nodded solemnly, and then laughed. "Imagine how unlucky! That night of all nights I decided to commit a small theft! Why? Because I dearly love my nephew, Angelo. On Sundays we build model airplanes. Last Sunday we were ready to paint our newest one. My nephew calls this one a dilly. Four feet over-all, with a gasoline motor! We needed aluminum paint, and, unfortunately, we had none. I thought it would be difficult to obtain because of the war and priorities. So I promised my nephew I would steal some from the paint shop in the Museum."

Gail found herself smiling. "And you did?"

"Of course! I merely worked late, as I often do, anyway. I went down to the paint shop. The man who takes care of the furnaces was pottering somewhere. I heard him but I did not see him. I stole — in a bottle, some varnish — in a bag, the powdered aluminum. I have an absent mind. I left it somewhere here and remembered it only this morning. Now, when I looked, I find it has been taken. The police, I suppose."

"You told them?"

"Of course! Otherwise they would think I had been killing my friend."

Gail rose to go. Dr. Lombardo rose, too.

"You've been very kind —"

He bowed. He came around his desk. He looked at her with a too-luminous light in his dark eyes. Gail backed a little bit, but he merely held out his hand. "Charming!" he said.

So she held out her hand. He seized it, kissed the back of it, and a moment later kissed her shoulder and her cheek.

He was talking. "You are so beautiful!" he said. "So often, every day, I have gone out of my way just to catch glimpses of you. So ravishing. I distress myself with it. Now I distress you with it — and I cannot help it!" He had taken her chin in his hand before she realized that she was going to be in the midst of a very long kiss in a very short time.

"Just let go of me," Gail said quietly, "or I'll hang one on you."

Dr. Lombardo persisted, with ardor. So Gail hung one on him. Possibly he had expected to be slapped, at the worst. He had certainly not expected a fast jab from a tight and quite competent right fist. He let go, embraced himself, and swore softly.

Dr. Jordan was sitting on the chest under the window, smoking a cigarette. He said abruptly, "Where have you been? I —"

She told him in some detail: Felton, anxious and rumpled; his call to the deceptive Dr. Pinsch; the offhand

Henry Grant; the grandiloquent medico. She left out the part she still felt in her knuckles.

He shrugged. "What have you got for all that running around, though?"

"I've got a concise picture of the Ujiji geology from Dr. Pinsch. And a list of the diseases in the area from Lombardo. He's not so very dangerous, really. Just — ultra-male. And I've also got suspicions. I'm practically sure, now, that Felton and Pinsch know something. They're hiding something. And they're in it together. Henry Grant's too nonchalant to be guilty of anything —"

"There's a woman's intuition!"

"— and Dr. Lombardo's guile isn't dangerous — to men."

Jordan shook his head impatiently. He came slowly to his feet. "Let's call on Martha. She's just doing over what the police will do also. But she should be finished."

Gail followed Jordan around the "L" in the hall to the distant door of the woman scientist's quarters. Again the masculine voice boomed, "Come in!" Again Gail found herself staring around at the incongruous disorder in the room that had served for so long as a working place, a living area, and a dump heap for the trivia of existence.

Martha Beal was listless. "I worked with the sample," she said. "It's Type Three. Paul's type. Not necessarily *his*, I realized. But it does seem likely that he was struck down in the gallery."

Jordan thanked her. "I guess I was over-zealous last night, Martha. I shouldn't have asked you to do what I did. I was unconsciously unkind. And the police did it all ahead of me. No doubt they've analyzed their samples, too."

Gail did not want to look at the crumpled, ugly, beaten figure. She kept staring at the room. She had a feeling that it was vaguely different from the way it had been on the evening before. Something had been moved, altered, replaced, or taken away. She couldn't decide what it was. And the room did not smell so strongly of chemicals; its morning scent was fresher and more familiar. Those thoughts barely reached the level of registration, for Dr. Jordan was already rising.

Martha Beal leaned forward and said, "Whatever you do, Horace, find the murderer! All last night I lay thinking —"

"I know. All last night a good many of us lay thinking, Martha."

"— and I knew how wrong I have been! I loved Paul. He never loved me. I have clung for thirty years to a chimera, a lie, to self-deceit. He was a good man. He was good to me, even, not to assent to a marriage that would have been a tragedy. You were his pet — his protégé. He must be avenged."

They went out.

"Love," Jordan said, as they walked together through the building, "is every bit as dangerous and wounding as it is rewarding."

Gail answered "Yes" in a small voice.

He glanced at her, opened his mouth, and said nothing. They sat down in the office again.

"Whom do we work for now?" she asked. "The War Department or the police?"

He broke away from an abstraction. "Police," he answered. "I'm wrought up over this business. I don't think I'd concentrate very well on African flatlands. Would you?"

"No. Any ideas?"

"None. Only a plan. I think we ought to put down everything we've seen, heard, thought, suspected, guessed, and wondered about. Make a complete dossier on what happened to Paul, like the one we were making on the Ujiji country."

She smiled. "Even with maps?"

"If maps are necessary. Sure. Begin, not at the beginning, but with right now, and go backward. Put down all you observed about Martha, and all I did. All about Felton and the others. About Evans, Taylor, the guards, the whole business."

"It'll be quite a job," she said.

"Better than hoping we'll think of something, or that Grove will send for us."

"Then let's do it."

The rest of the morning was spent in compiling data. They filled two yellow blocks of ruled paper with their penned notes. Each of them tried to enter every observed detail, every inflection, every mood. They ate lunch hurriedly, in the basement cafeteria. They took advantage of their presence on that floor to look into the paint shop. They re-explored the gallery of Akeley Hall.

At three-thirty, when they had virtually completed their stock-taking, Evans phoned to request Dr. Jordan's presence at an emergency meeting of the Board.

Gail sat alone in the gathering gloom, studying the yellow pages. Occasionally, as she read, she made new entries on the margin. The account left glaring blanks. They didn't know for sure where Dr. Weber had been killed. Or where — or if — his body had been temporarily concealed. They didn't know what had been used as a weapon.

Gail thought about the matter of a weapon in connection with her suggestion that the murder might have been impulsive rather than planned. If the latter, the weapon would have been brought, and disposed of. But if it had been an act only momentarily premeditated, the killer would not, in all likelihood, have had a weapon on his person. He would have used something in the vicinity. He would have seen Dr. Weber enter the gallery and gone off to seek a tool. Gone to seek it in the Museum, a place where, as Evans had indicated, there were ten thousand blunt instruments.

Gail left the office.

The immediate exterior of the gallery was empty. But the place connected with other halls, with passages and corridors, with stairs, and the heavily ornamented staircases. The choice of weapons, even within a half-minute's walking distance, was con-

siderable. Every available foot of wall space, in some areas, had been used for exhibits. And since many of them were of no intrinsic value, they were not attached firmly or kept behind glass. Maces and battle-axes, halberds, poleaxes, broadswords, American Indian war clubs, Australian boomerangs, small meteorites, petrified wood, tile from a Roman bath — each, in its way, suggested grim assassination.

Gail kept ruling out the ones that were impractical and the ones that would not satisfy the contour of the wound in the dead man's skull — a broad, curved depression.

With a sudden prickling sense, she realized that one of the weapons displayed on the wall had a familiar connotation. For a little while she could not place it. Then it came to her: the boomerang. There had been a boomerang somewhere — somewhere — and she remembered. *Everything*, Gail had noted, *from shrunken human heads to headache remedies, from brown bottles of acid to old shoes, a party hat, and a boomerang!* There had been a boomerang in Martha Beal's office on the night before; this morning Gail had sensed a change. *The boomerang was gone!*

She returned to the stairhead where the Australian weapons hung. There were three of them — dark, angled, polished. Upon two, was the inevitable accumulation of dust. The topmost, just within Gail's reach, was not dusty. On the contrary, it shone with the luster of a fresh coat of varnish. Gail, coming closer, realized that it was the smell of varnish which had obscured the chemical odors in Martha Beal's room that morning and given it a recognizable freshness.

Gail re-entered the office. Dr. Jordan had returned from the Board meeting. He was sitting by the window, staring at the dismal coming of night. When he heard her, he stood up, electrically, only to have whatever he was going to say quenched by her flow of words. She finished dramatically: "I suppose she could have learned to throw one, somewhere! I can imagine her, standing across the gallery or in the big room below and hurling that thing at him!"

Jordan stared. "It wasn't thrown, Miss Vincent — if it was used at all. Thrown, it hits edgewise. I know. I was struck, once, in northern Australia. Waited a month for a boat and about the only amusement was boomerangs. Edge-on, a boomerang makes a terrible wound, but a narrower one than the one we're dealing with. This one, and I'll agree you've probably found the weapon, must have been used flat-side-on. As a club."

"Hadn't we ought to call Grove right away?"

"In a minute." He sat down again. "The Board meeting was stupid. A few of the city's richer men tried to blame Evans for letting a murder happen in these holy premises. He was politely 'scandalized' and 'helpless.' I sat, thinking of other things. Thinking of our list. And I thought of something rather interesting."

Gail said, "I'm sure Lieutenant Grove —"

"— ought to have *all* the facts we can possibly gather. What I thought of is that Felton doesn't smoke."

Gail looked blank.

"I mean," Jordan went on, "you mentioned that he was untidy. You said he'd burned a hole in his suit — smoking. But he *doesn't smoke*. It isn't much. But put it with the possibility that he *may* have worn a blue suit in here on Tuesday and *gone home in a gray one*. The one he wore today. Then what? Then something else burned that hole. And what did that? Well, the mind jumps naturally to the thought that he may have scorched his gray suit at the time he was burning up his blue one."

Gail sat down abruptly. "Of course! Then you think *all three* of them —"

"I don't think anything yet. Two of them could easily be acting to cover up the third. Let's just add this to our notes."

He sat down at his desk. He took out his fountain pen and prepared to augment their collection of data. His pen had run dry. He shook it impatiently and unscrewed the top of his ink bottle. He thrust in his pen, pressed the valve lever, and frowned. He said, "Funny," and took out the pen. He tilted the bottle. Then, to Gail's surprise, he reached for an empty glass specimen dish and poured the ink into it. There was a clinking sound, and then with a blotter he fished out of the dish what looked like a glass pebble of good size.

"Some sort of stone," he said wonderingly. "I hit it with my pen point." He walked to the sink and washed the stone, disregarding the ink that stained his fingers. "Looks like a chip of that quartz, only it isn't yellow." He held it up to the light. Both of them bent forward intently. "Sparkles," he said. He carried the dish of ink to the sink, dumped it, and washed the dish. Then he took the stone between his thumb and forefinger and drew it across the glass side of the vessel. It left a long scratch.

"I'll be back," he said. "Wait."

While he was gone, the telephone rang. Gail answered.

"Hello, gorgeous. It's me. Henry. Sorry I was churlish this morning."

"That's all right. You have a cold."

"So I do, darn it! Have you solved the crime and won the war yet?"

"Not quite yet, on either one."

"What about that movie date we were discussing? Seriously?"

"Seriously, I'm too busy. But, seriously, when I'm not, I'll let you know. My social life is thin these days. Nil, in fact."

"Okay. I feel better. And, look. About Tuesday night. I didn't see anything. Not really. I saw Pinsch and Felton, though, and they were talking about Weber. I remembered it after you'd gone. They were looking for him, I think. Maybe the police should know about that item. You tell 'em, will you? Cops irritate me."

"Sure. Where are they?"

"Down on your floor. . . . Well, phone me before I pine away."

Dr. Jordan hurried back into the office. She told Henry she'd call soon, and hung up.

"Who was that?"

"Henry Grant. Trying to date me."

For a moment she thought he was going to show signs of jealousy. Instead, he said, "Talented kid!" and jumped excitedly to the matter in hand: "It's a diamond, all right! Uncut. Smith says it's worth about twenty thousand, as is. So I guess we'd better not take more notes or gather more facts. We'd better get Grove!"

But Homicide reported that Lieutenant Grove was out, was not expected, and could not be reached. Dr. Jordan left his name and an urgent request that he be called as soon as Grove reported in. Then he tipped back his chair and said, "Miss V., who'd hide an uncut diamond worth twenty thousand dollars in my inkwell? And why?"

"I don't know. It's crazy! I'm losing my mind, I think. Can't we do *anything?*"

"One thing: Supposing, still, that Felton burned up a suit of clothes — obviously, in our supposition, because it was bloodstained — he must have burned it here in the Museum, since he went out in other clothes. Where would he do it? If there's one thing the guards do look out for, it's fire. The only place I can think of is the incinerator."

"You mean — we'd better look there?"

Jordan grinned. "I mean we'd have to sift the ashes in it on the chance something didn't burn entirely and the further chance that it hasn't been cleaned since Tuesday night. Are you game? It's a dirty job and one I'd hate to be caught at by the wrong person, if we're on any track at all."

Gail nodded.

Even Jordan wasn't sure of his route. He dodged quietly through the cellar. The workmen had gone. Overhead, the exhibition floors were empty of visitors. It was nearing six.

The incinerator was a small, kiln-like structure in the quadrangle behind the main building. Jordan had provided himself with a segment of old window screen and a coal shovel. Enough light fell from the windows of the rooms in use to make it possible for him to shovel the smoldering contents of the incinerator into two large empty ash cans. He rolled them back into the cellar. Gail was shivering from her vigil just inside the door.

Together they began the job of sifting the two cans of charred debris and ashes. They recovered paper clips, bits of broken glass, some bottles, and two tin cans. And then, in the mess, Jordan saw something that made him say, "Hold it!" Gail stopped shaking the screen. Jordan plucked out a hook-like object about an inch long, made of flat metal.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Felton's tailor will know for sure," Jordan answered slowly. "But somebody's tailor sewed it into somebody's trousers, for a clasp, at the waistline. There'll be another metal piece here, a narrow one, for an eye. This is the

book. But we can let Grove's men go on hunting from this point. It would be quite a coincidence — wouldn't it — if somebody else had just happened to have been burning up a pair of trousers here in the last few days? No sign of fabric, though. A thorough job. What do you say we wash up, leave our restaurant telephone number, eat, and come back and wait for Grove in my office?"

The lieutenant put in an appearance at nine o'clock that evening. He was brusque and patronizing until they had finished a long, joint recital. Then he looked from one to the other and whistled softly. "We could use you two permanently," he said. "Now, lemme get the picture. You think all three were in it?"

Gail interrupted, "Four, I just thought. That is, if you didn't pick up the aluminum paint Lombardo says he stole for his nephew."

"Pick it up? Us? No."

"Then Dr. Lombardo was lying, after all! He *didn't* steal paint for his nephew! He went down to get something to put on that boomerang so that no blood or fingerprints could ever be found on it. Varnish. He just brought along the powdered aluminum to make a good story. Because he said he never did take it home."

Grove thought a moment, after she had clarified that statement. "You think Lombardo and Martha Beal, Felton and Pinsch all worked together to do away with the doctor, then? They all had reasons, at that! Hate, for the woman. Hate and spite and an old feud, for the two geologists. Desperate need of money, for Lombardo, and an expectation that he'd get some through Weber's death. Lombardo, incidentally, needs the money, all right. He owes, not thirty thousand, but about five thousand, to a gambler who has ways and means of collecting. So you think —?"

"They took the boomerang off the wall," Gail said rapidly. "One of them followed Dr. Weber into the gallery and struck him with it. Dr. Felton carried the body to a hiding place and burned his bloody clothes afterward. Martha Beal took charge of the boomerang. Lombardo got some varnish for her. And Pinsch — well, he was probably there, since his partner was. They thought, after they transferred the body to the gorilla tank the next day, that they had plenty of time to work in. It might have lain there for months. So Martha didn't chance putting back the boomerang right away. Felton kept wearing the gray suit so that, months from now, nobody'd remember when —"

Grove held up his hand. "All right. All right. I'll see Felton's tailor in the morning. If that's the kind of clip he uses I'll start with Felton."

"You mean you aren't going to arrest anybody right now?"

Grove shook his head. "Just assign men to 'em all. I'll phone you in the morning. There are still a couple of matters I don't get."

The way he said that worried Gail. "What?"

"Where's the can of quartz? And where'd that diamond come from?" He looked at them intently. "I'd like to take it along."

Jordan handed it over. "We talked about this. I think, myself, the diamond was in old Paul's pocket."

"Why?"

The zoologist shrugged. "I couldn't say. Talisman, maybe. He liked gems. Something he may have carried around for years. Or, perhaps, something he had with him that he intended to present to the Museum. He's made a lot of gifts to the Hall of Gems. I think the people who killed him, searched him, and probably decided to plant that stone in my office just to throw off anybody who found it. Maybe they expected to steal it back later. I never lock the place. And I almost never use my ink bottle."

"And the quartz?" Grove persisted.

"Why don't the police do a little of the work?" Jordan responded.

Grove winked. "I accept that. All right. You'd better knock off and go to the movies or something. I'll call you tomorrow."

He did call. Gail and Dr. Jordan were on hand before nine. He telephoned about ten. He said, "The tailor says it's one of his. I'm sending for Felton now."

The rest of the morning passed — and the afternoon. Toward five, Grove phoned again. "I'm getting nowhere," he said. "That is — not yet. Felton's mum. I sent for Martha Beal. Her story is that somebody put that boomerang in her office. She doesn't lock hers, any more than you do. She says she didn't even notice it until just before you two first called on her. She examined it, thought for a while she'd brought it in some time and then forgotten it.

"Next — I'm still following her story, which could easily be true — she says she noticed blood on it, and got panicky. She says, rightly enough, there was plenty to make us suspect her. So she looked through the other offices for some stain or lacquer that would make the boomerang proof against examination, and found what she wanted in Lombardo's office. She was coming back with it when you barged down the hall. That scared her and she ducked between the cabinets. You spotted her, so she cached the aluminum paint before she came out.

"She got it later, scrubbed the boomerang, dried it, put on the varnish, dumped the aluminum powder down the sink, and replaced the weapon before she went home. I had to tell her only enough to get her started, and she spilled all that, including that piece about Lombardo's aluminum paint. Lombardo does have a nephew, Angelo, and he does make model planes with the kid Sundays. And there's a trace of aluminum powder in the woman's sink. So where are we?"

Jordan repeated the call almost verbatim to Gail. "It seems plausible — in fact, it couldn't be coincidence. She either told him the absolute truth or they're all extraordinary liars."

"What about Felton?"

"Nothing. Grove's keeping him. He just won't talk. So far, anyway, the threat of indicting him for murder hasn't budged him. He's staying in custody over Sunday. Well —?"

"We go home," Gail said. "I have a headache."

Sunday was bright and clear, and the longest day of Gail's life. She stayed in her room in her midtown hotel, hoping and expecting that she would be called. But her telephone did not ring once all day long.

Gail went to bed early and continued her daylong effort to divert herself by minutely reading the Sunday papers. But even the war news did not hold her attention. Once, a small item briefly registered on her consciousness because it mentioned diamonds: "Cartel Operator Sought," the paragraph was headed. "Konrad A. Zweissman, retired diamond expert and amateur explorer, at one time investigated by the Justice Department in connection with cartel activities said to be inimical to American interests, is being sought again by federal authorities. His last known residence was Catskill Vista, in New York."

The smallness and irrelevance of the item gave her a frantic feeling. She threw the paper aside. For a long time she considered telephoning Horace Jordan just to break the tense monotony of waiting. But she decided he would think she was being silly. She put out her light, finally. Friday's excitement at having accomplished so much became, by Sunday night, an almost unbearable feeling that she and Dr. Jordan had accomplished nothing at all. . . .

In the morning she dressed feverishly and hurried to the Museum. Dr. Jordan appeared an hour earlier than usual and he, also, looked as if he had spent a wracking weekend. They waited all morning, relieved somewhat by mutual companionship. Then, just before they left for lunch, Grove came. He sauntered up the hall, and threw his coat and hat on a chair.

"Well?" Jordan spoke impatiently.

Grove shrugged. "I've got Felton's story. Got it last night. And Pinsch has just corroborated it. Probably they're lying, but I'm darned if I can break it down! And I'd hate to accuse one of them wrongly. They'd raise unholy Ned! It's like Martha Beal's story — so simple you almost have to believe it. Stupid, maybe, but the kind of thing that stuffed shirts like Felton will do when they think they're in a jam. He said, when he finally sent for me, and he said it all without prompting, that he and Pinsch found Weber lying dead in Akeley Hall.

"Seems they'd gone to the old man's office, and from there around the Museum, hunting him. They knew he was in; knew his habits. They had some fresh geological debate to needle him with. That's why they were looking for him that night. They pushed into Akeley Hall. The gallery. And he was lying there dead, with a boomerang on the floor beside him."

"And you believed that!" Jordan was indignant.

"Wait a minute. Wait till I fill in. Felton saw, at once, that if he and Pinsch raised a hue and cry, they'd be suspected. He had near hysterics, at first. Then he insisted that they should remove every trace of the crime in order to keep themselves clear. Pinsch didn't want to until what he calls the 'sardonic side of making the old man vanish,' hit him. *He* thought of the gorilla tank, naturally. He made Felton do the heavy work.

"They wrapped Weber in a tarpaulin — and remember, they both told the identical story separately, though they've had ample time to prepare it. They hid the body up on this floor, in the blower-room, where almost nobody ever goes. They searched Paul. That diamond, they said, was in his pants pocket. They put it in your inkwell. One for you to ponder — and us cops if the thing was ever found. They put the boomerang in that incredible morass Martha Beal calls her office, thinking that she was an even better suspect than you or themselves — if, when, and as.

"Next, Felton says, they went down and burned his suit. It was easy. There was nobody in the cellar at all. Not around the incinerator, anyhow. Felton had had that gray suit in a box in his office for two months, since late fall. He'd taken it into town for repairs and neglected to carry it home. Says he detests to carry packages on trains — imagine that! They figured, after that, on at least a month during which Paul Weber would be merely a missing person. In that time, they thought, they could either dispose of the body or leave it where it was to create the havoc it did when Taylor found it. Only, he found it quicker than they were prepared for. Even that metal pants clasp would have gone out in the ashes on Saturday, though it seems they'd never thought of that. The only other thing Felton did, that he calls a 'mistake,' was to hesitate about going out on a cold night, late, in a thin suit. The guard noticed and remembered it."

Jordan said, "Well, I'll be damned!"

"Me, too! Of course, we're still holding him. It isn't legal to move murdered people around. But neither is it necessarily a solution to who killed Weber."

"What are you going to do next?"

Grove shrugged. "I wish I knew. Any thoughts?"

Jordan shook his head. So did Gail.

"I'm gonna eat," Grove said. He departed perplexedly.

And presently Jordan left for lunch. Gail felt in no mood to accept his invitation. She went out alone and had coffee and hamburger in a hole-in-the-wall. Dr. Jordan didn't come back after lunch, and Gail started going through the mail that had accumulated in the office for some days. It lay piled on the table nearest the door. In it was an unwrapped copy of a natural history magazine, presumably left there for Dr. Jordan. The current issue. There was a flamingo on the cover.

Gail began to look through it. Ordinarily it would have absorbed her interest. Now she jumped from one picture to the next, feeling frustrated, lonely, and disappointed in everything.

By and by it occurred to her that this wasn't the current issue. She looked at the cover again. The date was correct but, she thought, there was a pterodactyl on the current issue. She wondered why she had thought that, and recalled the copy of the magazine that had been in Henry Grant's pocket. He must have been reading an old issue. She asked herself why, because she had fallen into the habit, in the past week, of asking the "why" of everything. She decided to find out. It would be better to do even that than just to sit here.

In the library she found the file of magazines she wanted. The one with the flying reptile on the outside was two months old. She carried it back to the office. She leafed through it as she had the first, and she found nothing that seemed relevant. Defiantly she put it aside. For a long time she compelled herself to work on the notes about Ujiji for the War Department. When she ran out of will power it was growing dark again. New York City was wrapping itself in veil after veil of winter mist. It would be night again before closing time. She switched on her light, and once more examined the magazine she had taken from the library.

This time she decided to be more methodical. She began with the table of contents. She got no farther. One of the articles was entitled, "Semiprecious Stones of the Amazon Basin." Its author was Konrad A. Zweissman.

At first the name was tantalizing. She seemed to associate it with something that had happened long ago. But, after much frowning concentration, its relationship came back to her. She had seen the name only yesterday in the newspapers: "Diamond expert . . . sought by the Justice Department . . . cartel activities inimical to American interests . . ."

She sat rigidly. A new idea had leaped into her mind. The things they had neglected suddenly began to take new forms. The can of quartz and the man who wanted to smuggle ivory; the Boers who had actually been German agents and Paul Weber's excitement on the night he had come to see Jordan; the possible significance of the old mineralogist's last stroll through the Museum and his enjoyment of his joke.

Part of her thinking was logical, part guesswork, part intuition. But it began with Zweissman, the man who was apparently an enemy agent and wanted by the FBI. A man who was an authority on diamonds. A man who had sufficient prestige to write an article for a natural history magazine. There had been one diamond — large, valuable, uncut, inexplicable. Had it been in that coffee can of quartz samples? And, if it had, wasn't it possible that there had been *more* diamonds like it?

Ujiji was a long way from the

Transvaal, where diamonds are found. But it was in Africa. Couldn't Nazi agents have gathered together a hoard of gems and entrusted them to someone who would get them out of Africa? Couldn't they have planned to send them, via America and Japan, to Hitler's war chest? So as not to risk them in Holland, the usual destination? Wasn't war coming soon to Holland? And wouldn't any such diamonds have to be *smuggled?* They would never get out, otherwise. And couldn't Horace Jordan have been made the unwitting victim of the affair?

Was the "Englishman" who sounded him out about smuggling old ivory, not English, but another German agent? Was he, perhaps, testing Jordan? And when he found Jordan uninterested, hadn't he nonetheless secreted his precious hoard in the can of quartz, where it would be magnificently hidden? Where even a customs inspector would probably not have made any distinction between the clear yellow fragments and the still clearer white ones?

Then what? Jordan, unknowingly, brought diamonds into America. Presumably, the agents on this side had a plan to intercept them. A paid agent "placed" inside the Museum. Or a staff member hard up for cash. Or a member secretly on their side. Somebody. Only — and Gail became certain she was on the right track — only, Dr. Jordan *hadn't* brought the quartz directly to the Museum! He hadn't stored it in any usual place, such as his home, either. No doubt his home had been carefully, tracelessly searched. But he had lacked room at home. He had sent the can of quartz, with some other things, to his sister's house in New Jersey, and there it had sat for three years, while baffled agents sought furiously for it!

It had reappeared on Tuesday — brought into the Museum by Dr. Jordan and turned over to Weber. Somebody had seen the coffee can, and, from that instant on, the old doctor had been in fearful danger.

Some time in the evening he had dumped out the quartz, had seen, perhaps at a glance, just what it was, and then — what lay beneath it. He had verified his discovery. Marveled over it. Come to see Jordan, maybe, at dinnertime, and missed him. Wandered around, excitedly. Carrying in his pocket one of the diamonds, with which to confront Jordan.

But Paul Weber had missed Jordan. He had written down the basic analysis of the yellow quartz as a "joke" — a joke, since he probably thought Jordan knew the different, colorless stones also were in the can but did not realize their worth. Then, having missed Jordan, Weber had gone out, leaving the can and the quartz — but not the diamonds. He had said, vaguely, that, "it would keep," and that he had "taken care of things."

If there had been many diamonds worth twenty thousand dollars apiece, that could have meant only one thing: He had hidden them. Certainly, he would not have left them lying about

in his office. Perhaps, even then, he was worried. Perhaps he had seen a face looking in at him or had heard stealthy footsteps. But he had surely concealed the diamonds which Gail had hypothesized, whether he had been alarmed by anything or not.

Gail capped that brilliant piece of deduction by another. There was no place to hide jewels in the gallery of Akeley Hall. But old Paul had another haunt, one to which he possessed the key: the Hall of Gems. There, he was at home. And if the diamonds could be exquisitely camouflaged in a can of quartz chips, they could be concealed in the same way, and just as effectively, somewhere in the Hall of Gems.

Gail raced through the long, somber corridor. Her feet pattered on the stone stairs. She hurried into the Hall of Gems. The lights were on and the vast chamber gleamed like the cave of a genie. The extreme beauty of the place struck her. She began moving past the exhibits, searching intently. In the room were perhaps a dozen persons. But it would soon be closing time. A uniformed guard was already standing at the gate. She read labels: beryl, topaz, amethyst, citrine, which looked like the quartz in the coffee can.

Why, though, was Dr. Weber killed, she wondered? Then she knew. Even to be *aware* of the existence of the precious stones was to menace their delivery to Germany. He had known too much. Jordan didn't know. Weber had died, and the search for the treasure, concealed again by him, had been resumed. It was surely still going on.

She walked around a case filled with porphyrite and peered into its back. Nothing . . .

All that Martha had said, all that Felton and Pinsch had reported, and the absurd story of Lombardo — all were true. They had done what they had admitted, and nothing more. Tourmaline, jade, onyx . . .

She came to a large geode in a special case. She drew her breath and bent nearer. A geode, the sign explained, is stone within a stone, a nodule formed in a rock pocket by seeping minerals. Its interior, as a result, is filled with crystals, except for the center, which is usually hollow. This stone was about the size of her head. It had been sliced through, so that a "lid" could be removed. It lay in the case, like a jack-o'-lantern on its side.

In it, she saw the glittering, transparent arrangements of crystals that had "grown" toward the center. They were in parallel stalks about as thick as her fingers. Beyond them, in the back, where the light barely made them distinguishable and where no human being would ever have noticed their differentness, if that person had not been looking for it, were many more crystals. These were not attached.

The diamonds Dr. Weber had found could have lain in the geode for a century, undetected. It furnished a superb hiding place for them.

When she saw them in the shadow

within the stone, masked by the crystal fingers of larger and therefore more spectacular prisms, she could hardly believe her senses. She — Gail — had figured it out and proved she was right! The myriad crystals which were part of the geode consisted, the sign said, of quartz, or SiO_2. So, perhaps, Dr. Weber's joke had included a sly hint of the hiding place of the gems, a hint which he could have interpreted!

The next thought that entered her mind was one that made her afraid.

Dr. Weber had found the diamonds. And died. Did the murderer know where they were now? Had he located them yet? Was he, even at this instant, in the Hall with her, watching? He had obviously stolen the coffee can from Dr. Jordan's office and found they were not in it.

Fearfully, she looked around. In the dull electric light the few remaining people seemed harmless enough. A warning bell and the urging of the guards would soon send them on their way to the elevators and the exits.

Gail left the Hall of Gems. She crossed the Hall of the Age of Man, with its towering mammoth. Beyond, were the elevators. One car closed its gate and started down as she approached. She would take the next, whichever way it went. People were already gathering. Then she decided not to take it. The chances that she was even now being watched were minute. But what if she were? Suppose the murderer had been one of the guards? The guard now entering the Hall of Gems?

She turned toward the staircase that led up to the fifth floor, and observed that Dr. Evans was standing at its foot, talking to another man. Near-panic seized her. Suppose it was Dr. Evans, and he had been watching her? She walked hastily into the room beyond. It was filled with fossil mammals. She could go on around to the north elevators. Dr. Evans, she thought, had every right to be talking to a man on the exhibition floor.

But her sense of normalcy crumbled steadily. She went on, almost at a trot, into the room that held fossil reptiles, the room that held her phobia, also. Beyond that were the cretaceous dinosaurs and, beyond them, a hallway.

The closing bell was sounding somewhere. A guard called to her that it was time to leave. She nodded; the man went on. Above her, now, towered the mighty piles of brown bones that had once been the frames of living animals — gigantic biological machines. The bell rang again. The guard's voice was far behind her. And the lights went out.

They flashed out in sections, but very rapidly. The last half of them went dark all together, as if a fuse had blown. Gail stopped stock-still. Coincidence? The footsteps of the departing visitors echoed ahead and behind. An iron gate clanged. Full of a new horror, Gail rushed toward the hall. Light from it silhouetted the ribs and vertebrae of the monsters. She felt sweat leak down her sides under her dress. For a moment she considered running back. She looked

around — into the dim, cavernous vault behind her. She turned again.

The gate to the hall was moving. Then the guard who had his hand on it suddenly let go, and the hand vanished. Beyond him, she heard a mutter and a muffled cry of "Fire!"

An elevator door calmly opened. The last of the people in the hall entered it with a rush and it went down. A thin vine of smoke was swinging down the distant passageway.

She heard a low, bubbling sound, like a whisper, and, even as it started, she dodged. Something hard and heavy crashed beyond her and slithered on the polished floor. Gail knew then.

The gate behind her clanged shut. She was trapped. She screamed for help, her voice splitting the darkness. With an instinct that was repellent even as it made her act, she slid into the murk at the side of the room, out of the pale, uncertain light that shone through its middle. Now she could see the monsters dimly. They were like titanic cattle, staring and grazing in the gloom. Only there was no flesh on them and no skin. Swiftly, breathing with desperate care so as not to make a sound, she slipped off her shoes. The person who had thrown the missile at her was in the room. In her stocking feet she began to hurry along the bare, smooth stone floor.

Once, she distinctly heard the soft rap of lightly running feet. Then she heard nothing for a while. She moved around cases and skeletons, putting distance between her and the place where the tapping sound had originated. But the move only sent her deeper into the vaulted chamber, toward the end where the gate was already closed and locked. In the corridor there was still smoke and confused shouting. Sheer horror, she realized, was rapidly weakening her.

A cough, dry, low, and muffled, sounded briefly. The hair rose on the nape of her neck; she knew for certain — everything.

She tiptoed along. On a dais, between Gail and the hall, was the figure of another dinosaur, a horizontal ladder of enormous ribs with huge, flared horns. Gail ducked under the heavy silk cord that roped it off. She put a tentative foot on the great knee bone, tested it, and heaved herself up, like a child climbing into a tree. The thick, splayed bones, as big as a good-sized table, silently received her. She crouched on them rigidly.

The reek of smoke was now permeating the darkness. It wasn't like any Gail had ever smelled before. In the corridor men were shouting more loudly. From far away came the sizzle of an extinguisher. Below, on the floor of the chamber, was another sound — the same cough, muffled and horrid. Then Gail could vaguely make out a figure. It came forward in a crouch. The distant source of faint light shone hideously on the eyeballs for an instant. Afterward, it made a glint in Henry Grant's hand, the glint of a gun. He was coming quickly, but with caution, peering into every recess, and — she observed with a last desperate

surge of horror — looking up into the colossal skeletons, too. He would not fail to see her.

The elevator banged again. Feet ran. A broad brogue came clearly to her ears: "It was a smokepot, Doc!"

Then Dr. Jordan's voice: "Get those lights on!"

"The boys are busy with 'em now."

Gail saw the figure below come to a halt. An ecstasy of fear welled in her. She did not dare to scream. It would give away her hiding place. Then Grant might not only kill her, but Dr. Jordan, also.

The gate was pushed wide open again. The guard said, "I think maybe that scream came from the room here — the one that went dark. Probably a scared tourist!"

Horace Jordan was coming in. She could see him clearly, silhouetted against the door. His voice was like broken glass. "Yeah, Kelly. If it was the girl I've been looking for the last half-hour, and anything has happened to her, I'm going to break you apart! She's the finest kid in the world! You shouldn't have left this spot!"

Her eyes darted back to Grant. She could see his teeth, now, faintly white; his arm was coming up. She knew what she had to do, then. Her voice was clear and loud: "Look out, Horace!"

The figure at the door dodged inside. Grant's gun split the darkness. Instantly, Horace Jordan's gun shot back. She saw Grant dive for cover in the deeper darkness. As he plunged, he fired again. The bullet ripped the great bones that concealed her. With the second flash came a second reply. For a few, infinite seconds, the two guns flashed in the dark. Then there came the sound of metal clattering on the floor.

The lights went on.

Grant was holding his arm, and blood was spurting from it. Dr. Jordan was standing just inside the door with his pistol in his hand. He blinked, glanced once at Grant, and started searching the great, skeleton-filled chamber for the girl.

"I'm right up here, H-H-Horace," she said, and then the dam broke and she burst into tears.

The zoologist ran. Gail half tumbled out of the thing of which she had been most afraid in the world. But she wasn't even thinking of dinosaurs. She was thinking of the way Horace Jordan had spoken about her.

He held her while she wept and shook. Behind them, the guards were taking charge of Henry Grant.

The doctor spoke, finally, in a wondering tone. "Horace," he repeated. "You called me Horace! And you're crying. Now, I must say, that's damn' human of you!"

Gail responded in a faint but determined tone, "Of course I'm human! If you only knew *how* human!"

She felt his arms tighten. "That," he said, "is what I aim to find out. I've been afraid for months you weren't real. The package was so irresistibly attractive, I couldn't believe that it held more than a mere brain. And brains, around here, are a nickel

apiece! This is a lousy way to make love — and a particularly lousy place!"

She giggled. . . .

Dr. Evans was there in the familiar office, and Lieutenant Grove. Gail had been talking for quite a while and Horace Jordan was getting impatient.

"How does it happen," Evans asked, "that you were afraid of me, since you had figured out so much? I mean this afternoon on the stairs?"

"Because it was only figuring. I wasn't certain of anything. I thought it was Henry, because of that issue of the magazine. He'd been reading that article, I imagined. Or maybe he translated it. Or placed it. But I couldn't prove it wasn't you — or anybody."

Evans turned to Grove: "What about Grant?"

The police officer grimaced. "The FBI gets that baby! They always get the good ones! But he said plenty befor they came for him. He's been in a terrible sweat, as you can imagine. I mean, he killed Weber there in the dark and raced back up to this floor to get the diamonds. They were missing. He made as careful and fast a search of Weber's office as he could, and then went back to do something about Weber's body. Remove the traces he'd left.

"But the boomerang he'd snatched for the killing was gone. The body was gone. The bloodstains, even, were gone. You can imagine the sort of days and nights he put in on Wednesday and Thursday! Then Weber's body was discovered, and Grant began to look frantically for the jewels. He stole the can, of course, and dropped it in the Hudson River on his way home, the same night. He came to the same conclusion Miss Vincent did, and located the geode. He says the diamonds are worth about four millions.

"He didn't dare smash right in. He made the smoke bomb to fake a fire at closing time, when things are jumbled, anyway, and the guards are busy with the public. He planned to touch off and blow some fuses, then to get to the geode. He was just checking things over when he saw Miss Vincent looking at the cache."

"Nazis!" Jordan said, with loathing.

Grove nodded. "He even beat up his own kind, to look like a good citizen. That I call low!"

Evans said thoughtfully, "Well, it's over. I'm glad. The Museum won't ever be able to repay its debt, Miss Vincent."

Horace Jordan rose with determination. "This sort of business," he said sternly, "can go on for hours! We all know what happened. I, personally, will undertake to pay a portion of the Museum's debt with one small steak — if there's one to be had. Mind you, gentlemen, I am not offering more steaks. One — only one. And then I am going to put the Museum in Gail's debt in perpetuity, if she'll have me. . . . Come on, Gail."

"Yes," Gail answered. "Yes to the beefsteak — and yes to the perpetuity!"

LEW D. FELDMAN SELECTS . . .

Which are the twelve best detective short stories ever written? . . . You will recall that we asked a special panel of experts, consisting of James Hilton, Howard Haycraft, John Dickson Carr, Anthony Boucher, Vincent Starrett, James Sandoe, August Derleth, Viola Brothers Shore, Lee Wright, Lew D. Feldman, Charles Honce, and your Editors (serving as twelfth talesmen), to select the finest detective-crime short stories written in 109 years — the crème de la *crime, the best of all time. Among 83 stories nominated, twelve tales stood out as* THE GOLDEN DOZEN *— a 'tec team to challenge Time's ultimate verdict. Here are the winning stories:*

The Hands of Mr. Ottermole . . . by Thomas Burke
The Purloined Letter . . . . by Edgar A. Poe
The Red-Headed League . . . . by A. Conan Doyle
The Avenging Chance . . . . by Anthony Berkeley
The Absent-Minded Coterie . . . . by Robert Barr
The Problem of Cell 13 . . . . by Jacques Futrelle
The Oracle of the Dog . . . . by G. K. Chesterton
Naboth's Vineyard . . . . by Melville Davisson Post
The Gioconda Smile . . . . by Aldous Huxley
The Yellow Slugs . . . . by H. C. Bailey
The Genuine Tabard . . . . by E. C. Bentley
Suspicion . . . . by Dorothy L. Sayers

This month we bring you G. K. Chesterton's "The Oracle of the Dog," sponsored by Lew D. Feldman. Before we tell you Mr. Feldman's qualifications as an expert, we must confess that "The Oracle of the Dog" was not the Father Brown story originally selected. The first choice, receiving three votes from the Blue Ribbon Jury, was "The Invisible Man"; but unfortunately the magazine reprint rights to "The Invisible Man" were not available. It would have been manifestly unfair to omit a Father Brown story, so we asked the three experts to nominate their second choice among the Father Brown tales. This time "The Honour of Israel Gow" won, but again we were unable to secure permission to reprint the story. Once more we asked the three experts to cast their votes, and the third-favorite Father Brown story proved to be "The Hammer of God." At this point we might have been forgiven a twinge of both disappointment and annoyance — for once again we were denied the privilege of reprinting the experts' choice. So, begging the jury's patience, we asked for still another vote. The result was the selection of "The Oracle of the Dog." We might say, in passing, that even the fourth choice represents a high-ranking story: no less a connoisseur

than S. S. Van Dine considered "The Oracle of the Dog" the very best story in the entire Father Brown saga.

Lew D. Feldman is an internationally known rare-book dealer who specializes in detective first editions and manuscripts. To give you some idea of what Mr. Feldman has in stock, in addition to thousands of first editions of both old and new detective stories, he is the proud possessor, at the time of this writing, of the original holograph manuscripts of "A Scandal in Bohemia," THE VALLEY OF FEAR, *and* THE HOUSE OF THE ARROW. *Mr. Feldman operates under the firm name of House of El Dieff, at 180–31 Aberdeen Road, Jamaica 3, New York. Even more relevant, however, Mr. Feldman is that rare rare-book dealer who reads what he sells.*

Here is Mr. Feldman's list of all-time favorites:

The Oracle of the Dog.........by G. K. Chesterton
The Purloined Letter..........by Edgar A. Poe
The Hands of Mr. Ottermole...by Thomas Burke
The Red-Headed League.......by A. Conan Doyle
The Avenging Chance.........by Anthony Berkeley
The Absent-Minded Coterie....by Robert Barr
The Problem of Cell 13........by Jacques Futrelle
Naboth's Vineyard............by Melville Davisson Post
The Gioconda Smile...........by Aldous Huxley
Faith, Hope and Charity.......by Irvin S. Cobb
Philomel Cottage.............by Agatha Christie
A Case of Premeditation.......by R. Austin Freeman

In his letter to your Editors, Mr. Feldman wrote: "I can think of no finer gift for anyone than to be given the opportunity to read for the first time the dozen stories listed above. It is my sincere conviction that these stories [including Chesterton's "The Invisible Man" as first choice among the Father Brown tales] are the All-Time Great . . ."

THE ORACLE OF THE DOG

by G. K. CHESTERTON

"Yes," said Father Brown, "I always like a dog so long as he isn't spelt backwards."

Those who are quick in talking are not always quick in listening. Sometimes even their brilliancy produces a sort of stupidity. Father Brown's friend and companion was a young

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man with a stream of ideas and stories, an enthusiastic young man named Fiennes, with eager blue eyes and blonde hair that seemed to be brushed back, not merely with a hair-brush but with the wind of the world as he rushed through it. But he stopped in the torrent of his talk in a momentary bewilderment before he saw the priest's simple meaning.

"You mean that people make too much of them?" he said. "Well, I don't know. They're marvellous creatures. Sometimes I think they know a lot more than we do."

Father Brown said nothing; but continued to stroke the head of the big retriever in a half-abstracted but apparently soothing fashion.

"Why," said Fiennes, warming again to his monologue, "there was a dog in the case I've come to see you about; what they call the 'Invisible Murder Case,' you know. It's a strange story, but from my point of view the dog is about the strangest thing in it. Of course, there's the mystery of the crime itself, and how old Druce can have been killed by somebody else when he was all alone in the summer-house ——"

The hand stroking the dog stopped for a moment in its rhythmic movement; and Father Brown said calmly, "Oh, it was a summer-house, was it?"

"I thought you'd read all about it in the papers," answered Fiennes. "Stop a minute; I believe I've got a cutting that will give you all the particulars." He produced a strip of newspaper from his pocket and handed it to the priest, who began to read it, holding it close to his blinking eyes with one hand while the other continued its half-conscious caresses of the dog. It looked like the parable of a man not letting his right hand know what his left hand did.

"Many mystery stories, about men murdered behind locked doors and windows, and murderers escaping without means of entrance and exit, have come true in the course of the extraordinary events at Cranston on the coast of Yorkshire, where Colonel Druce was found stabbed from behind by a dagger that has entirely disappeared from the scene, and apparently even from the neighbourhood.

"The summer-house in which he died was indeed accessible at one entrance, the ordinary doorway which looked down the central walk of the garden towards the house. But by a combination of events almost to be called a coincidence, it appears that both the path and the entrance were watched during the crucial time, and there is a chain of witnesses who confirm each other. The summer-house stands at the extreme end of the garden, where there is no exit or entrance of any kind. The central garden path is a lane between two ranks of tall delphiniums, planted so close that any stray step off the path would leave its traces; and both path and plants run right up to the very mouth of the summer-house, so that no straying from that straight path could fail to be observed, and no

other mode of entrance can be imagined.

"Patrick Floyd, secretary of the murdered man, testified that he had been in a position to overlook the whole garden from the time when Colonel Druce last appeared alive in the doorway to the time when he was found dead; as he, Floyd, had been on the top of a step-ladder clipping the garden hedge. Janet Druce, the dead man's daughter, confirmed this, saying that she had sat on the terrace of the house throughout that time and had seen Floyd at his work. Touching some part of the time, this is again supported by Donald Druce, her brother, who overlooked the garden standing at his bedroom window in his dressing-gown, for he had risen late. Lastly the account is consistent with that given by Dr. Valentine, a neighbour, who called for a time to talk with Miss Druce on the terrace, and by the Colonel's solicitor, Mr. Aubrey Traill, who was apparently the last to see the murdered man alive — presumably with the exception of the murderer.

"All are agreed that the course of events was as follows: about half-past three in the afternoon, Miss Druce went down the path to ask her father when he would like tea; but he said he did not want any and was waiting to see Traill, his lawyer, who was to be sent to him in the summer-house. The girl then came away and met Traill coming down the path; she directed him to her father and he went in as directed. About half an hour afterwards he came out again, the Colonel coming with him to the door and showing himself to all appearance in health and even high spirits. He had been somewhat annoyed earlier in the day by his son's irregular hours, but seemed to recover his temper in a perfectly normal fashion, and had been rather markedly genial in receiving other visitors, including two of his nephews who came over for the day. But as these were out walking during the whole period of the tragedy, they had no evidence to give. It is said, indeed, that the Colonel was not on very good terms with Dr. Valentine, but that gentleman only had a brief interview with the daughter of the house, to whom he is supposed to be paying serious attentions.

"Traill, the solicitor, says he left the Colonel entirely alone in the summer-house, and this is confirmed by Floyd's bird's-eye view of the garden, which showed nobody else passing the only entrance. Ten minutes later Miss Druce again went down the garden and had not reached the end of the path when she saw her father, who was conspicuous by his white linen coat, lying in a heap on the floor. She uttered a scream which brought others to the spot, and on entering the place they found the Colonel lying dead beside his basket-chair, which was also upset. Dr. Valentine, who was still in the immediate neighbourhood, testified that the wound was made by some sort of stiletto, entering under the shoulder-

blade and piercing the heart. The police have searched the neighbourhood futilely for such a weapon."

"So Colonel Druce wore a white coat, did he?" said Father Brown as he put down the paper.

"Trick he learnt in the tropics," replied Fiennes with some wonder. "He'd had some queer adventures there, by his own account; and I fancy his dislike of Valentine was connected with the doctor coming from the tropics too. But it's all an infernal puzzle. The account there is pretty accurate; I didn't see the tragedy, in the sense of the discovery; I was out walking with the young nephews and the dog — the dog I wanted to tell you about. But I saw the stage set for it as described: the straight lane between the blue flowers right up to the dark entrance, and the lawyer going down it in his blacks and his silk hat, and the red head of the secretary showing high above the green hedge as he worked on it with his shears. Nobody could have mistaken that red head at any distance; and if people say they saw it there all the time, you may be sure they did. This red-haired secretary Floyd is quite a character; a breathless, bounding sort of fellow, always doing everybody's work as he was doing the gardener's. I think he is an American; he's certainly got the American view of life; what they call the view-point, bless 'em."

"What about the lawyer?" asked Father Brown.

There was a silence and then Fiennes spoke quite slowly for him. "Traill struck me as a singular man. In his fine black clothes he was almost foppish, yet you can hardly call him fashionable. For he wore a pair of long, luxuriant black whiskers such as haven't been seen since Victorian times. He had rather a fine grave face and a fine grave manner, but every now and then he seemed to remember to smile. And when he showed his white teeth he seemed to lose a little of his dignity and there was something faintly fawning about him. It may have been only embarrassment, for he would also fidget with his cravat and his tie-pin, which were at once handsome and unusual, like himself. If I could think of anybody — but what's the good, when the whole thing's impossible? Nobody knows who did it. Nobody knows how it could be done. At least there's only one exception I'd make, and that's why I really mentioned the whole thing. The dog knows."

Father Brown sighed and then said absently, "You were there as a friend of young Donald, weren't you? He didn't go on your walk with you?"

"No," replied Fiennes smiling. "The young scoundrel had gone to bed that morning and got up that afternoon. I went with his cousins, two young officers from India, and our conversation was trivial enough. I remember the elder, whose name I think is Herbert Druce and who is an authority on horsebreeding, talked about nothing but a mare he had

bought and the moral character of the man who sold her; while his brother Harry seemed to be brooding on his bad luck at Monte Carlo. I only mention it to show you, in the light of what happened on our walk, that there was nothing psychic about us. The dog was the only mystic in our company."

"What sort of a dog was he?" asked the priest.

"Same breed as that one," answered Fiennes. "That's what started me off on the story, your saying you didn't believe in believing in a dog. He's a big black retriever named Nox, and a suggestive name too; for I think what he did a darker mystery than the murder. You know Druce's house and garden are by the sea; we walked about a mile from it along the sands and then turned back, going the other way. We passed a rather curious rock called the Rock of Fortune, famous in the neighbourhood because it's one of those examples of one stone barely balanced on another, so that a touch would knock it over. It is not really very high, but the hanging outline of it makes it look a little wild and sinister; at least it made it look so to me, for I don't imagine my jolly young companions were afflicted with the picturesque. But it may be that I was beginning to feel an atmosphere; for just then the question arose of whether it was time to go back to tea, and even then I think I had a premonition that time counted for a good deal in the business. Neither Herbert Druce nor I had a watch, so we called out to his brother, who was some paces behind, having stopped to light his pipe under the hedge. Hence it happened that he shouted out the hour, which was twenty past four, in his big voice through the growing twilight; and somehow the loudness of it made it sound like the proclamation of something tremendous. His unconsciousness seemed to make it all the more so; but that was always the way with omens; and particular ticks of the clock were really very ominous things that afternoon. According to Dr. Valentine's testimony, poor Druce had actually died just about half-past four.

"Well, they said we needn't go home for ten minutes and we walked a little farther along the sands, doing nothing in particular — throwing stones for the dog and throwing sticks into the sea for him to swim after. But to me the twilight seemed to grow oddly oppressive and the very shadow of the top-heavy Rock of Fortune lay on me like a load. And then the curious thing happened. Nox had just brought back Herbert's walking stick out of the sea and his brother had thrown his in also. The dog swam out again, but just about what must have been the stroke of the half-hour, he stopped swimming. He came back again on to the shore and stood in front of us. Then he suddenly threw up his head and sent up a howl or wail of woe, if ever I heard one in the world.

" 'What the devil's the matter with the dog?' asked Herbert; but none of

us could answer. There was a long silence after the brute's wailing and whining died away on the desolate shore; and then the silence was broken. As I live, it was broken by a faint and far-off shriek, like the shriek of a woman from beyond the hedges inland. We didn't know what it was then; but we knew afterwards. It was the cry the girl gave when she first saw the body of her father."

"You went back, I suppose," said Father Brown patiently. "What happened then?"

"I'll tell you what happened then," said Fiennes with a grim emphasis. "When we got back into that garden the first thing we saw was Traill the lawyer; I can see him now with his black hat and black whiskers relieved against the perspective of the blue flowers stretching down to the summer-house, with the sunset and the strange outline of the Rock of Fortune in the distance. His face and figure were in shadow against the sunset; but I swear the white teeth were showing in his head and he was smiling.

"The moment Nox saw that man, the dog dashed forward and stood in the middle of the path barking at him madly, murderously, volleying out curses that were almost verbal in their dreadful distinctness of hatred. And the man doubled up and fled along the path between the flowers."

Father Brown sprang to his feet with a startling impatience.

"So the dog denounced him, did he?" he cried. "The oracle of the dog condemned him. Did you see what birds were flying, and are you sure whether they were on the right hand or the left? Did you consult the augurs about the sacrifices? Surely you didn't omit to cut open the dog and examine his entrails. That is the sort of scientific test you heathen humanitarians seem to trust, when you are thinking of taking away the life and honour of a man."

Fiennes sat gaping for an instant before he found breath to say, "Why, what's the matter with you? What have I done now?"

A sort of anxiety came back into the priest's eyes — the anxiety of a man who has run against a post in the dark and wonders for a moment whether he has hurt it.

"I'm most awfully sorry," he said with sincere distress. "I beg your pardon for being so rude; pray forgive me."

Fiennes looked at him curiously. "I sometimes think you are more of a mystery than any of the mysteries," he said. "But anyhow, if you don't believe in the mystery of the dog, at least you can't get over the mystery of the man. You can't deny that at the very moment when the beast came back from the sea and bellowed, his master's soul was driven out of his body by the blow of some unseen power that no mortal man can trace or even imagine. And as for the lawyer, I don't go only by the dog; there are other curious details too. He struck me as a smooth, smiling, equivocal sort of person; and one of

his tricks seemed like a sort of hint. You know the doctor and the police were on the spot very quickly; Valentine was brought back when walking away from the house, and he telephoned instantly. That, with the secluded house, small numbers, and enclosed space, made it pretty possible to search everybody who could have been near; and everybody was thoroughly searched — for a weapon. The whole house, garden, and shore were combed for a weapon. The disappearance of the dagger is almost as crazy as the disappearance of the man."

"The disappearance of the dagger," said Father Brown, nodding. He seemed to have become suddenly attentive.

"Well," continued Fiennes, "I told you that man Traill had a trick of fidgeting with his tie and tie-pin — especially his tie-pin. His pin, like himself, was at once showy and old-fashioned. It had one of those stones with concentric coloured rings that look like an eye; and his own concentration on it got on my nerves, as if he had been a Cyclops with one eye in the middle of his body. But the pin was not only large but long; and it occurred to me that his anxiety about its adjustment was because it was even longer than it looked; as long as a stiletto in fact."

Father Brown nodded thoughtfully. "Was any other instrument ever suggested?" he asked.

"There was another suggestion," answered Fiennes, "from one of the young Druces — the cousins, I mean. Neither Herbert nor Harry Druce would have struck one at first as likely to be of assistance in scientific detection; but while Herbert was really the traditional type of heavy Dragoon, caring for nothing but horses and being an ornament to the Horse Guards, his younger brother Harry had been in the Indian Police and knew something about such things. Indeed in his own way he was quite clever; and I rather fancy he had been too clever; I mean he had left the police through breaking some red-tape regulations and taking some sort of risk and responsibility of his own. Anyhow, he was in some sense a detective out of work, and threw himself into this business with more than the ardour of an amateur. And it was with him that I had an argument about the weapon — an argument that led to something new. It began by his countering my description of the dog barking at Traill; and he said that a dog at his worst didn't bark, but growled."

"He was quite right there," observed the priest.

"This young fellow went on to say that, if it came to that, he'd heard Nox growling at other people before then; and among others at Floyd the secretary. I retorted that his own argument answered itself; for the crime couldn't be brought home to two or three people, and least of all to Floyd, who was as innocent as a harum-scarum schoolboy, and had been seen by everybody all the time

perched above the garden hedge with his fan of red hair as conspicuous as a scarlet cockatoo. 'I know there's difficulties anyhow,' said my colleague, 'but I wish you'd come with me down the garden a minute. I want to show you something I don't think anyone else has seen.' This was on the very day of the discovery, and the garden was just as it had been: the step-ladder was still standing by the hedge, and just under the hedge my guide stooped and disentangled something from the deep grass. It was the shears used for clipping the hedge, and on the point of one of them was a smear of blood."

There was a short silence, and then Father Brown said suddenly, "What was the lawyer there for?"

"He told us the Colonel sent for him to alter his will," answered Fiennes. "And, by the way, there was another thing about the business of the will that I ought to mention. You see, the will wasn't actually signed in the summer-house that afternoon."

"I suppose not," said Father Brown, "there would have to be two witnesses."

"The lawyer actually came down the day before and it was signed then; but he was sent for again next day because the old man had a doubt about one of the witnesses and had to be reassured."

"Who were the witnesses?" asked Father Brown.

"That's just the point," replied his informant eagerly, "the witnesses were Floyd the secretary and this Dr. Valentine, the foreign sort of surgeon or whatever he is; and the two have a quarrel. Now I'm bound to say that the secretary is something of a busybody. He's one of those hot and headlong people whose warmth of temperament has unfortunately turned mostly to pugnacity and bristling suspicion; to distrusting people instead of to trusting them. That sort of red-haired red-hot fellow is always either universally credulous or universally incredulous; and sometimes both. He was not only a Jack of all trades, but he knew better than all tradesmen. He not only knew everything, but he warned everybody against everybody. All that must be taken into account in his suspicions about Valentine; but in that particular case there seems to have been something behind it. He said the name of Valentine was not really Valentine. He said he had seen him elsewhere known by the name of De Villon. He said it would invalidate the will; of course he was kind enough to explain to the lawyer what the law was on that point. They were both in a frightful wax."

Father Brown laughed. "People often are when they are to witness a will," he said. "For one thing it means that they can't have any legacy under it. But what did Dr. Valentine say? No doubt the universal secretary knew more about the doctor's name than the doctor did. But even the doctor might have some information about his own name."

Fiennes paused a moment.

"Dr. Valentine took it in a curious way. Dr. Valentine is a curious man. His appearance is rather striking but very foreign. He is young but wears a beard cut square; and his face is very pale, dreadfully pale and dreadfully serious. His eyes have a sort of ache in them, as if he ought to wear glasses or had given himself a headache with thinking; but he is quite handsome and always very formally dressed, with a top hat and a dark coat and a little red rosette. His manner is rather cold and haughty, and he has a way of staring at you which is very disconcerting. When thus charged with having changed his name, he merely stared like a sphinx and then said with a little laugh that he supposed Americans had no names to change. At that I think the Colonel also got into a fuss and said all sorts of angry things to the doctor; all the more angry because of the doctor's pretensions to a future place in his family. But I shouldn't have thought much of that but for a few words that I happened to hear later, early in the afternoon of the tragedy. I don't want to make a lot of them, for they weren't the sort of words on which one would like, in the ordinary way, to play the eavesdropper. As I was passing out towards the front gate with my two companions and the dog, I heard voices which told me that Dr. Valentine and Miss Druce had withdrawn for a moment into the shadow of the house, in an angle behind a row of flowering plants, and were talking to each other in passionate whisperings — sometimes almost like hissings; for it was something of a lovers' quarrel as well as a lovers' tryst. Nobody repeats the sorts of things they said for the most part; but in an unfortunate business like this I'm bound to say that there was repeated more than once a phrase about killing somebody. In fact, the girl seemed to be begging him not to kill somebody, or saying that no provocation could justify killing anybody; which seems an unusual sort of talk to address to a gentleman who has dropped in to tea."

"Do you know," asked the priest, "whether Dr. Valentine seemed to be very angry after the scene with the secretary and the Colonel — I mean about witnessing the will?"

"By all accounts," replied the other, "he wasn't half so angry as the secretary was. It was the secretary who went away raging after witnessing the will."

"And now," said Father Brown, "what about the will itself?"

"The Colonel was a very wealthy man, and his will was important. Traill wouldn't tell us the alteration at that stage, but I have since heard, only this morning in fact, that most of the money was transferred from the son to the daughter. I told you that Druce was wild with my friend Donald over his dissipated hours."

"The question of motive has been rather overshadowed by the question of method," observed Father Brown thoughtfully. "At that moment, apparently, Miss Druce was the im-

mediate gainer by the man's death."

"Good God! What a cold-blooded way of talking," cried Fiennes, staring at him. "You don't really mean to hint that she ——"

"Is she going to marry that Dr. Valentine?" asked the other.

"Some people are against it," answered his friend. "But he is liked and respected in the place and is a skilled and devoted surgeon."

"So devoted a surgeon," said Father Brown, "that he had surgical instruments with him when he went to call on the young lady at tea-time. For he must have used a lancet or something, and he never seems to have gone home."

Fiennes sprang to his feet and looked at him in a heat of inquiry. "You suggest he might have used the very same lancet ——"

Father Brown shook his head. "All these suggestions are fancies just now," he said. "The problem is not who did it or what did it, but how it was done. We might find many men and even many tools — pins and shears and lancets. But how did a man get into the room? How did even a pin get into it?"

He was staring reflectively at the ceiling as he spoke, but as he said the last words his eye cocked in an alert fashion as if he had suddenly seen a curious fly on the ceiling.

"Well, what would you do about it?" asked the young man. "You have a lot of experience, what would you advise now?"

"I'm afraid I'm not much use," said Father Brown with a sigh. "I can't suggest very much without having ever been near the place or the people. For the moment you can only go on with local inquiries. I gather that your friend from the Indian police is more or less in charge of your inquiry down there. I should run down and see how he is getting on. See what he's been doing in the way of amateur detection. There may be news already."

As his guests, the biped and the quadruped, disappeared, Father Brown took up his pen and went back to his interrupted occupation of planning a course of lectures on the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. The subject was a large one and he had to recast it more than once, so that he was somewhat similarly employed some two days later when the big black dog again came bounding into the room and sprawled all over him with enthusiasm and excitement. The master who followed the dog shared the excitement if not the enthusiasm. He had been excited in a less pleasant fashion, for his blue eyes seemed to start from his head and his eager face was even a little pale.

"You told me," he said abruptly and without preface, "to find out what Harry Druce was doing. Do you know what he's done?"

The priest did not reply, and the young man went on in jerky tones:

"I'll tell you what he's done. He's killed himself."

Father Brown's lips moved only faintly, and there was nothing prac-

tical about what he was saying — nothing that has anything to do with this story or this world.

"You give me the creeps sometimes," said Fiennes. "Did you — did you expect this?"

"I thought it possible," said Father Brown; "that was why I asked you to go and see what he was doing. I hoped you might not be too late."

"It was I who found him," said Fiennes rather huskily. "It was the ugliest and most uncanny thing I ever knew. I went down that old garden again and I knew there was something new and unnatural about it besides the murder. The flowers still tossed about in blue masses on each side of the black entrance into the old grey summer-house; but to me the blue flowers looked like blue devils dancing before some dark cavern of the underworld. I looked all round; everything seemed to be in its ordinary place. But the queer notion grew on me that there was something wrong with the very shape of the sky. And then I saw what it was. The Rock of Fortune always rose in the background beyond the garden hedge and against the sea. And the Rock of Fortune was gone."

Father Brown had lifted his head and was listening intently.

"It was as if a mountain had walked away out of a landscape or a moon fallen from the sky; though I knew, of course, that a touch at any time would have tipped the thing over. Something possessed me and I rushed down that garden path like the wind and went crashing through that hedge as if it were a spider's web. It was a thin hedge really, though its undisturbed trimness had made it serve all the purposes of a wall. On the shore I found the loose rock fallen from its pedestal; and poor Harry Druce lay like a wreck underneath it. One arm was thrown round it in a sort of embrace as if he had pulled it down on himself; and on the broad brown sands beside it, in large crazy lettering he had scrawled the words, 'The Rock of Fortune falls on the Fool.' "

"It was the Colonel's will that did that," observed Father Brown. "The young man had staked everything on profiting himself by Donald's disgrace, especially when his uncle sent for him on the same day as the lawyer, and welcomed him with so much warmth. Otherwise he was done; he'd lost his police job; he was beggared at Monte Carlo. And he killed himself when he found he'd killed his kinsman for nothing."

"Here, stop a minute!" cried the staring Fiennes. "You're going too fast for me."

"Talking about the will, by the way," continued Father Brown calmly, "before I forget it, or we go on to bigger things, there was a simple explanation, I think, of all that business about the doctor's name. I rather fancy I have heard both names before somewhere. The doctor is really a French nobleman with the title of the Marquis de Villon. But he is also an ardent Republican and has aban-

doned his title and fallen back on the forgotten family surname. 'With your Citizen Riquetti you have puzzled Europe for ten days.' "

"What is that?" asked the young man blankly.

"Never mind," said the priest. "Nine times out of ten it is a rascally thing to change one's name; but this was a piece of fine fanaticism. That's the point of his sarcasm about Americans having no names — that is, no titles. Now in England the Marquis of Hartington is never called Mr. Hartington; but in France the Marquis de Villon is called M. de Villon. So it might well look like a change of name. As for the talk about killing, I fancy that also was a point of French etiquette. The doctor was talking about challenging Floyd to a duel, and the girl was trying to dissuade him."

"Oh, I *see*," cried Fiennes slowly. "Now I understand what she meant."

"And what is that about?" asked his companion, smiling.

"Well," said the young man, "it was something that happened to me just before I found that poor fellow's body; only the catastrophe drove it out of my head. I suppose it's hard to remember a little romantic idyll when you've just come on top of a tragedy. But as I went down the lanes leading to the Colonel's old place, I met his daughter walking with Dr. Valentine. She was in mourning of course, and he always wore black as if he were going to a funeral; but I can't say that their faces were very funereal. Never have I seen two people looking in their own way more respectably radiant and cheerful. They stopped and saluted me and then she told me they were married and living in a little house on the outskirts of the town, where the doctor was continuing his practice. This rather surprised me, because I knew that her old father's will had left her his property; and I hinted at it delicately by saying I was going along to her father's old place and had half expected to meet her there. But she only laughed and said, 'Oh, we've given up all that. My husband doesn't like heiresses.' And I discovered with some astonishment they really had insisted on restoring the property to poor Donald; so I hope he's had a healthy shock and will treat it sensibly. There was never much really the matter with him; he was very young and his father was not very wise. But it was in connection with that that she said something I didn't understand at the time; but now I'm sure it must be as you say. She said with a sort of sudden and splendid arrogance that was entirely altruistic:

" 'I hope it'll stop that red-haired fool from fussing any more about the will. Does he think my husband, who has given up a crest and a coronet as old as the Crusades for his principles, would kill an old man in a summer-house for a legacy like that?' Then she laughed again and said, 'My husband isn't killing anybody except in the way of business. Why,

he didn't even ask his friends to call on the secretary.' Now, of course, I see what she meant."

"I see part of what she meant, of course," said Father Brown. "What did she mean exactly by the secretary fussing about the will?"

Fiennes smiled as he answered: "I wish you knew the secretary, Father Brown. It would be a joy to you to watch him make things hum, as he calls it. He made the house of mourning hum. He filled the funeral with all the snap and zip of the brightest sporting event. There was no holding him, after something had really happened. I've told you how he used to oversee the gardener as he did the garden, and how he instructed the lawyer in the law. Needless to say, he also instructed the surgeon in the practice of surgery; and as the surgeon was Dr. Valentine, you may be sure it ended in accusing him of something worse than bad surgery. The secretary got it fixed in his red head that the doctor had committed the crime; and when the police arrived he was perfectly sublime. Need I say that he became on the spot the greatest of all amateur detectives? Sherlock Holmes never towered over Scotland Yard with more Titanic intellectual pride and scorn than Colonel Druce's private secretary over the police investigating Colonel Druce's death. I tell you it was a joy to see him. He strode about with an abstracted air, tossing his scarlet crest of hair and giving curt impatient replies. Of course it was his demeanour during these days that made Druce's daughter so wild with him. Of course he had a theory. It's just the sort of theory a man would have in a *book*; and Floyd is the sort of man who ought to be in a book. He'd be better fun and less bother in a book."

"What was his theory?" asked the other.

"Oh, it was full of pep," replied Fiennes gloomily. "It would have been glorious copy if it could have held together for ten minutes longer. He said the Colonel was still alive when they found him in the summer-house and the doctor killed him with the surgical instrument on pretence of cutting the clothes."

"I see," said the priest. "I suppose he was lying flat on his face on the mud floor as a form of siesta."

"It's wonderful what hustle will do," continued his informant. "I believe Floyd would have got his great theory into the papers at any rate, and perhaps had the doctor arrested, when all these things were blown sky high as if by dynamite by the discovery of that dead body lying under the Rock of Fortune. And that's what we come back to after all. I suppose the suicide is almost a confession. But nobody will ever know the whole story."

There was a silence, and then the priest said modestly, "I rather think I know the whole story."

Fiennes stared. "But look here," he cried, "how do you come to know the whole story, or to be sure it's the true story? You've been sitting

here a hundred miles away writing a sermon; do you mean to tell me you really know what happened already? If you've really come to the end, where in the world do you begin? What started you off with your own story?"

Father Brown jumped up with a very unusual excitement and his first exclamation was like an explosion.

"The dog!" he cried. "The dog, of course! You had the whole story in your hands in the business of the dog on the beach, if you'd only noticed the dog properly."

Fiennes stared still more. "But you told me just now that my feelings about the dog were all nonsense, and the dog had nothing to do with it."

"The dog had everything to do with it," said Father Brown, "as you'd have found out, if you'd only treated the dog as a dog and not as God Almighty, judging the souls of men."

He paused in an embarrassed way for a moment, and then said, with a rather pathetic air of apology:

"The truth is, I happen to be awfully fond of dogs. And it seemed to me that in all this lurid halo of dog superstitions nobody was really thinking about the poor dog at all. To begin with a small point, about his barking at the lawyer or growling at the secretary. You asked how I could guess things a hundred miles away; but honestly it's mostly to your credit, for you described people so well that I know the types. A man like Traill who frowns usually and smiles suddenly, a man who fiddles with things, especially at his throat, is a nervous, easily embarrassed man. I shouldn't wonder if Floyd, the efficient secretary, is nervy and jumpy too; those Yankee hustlers often are. Otherwise he wouldn't have cut his fingers on the shears and dropped them when he heard Janet Druce scream.

"Now dogs hate nervous people. I don't know whether they make the dog nervous too; or whether, being after all a brute, he is a bit of a bully; or whether his canine vanity (which is colossal) is simply offended at not being liked. But anyhow there was nothing in poor Nox protesting against those people, except that he disliked them for being afraid of him. Now I know you're awfully clever, and nobody of sense sneers at cleverness. But I sometimes fancy, for instance, that you are too clever to understand animals. Sometimes you are too clever to understand men, especially when they act almost as simply as animals. Animals are very literal; they live in a world of truisms. Take this case; a dog barks at a man and a man runs away from a dog. Now you do not seem to be quite simple enough to see the fact; that the dog barked because he disliked the man and the man fled because he was frightened of the dog. They had no other motives and they needed none. But you must read psychological mysteries into it and suppose the dog had super-normal vision, and was a mysterious mouth-

piece of doom. You must suppose the man was running away, not from the dog but from the hangman. And yet, if you come to think of it, all this deeper psychology is exceedingly improbable. If the dog really could completely and consciously realize the murderer of his master, he wouldn't stand yapping as he might at a curate at a tea-party; he's much more likely to fly at his throat. And on the other hand, do you really think a man who had hardened his heart to murder an old friend and then walk about smiling at the old friend's family, under the eyes of his old friend's daughter and post-mortem doctor — do you think a man like that would be doubled up by mere remorse because a dog barked? He might feel the tragic irony of it; it might shake his soul, like any other tragic trifle. But he wouldn't rush madly the length of a garden to escape from the only witness whom he knew to be unable to talk. People have a panic like that when they are frightened, not of tragic ironies, but of teeth. The whole thing is simpler than you can understand. But when we come to that business by the seashore, things are much more interesting. As you stated them, they were much more puzzling. I didn't understand that tale of the dog going in and out of the water; it didn't seem to me a doggy thing to do. If Nox had been very much upset about something else, he might possibly have refused to go after the stick at all. He'd probably go off nosing in whatever direction he suspected the mischief. But when once a dog is actually chasing a thing, a stone or a stick or a rabbit, my experience is that he won't stop for anything but the most peremptory command, and not always for that. That he should turn round because his mood changed seems to me unthinkable."

"But he did turn round," insisted Fiennes, "and came back without the stick."

"He came back without the stick for the best reason in the world," replied the priest. "He came back because he couldn't find it. He whined because he couldn't find it. That's the sort of thing a dog really does whine about. A dog is a devil of a ritualist. He is as particular about the precise routine of a game as a child about the precise repetition of a fairy-tale. In this case something had gone wrong with the game. He came back to complain seriously of the conduct of the stick. Never had such a thing happened before. Never had an eminent and distinguished dog been so treated by a rotten old walking-stick."

"Why, what had the walking-stick done?" inquired the young man.

"It had sunk," said Father Brown.

Fiennes said nothing, but continued to stare, and it was the priest who continued:

"It had sunk because it was not really a stick, but a rod of steel with a very thin shell of cane and a sharp point. In other words, it was a sword-

stick. I suppose a murderer never got rid of a bloody weapon so oddly and yet so naturally as by throwing it into the sea for a retriever."

"I begin to see what you mean," admitted Fiennes; "but even if a sword-stick was used, I have no guess of how it was used."

"I had a sort of guess," said Father Brown, "right at the beginning when you said the word summer-house. And another when you said that Druce wore a white coat. As long as everybody was looking for a short dagger, nobody thought of it; but if we admit a rather long blade like a rapier, it's not so impossible."

He was leaning back, looking at the ceiling, and began like one going back to his own first thoughts and fundamentals.

"All that discussion about detective stories like the Yellow Room, about a man found dead in sealed chambers which no one could enter, does not apply to the present case, because it is a summer-house. When we talk of a Yellow Room, or any room, we imply walls that are really homogeneous and impenetrable. But a summer-house is not made like that; it is often made, as it was in this case, of closely interlaced but still separate boughs and strips of wood, in which there are chinks here and there. There was one of them just behind Druce's back as he sat in his chair up against the wall. But just as the room was a summer-house, so the chair was a basket-chair. That also was a lattice of loopholes. Lastly, the summer-house was close up under the hedge; and you have just told me that it was really a thin hedge. A man standing outside it could easily see, amid a network of twigs and branches and canes, one white spot of the Colonel's coat as plain as the white of a target.

"Now, you left the geography a little vague; but it was possible to put two and two together. You said the Rock of Fortune was not really high; but you also said it could be seen dominating the garden like a mountain-peak. In other words, it was very near the end of the garden, though your walk had taken you a long way round to it. Also, it isn't likely the young lady really howled so as to be heard half a mile. She gave an ordinary involuntary cry, and yet you heard it on the shore. And among other interesting things that you told me, may I remind you that you said Harry Druce had fallen behind to light his pipe under a hedge."

Fiennes shuddered slightly. "You mean he drew his blade there and sent it through the hedge at the white spot. But surely it was a very odd chance and a very sudden choice. Besides, he couldn't be certain the old man's money had passed to him, and as a fact it hadn't."

Father Brown's face became animated.

"You misunderstand the man's character," he said, as if he himself had known the man all his life. "A curious but not unknown type of character. If he had really *known* the

money would come to him, I seriously believe he wouldn't have done it. He would have seen it as the dirty thing it was."

"Isn't that rather paradoxical?" asked the other.

"This man was a gambler," said the priest, "and a man in disgrace for having taken risks and anticipated orders. It was probably for something pretty unscrupulous, for every imperial police is more like a Russian secret police than we like to think. But he had gone beyond the line and failed. Now, the temptation of that type of man is to do a mad thing precisely because the risk will be wonderful in retrospect. He wants to say, 'Nobody but I could have seized that chance or seen that it was then or never. What a wild and wonderful guess it was, when I put all those things together; Donald in disgrace; and the lawyer being sent for; and Herbert and I sent for at the same time — and then nothing more but the way the old man grinned at me and shook hands. Anybody would say I was mad to risk it; but that is how fortunes are made, by the man mad enough to have a little foresight.' In short, it is the vanity of guessing. It is the megalomania of the gambler. The more incongruous the coincidence, the more instantaneous the decision, the more likely he is to snatch the chance. The accident, the very triviality, of the white speck and the hole in the hedge intoxicated him like a vision of the world's desire. Nobody clever enough to see such a combination of accidents could be cowardly enough not to use them! That is how the devil talks to the gambler. But the devil himself would hardly have induced that unhappy man to go down in a dull, deliberate way and kill an old uncle from whom he'd always had expectations. It would be too respectable."

He paused a moment; and then went on with quiet emphasis.

"And now try to call up the scene, even as you saw it yourself. As he stood there, dizzy with his diabolical opportunity, he looked up and saw that strange outline that might have been the image of his own tottering soul — the one great crag poised perilously on the other like a pyramid on its point — and remembered that it was called the Rock of Fortune. Can you guess how such a man at such a moment would read such a signal? I think it strung him up to action and even to vigilance. He who would be a tower must not fear to be a toppling tower. Anyhow he acted; his next difficulty was to cover his tracks. To be found with a sword-stick, let alone a blood-stained sword-stick, would be fatal in the search that was certain to follow. If he left it anywhere, it would be found and probably traced. Even if he threw it into the sea the action might be noticed, and thought noticeable — unless indeed he could think of some more natural way of covering the action. As you know, he did think of one, and a very good one. Being the only one of you with a watch, he told

you it was not yet time to return, strolled a little farther and started the game of throwing in sticks for the retriever. But how his eyes must have rolled darkly over all that desolate seashore before they alighted on the dog!"

Fiennes nodded, gazing thoughtfully into space. His mind seemed to have drifted back to a less practical part of the narrative.

"It's queer," he said, "that the dog really was in the story after all."

"The dog could almost have told you the story, if he could talk," said the priest. "All I complain of is that because he couldn't talk, you made up his story for him, and made him talk with the tongues of men and angels. It's part of something I've noticed more and more in the modern world, appearing in all sorts of newspaper rumours and conversational catchwords; something that's arbitrary without being authoritative. People readily swallow the untested claims of this, that, or the other. It's drowning all your old rationalism and scepticism, it's coming in like a sea; and the name of it is superstition." He stood up abruptly, his face heavy with a sort of frown, and went on talking almost as if he were alone. "It's the first effect of not believing in God that you lose your common sense, and can't see things as they are. Anything that anybody talks about, and says there's a good deal in it, extends itself indefinitely like a vista in a nightmare. And a dog is an omen and a cat is a mystery and a pig is a mascot and a beetle is a scarab, calling up all the menagerie of polytheism from Egypt and old India; Dog Anubis and great green-eyed Pasht and all the holy howling Bulls of Bashan; reeling back to the bestial gods of the beginning, escaping into elephants and snakes and crocodiles; and all because you are frightened of four words: 'He was made Man.' "

The young man got up with a little embarrassment, almost as if he had overheard a soliloquy. He called to the dog and left the room with vague but breezy farewells. But he had to call the dog twice, for the dog had remained behind quite motionless for a moment, looking up steadily at Father Brown as the wolf looked at St. Francis.

SPECIAL BINDER OFFER

Because of the large number of reader requests, *ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE* has procured a supply of strong, handsome binders for your copies of *EQMM*. Each binder holds one complete volume — that is, six issues of the magazine. It is easy to use, handy, convenient, and economical. The price is $1.00 postpaid. Send your order and remittance to: Special Binder Dept., Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, New York.

One of the most interesting reading experiences a dyed-in-the-blood fan can have is to go back into the earlier work of a writer who is now a steady contributor to the bigtime magazines and compare that earlier work with the same writer's current opera. You will usually discover that the writer's earlier virtues persist — on a modified, or to use a more honest word, on a compromised basis. The newer stories are more fashionably dressed; with success, the hardier virtues survive, though obviously more streamlined, more sophisticated, and more slickly conscious of the old reliable formulas. The more delicate virtues generally take a beating: approach (what some editors call "slant"), technique, and style are dictated by the powers-that-be, the invisible arbiters who sit in the slick seats of the mighty.

Take, for example, this story written by George Harmon Coxe nearly twenty years ago. From a strictly realistic, as distinguished from the so-called hardboiled viewpoint, "Invited Witness" is one of the toughest tales Mr. Coxe has ever straitjacketed into less than 3000 words.

George doesn't write this kind of yarn any more . . .

INVITED WITNESS

by GEORGE HARMON COXE

SPEAK your piece, Charlie, and quit stallin'." Jack Wolfe leaned back in his chair and rolled a cigarette.

"I know what you want. I read that Sob Sister story in *The Record*. I'm a killer, eh? And you're being big-hearted — gonna give me a chance to tell my side of the story maybe."

Wolfe stuck the finished cigarette in one corner of his mouth, lighted it, and turned to face me.

For a moment or so I studied that thin, gray-eyed face with its pointed chin and almost lipless mouth. Then I could feel the flush that swept over my face. I dropped my eyes and picked at the brim of my dark hat.

I wasn't prepared for a direct attack. I had hoped to get around to the subject in a more diplomatic manner. Now he had me where I couldn't sidestep — not and get away with it.

"Something like that," I mumbled. "This Varelli was a family man and —"

"Yeah. He was. Had a wife and two kids. He drove a Packard and they were starving. All they got was a monthly beating. And Varelli had only killed two men. The last one was a bank messenger — was shot four times. Four times, Charlie, and the kid never had a gun. Think it

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over. I suppose it would have been better if I'd let Varelli make it three. But then I wouldn't be here to give you your story, would I, Charlie?"

Wolfe's voice was bantering but there was no smile on his face.

I didn't answer right away, couldn't think of anything to say. Jack Wolfe was Special Investigator for the District Attorney and he had the reputation of getting things done. He had all kinds of authority to back him up. He was practically independent as an operative, responsible only to the D. A. Yet he could call on the police if he needed help.

This Varelli had been a rat, a murderer — anyone could tell you that. And Wolfe had done a good job in knocking him off. But he had, nevertheless, the unsavory reputation of a killer. Most people left the "e" off his name — labeled him The Wolf, and public sentiment was against him.

And when this dame down at *The Record* had run wild on the Varelli story, the chief sent me down to see what I could get from Wolfe for *The Courier*. I looked up at him again. The half-smoked cigarette drooped from his mouth and there was a mocking twinkle in his eyes.

"Well," he grunted. "What about it?"

"Don't get me wrong," I replied. "I'm not saying you shouldn't 've plugged Varelli. All I know is that you're quicker'n hell on the draw. The witnesses who saw it said you both yanked out your guns at the same time, but that you fired an instant before he did."

Wolfe laughed. "I'm quick on the draw — but we both drew at the same time. Then I can't be so quick, eh?"

"Well —" I stammered. "I don't know. I wasn't there. That's what I heard."

Wolfe sat upright with a jerky movement, tossed the cigarette away and pulled his coat sleeve up. Rolling up his shirt sleeve above the elbow, he showed me his arm. A yellowish scar showed on one side of the muscle, a larger scar on the other side.

"There's one," he snapped. "I got another one in my side. I didn't get 'em in Europe either. I got 'em right here in Boston. And I got both of 'em because I drew first — and didn't shoot."

He rolled down his sleeve. "Quick on the draw! That's a lot of bunk. It's got nothin' to do with it. There's plenty of guys in the grave that drew first."

"Well, then," I pressed, "what's the answer?"

"The answer's a state of mind." He waited a moment for his words to sink in. "When you go after a man you've got to know whether he's gonna shoot or not. And if he is going to shoot, you've got to be first — if you want to live.

"I've seen a cop with his gun drawn stop a guy who still had his rod in his pocket. Yet the cop was the one that got plugged. Why? Because he didn't think the other guy would shoot —

while the guy himself knew he would.

"After this second nick I got, I made up my mind I wanted to live a while. Understand, I don't draw unless I have to. But when I draw on a killer now, I figure on shootin'.

"This Varelli thug is an example. He was a killer. I knew it, everybody knew it. I went in after him. Neither of us had a gun in our hand. When he went for his, I knew he meant business."

Wolfe pulled out the makings and started another cigarette.

"Doesn't make a very good story, does it, Charlie?"

"Well —" I hedged. "I guess it does, but I never thought of it that way before."

"Then let it lay. I'll give you a ring in a couple days — if I'm lucky. If you want, I'll let you see for yourself."

Wolfe kept his word and three days later I got the call. It was in the evening and I was down at his office about nine o'clock.

He was sitting indolently in his chair, one of his half-consumed, smoke-stained cigarettes in the corner of his mouth. It was a funny habit, that rolling his own. It must've been a hangover from his army days. I never saw him smoke anything else.

I waited for him to speak. I didn't know just what he was going to do or what he had in mind. He'd said he was going to let me see for myself. And without knowing how or why, there was a definite tingle to my skin and the palms of my hands were damp.

"All set, Charlie?" he said, finally.

"Sure. What're we gonna do?"

"We're goin' after Shulz."

I whistled and made no attempt to disguise my feelings. Shulz was the one they had been looking for on the baby killings. The fellow had a record a mile long but with surprisingly few convictions. He'd been up for murder twice and both times he had beaten the rap. And two weeks ago, in gunning out a rival, he had killed a little girl and crippled a boy.

I hadn't said anything to the chief about Wolfe's offer, but now I thought I'd better phone in. To tell the truth, I wasn't so sure I was coming back.

"Is it all right to call in and tell 'em what I'm on?" I asked. "I'd like to have 'em get all the stuff out of the files and the morgue, so they'll be ready for it. Will it break by eleven?"

Wolfe looked at me with that poker face of his and his lips barely moved as he spoke.

"It'll break by eleven. But I don't think you'd better call in. You may change your mind about it before you get through. And — we might not be successful."

I knew what he meant by that last, so I sat back and watched him open the drawer of his desk and take out a long-barreled, light automatic. I was plenty surprised and I guess I showed it when I spoke.

"You're not going after Shulz with that, are you? Looks like a .22."

"It is." Wolfe fondled the gun, slipped out the clip. "And this isn't always what I use, Charlie."

He put the clip back in the .22, pulled back the slide to throw a bullet in the chamber, and laid it on the desk. Then taking a larger gun — a revolver — from the drawer, he inspected this also.

"This is the old stand-by. A .38 special. But sometimes I have use for the .22. It all depends on the job and what I've got to do."

He slipped this in his shoulder holster and picked up the .22 again.

"It's a funny thing, Charlie. They've got me down for a killer. A hardboiled murderer. Well, I've been on this job five years and I've killed just three men in that time — including Varelli. Not so many, is it, when you think of what I've been up against."

"But," I sputtered. "It seems like —"

"Nope." Wolfe interrupted and forestalled the thought I was about to express. "I've shot plenty, Charlie. That's what you're thinking of. I've shot plenty — wounded 'em enough so we could take 'em. But that doesn't make such a good story, does it?"

I kept still and he continued. "That's what the .22 is for. With the .38 I can generally put a quick shot in a three-inch circle at ordinary range. With the .22 I can make that a one-inch circle. It's almost as good as a rifle, Charlie. And sometimes it comes in handy."

Wolfe stood up and slipped the .22 in his coat pocket. "I guess we're set. And just remember, this is no picnic. You know Shulz's reputation. If he should get me, it might be sort of tough on you. I'll try to take care of you, but it's not too late to back out and I wouldn't blame you if you did."

I looked at the sharp-featured face, sized up the slim, wiry build. There was competence in every line of him.

"It's O.K. with me," I said.

We left the taxi at Columbus Avenue. "How do you know you'll find him?" I asked.

"I'll find him. That's what stoolies are for. He won't be in when we get there but we'll stick around till he comes.

"The house is almost down to the next block. I'll go down alone. You watch me. See where I go. Then follow me in about five minutes. I'll wait down in the hall for you."

Five minutes later I followed Wolfe down the depressing canyon of three and four storied, dirty brick apartment houses. There was a sordid atmosphere of decay about the neighborhood that quickened my footsteps. I was glad when I reached the house into which Wolfe had turned.

The door was unlocked and Wolfe was waiting inside.

I followed him up two flights of narrow, dimly lighted stairs and down a corridor to an entrance on the left. He tried the knob, then fished out a ring of keys. An instant later he

pushed open the door and stepped inside. I followed and stood out of the way until he had closed the door again.

The place seemed pitch black. And as I waited there in the darkness for him to speak, I was conscious that I was holding my breath, that the blood was thumping at my eardrums. It seemed as though we stood there for five minutes before he said:

"Just stand there a minute."

He snapped on a flashlight. A handkerchief was over the lens and the diffused light which came from the bulb cast an eerie glow over the room. I could see that it was garishly furnished, could make out a davenport, a table, some chairs.

Then the light went out. I could hear Wolfe fumbling with something in the room, heard him grunt.

"It won't be long now," he said. "I guess the best place for you to stand is right in that doorway. If things don't work out, you can beat it back there to the kitchen. Now we'd better keep still."

He snapped on the light again until I took up my station in the hall doorway, then he switched it off again. But I wanted to ask one more question and I did.

"How come you're after this guy alone? You know he's goin' to be here. Why not let the cops in on it?"

"Yeah. That's just it. If they knew about it, there'd be fifty cops around this place. They'd be so thick Shulz couldn't miss. This way is safer. Now shut up."

I don't know how much later it was, probably not more than ten minutes, when I heard the footsteps in the outside corridor. And if I was nervous before, I was tensed all over now. Maybe I was scared; I know I wasn't happy about it. I wished then that I'd found out if there was a back door.

Then a key clicked in the lock and I tried to put my thoughts together. Would Wolfe shoot Shulz down in the doorway? Would he give him a chance?

I watched the door swing slowly open. A narrow strip of yellow from the lighted hall crept across the floor, picked out the pattern in the rug, played tricks with the table and chair in its path. I glanced quickly toward the wall opposite the door to see if Wolfe could be seen. I couldn't pick him out.

Then I watched the tall, thick-set figure, silhouetted in the doorway; saw him step into the room and raise one hand along the wall.

A switch clicked. Nothing happened. I stiffened as the fellow by the door spat out a curse. That was what Wolfe had been fumbling with. He had unscrewed the light bulbs.

Then a conical beam of light shot out from a point directly opposite the door. Wolfe's flashlight. I couldn't see what was behind it. I shrank back in my doorway and looked at Shulz.

For a second or two he stood there as though transfixed. His fleshy, heavily jowled face looked ghastly white in the artificial light. His eyes seemed

to recede under the puffy lids and a tongue licked out to wet his lips.

"Stick 'em up, Shulz!" Wolfe barked the command. Then it happened.

This was what I had come to see and here it was. My eyes were glued on that puffy face of Shulz. I saw it coming, that thing Wolfe had spoken about, that action of the brain that meant death.

His hand darted inside his coat and I knew what to expect when the gun came out. I wanted to yell at Wolfe, wanted him to shoot while he had time.

Shulz's automatic whipped into view and the instant it was free of his clothing a streak of flame stabbed the darkness and a roar shattered the quiet of the room.

The time between the first shot and the second couldn't have been more than a watch tick. But it was long enough for a weakness of fear to sweep over me with the realization that Wolfe must have been hit. But the conical sweep of the flashlight still held steady.

Then the second shot roared and by that time I couldn't have run if I'd wanted to. Then two jets of flame shot out from a spot about four feet from the flashlight. Two sharp, distinct cracks sounded, like a person slapping a mosquito on his hand.

Shulz's face twitched. His mouth dropped open and the automatic slid from a hand that showed red on the back. One knee sagged and he braced himself on the other leg to keep from falling.

Wolfe, the .22 in his right fist, stepped into the flashlight's rays, reached up and turned one of the light bulbs. The resulting glow showed the flashlight resting on the back of an overstuffed chair. Wolfe moved over to Shulz, who hadn't said a word, and picked up the fallen automatic.

Backing toward a wall phone he said, "Now you see where the .22 comes in, Charlie. The one in the forearm crippled his gun hand, the one in the knee makes him stick around. I didn't have to kill this guy because, for once, we got a case he can't beat."

He reached up for the receiver. "Of course, this may not give you the story you want. This wasn't a regular shooting contest. I tricked him with the flash, turned it on and stepped to one side. Maybe that don't count. But maybe you can see what would've happened to some conscientious cop standing there with a flashlight — maybe you can see how a real killer works.

"And if this ain't just what you want, Charlie, let it lay. There may be a time when I can take you out with a .38 instead of the .22."

Damon Runyon wrote his own editorial introduction to "The Old Doll's House" — to wit: "A very romantic story — so romantic that some very romantic people, indeed, are still scratching their noodles over it. They will never get anywhere. Miss Abigail Ardsley has plenty of potatoes. And she is not the sort to talk . . ."

THE OLD DOLL'S HOUSE

by DAMON RUNYON

Now it seems that one cold winter night, a party of residents of Brooklyn comes across the Manhattan Bridge in an automobile wishing to pay a call on a guy by the name of Lance McGowan, who is well-known to one and all along Broadway as a coming guy in the business world.

In fact, it is generally conceded that, barring accident, Lance will some day be one of the biggest guys in this country as an importer, and especially as an importer of such merchandise as fine liquors, because he is very bright, and has many good connections throughout the United States and Canada.

Furthermore, Lance McGowan is a nice-looking young guy and he has plenty of ticker, although some citizens say he does not show very sound business judgment in trying to move in on Angie the Ox over in Brooklyn, as Angie the Ox is an importer himself, besides enjoying a splendid trade in other lines, including artichokes and extortion.

Of course Lance McGowan is not interested in artichokes at all, and very little in extortion, but he does not see any reason why he shall not place his imports in a thriving territory such as Brooklyn, especially as his line of merchandise is much superior to anything handled by Angie the Ox.

Anyway, Angie is one of the residents of Brooklyn in the party that wishes to call on Lance McGowan, and besides Angie the party includes a guy by the name of Mockie Max, who is a very prominent character in Brooklyn, and another guy by the name of The Louse Kid, who is not so prominent, but who is considered a very promising young guy in many respects, although personally I think The Louse Kid has a very weak face.

He is supposed to be a wonderful hand with a burlap bag when anybody wishes to put somebody in such a bag, which is considered a great practical joke in Brooklyn, and in fact The Louse Kid has a burlap bag with him on the night in question, and they are figuring on putting Lance McGowan in the bag when

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they call on him, just for a laugh. Personally, I consider this a very crude form of humor, but then Angie the Ox and the other members of his party are very crude characters, anyway.

Well, it seems they have Lance McGowan pretty well cased, and they know that of an evening along toward 10 o'clock, he nearly always strolls through West Fifty-fourth Street on his way to a certain spot on Park Avenue that is called the Humming Bird Club, which has a very hightoned clientele, and the reason Lance goes there is because he has a piece of the joint, and furthermore he loves to show off his shape in a tuxedo to the swell dolls.

So these residents of Brooklyn drive in their automobile along this route, and as they roll past Lance McGowan, Angie the Ox and Mockie Max let fly at Lance with a couple of sawed-offs, while The Louse Kid holds the burlap bag, figuring for all I know that Lance will be startled by the sawed-offs and will hop into the bag like a rabbit.

But Lance is by no means a sucker, and when the first blast of slugs from the sawed-offs breezes past him without hitting him, what does he do but hop over a brick wall alongside him and drop into a yard on the other side. So Angie the Ox, and Mockie Max and The Louse Kid get out of their automobile and run up close to the wall themselves because they commence figuring that if Lance McGowan starts popping at them from behind this wall, they will be taking plenty the worst of it, for of course they cannot figure Lance to be strolling about without being rodded up somewhat.

But Lance is by no means rodded up, because a rod is apt to create a bump in his shape when he has his tuxedo on, so the story really begins with Lance McGowan behind the brick wall, practically defenseless, and the reason I know this story is because Lance McGowan tells most of it to me, as Lance knows that I know his real name is Lancelot, and he feels under great obligation to me because I never mention the matter publicly.

Now, the brick wall Lance hops over is a wall around a pretty fair-sized yard, and the yard belongs to an old two-story stone house, and this house is well known to one and all in this man's town as a house of great mystery, and it is pointed out as such by the drivers of sightseeing busses.

This house belongs to an old doll by the name of Miss Abigail Ardsley, and anybody who ever reads the newspapers will tell you that Miss Abigail Ardsley has so many potatoes that it is really painful to think of, especially to people who have no potatoes whatever. In fact, Miss Abigail Ardsley has practically all the potatoes in the world, except maybe a few left over for general circulation.

These potatoes are left to her by her papa, old Waldo Ardsley, who accumulates same in the early days

of this town by buying corner real estate very cheap before people realize this real estate will be quite valuable later on for fruit-juice stands and cigar stores.

It seems that Waldo is a most eccentric old bloke, and is very strict with his daughter, and will never let her marry, or even as much as look as if she wishes to marry, until finally she is so old she does not care a cuss about marrying, or anything else, and becomes very eccentric herself.

In fact, Miss Abigail Ardsley becomes so eccentric that she cuts herself off from everybody, and especially from a lot of relatives who are wishing to live off of her, and any time anybody cuts themselves off from such characters, they are considered very eccentric, indeed, especially by the relatives. She lives in the big house all alone, except for a couple of old servants, and it is very seldom that anybody sees her around and about.

Well, no sooner is he in the yard than Lance McGowan begins looking for a way to get out, and one way he does not wish to get out is over the wall again, because he figures Angie the Ox and his sawed-offs are bound to be waiting for him in Fifty-fourth Street. So Lance looks around to see if there is some way out of the yard in another direction, but it seems there is no such way, and pretty soon he sees the snozzle of a sawed-off come poking over the wall, with the ugly kisser of Angie the Ox behind it, looking for him.

Then Lance happens to try a door on one side of the house, and the door opens at once and Lance McGowan hastens in to find himself in the living-room of the house. It is a very large living-room with very nice furniture standing around and about, and oil paintings on the walls, and a big old grandfather's clock as high as the ceiling, and statuary here and there. In fact, it is such a nice, comfortable-looking room that Lance McGowan is greatly surprised, as he is expecting to find a regular-mystery-house room such as you see in the movies, with cobwebs here and there, and everything all rotted up.

But the only person in this room seems to be a little old doll all dressed in soft white, who is sitting in a low rocking chair by an open fireplace in which a bright fire is going, doing some tatting.

Well, naturally Lance McGowan is somewhat startled by this scene, and he is figuring that the best thing he can do is to guzzle the old doll before she can commence yelling for the gendarmes, when she looks up at him and gives him a soft smile, and speaks to him in a soft voice, as follows:

"Good evening," the old doll says.

Well, Lance cannot think of any reply to make to this at once, as it is certainly not a good evening for him, and he stands there looking at the old doll, somewhat dazed, when she smiles again and tells him to sit down.

So the next thing Lance knows, he is sitting there in a chair in front of

the fireplace chewing the fat with the old doll as pleasant as you please, and of course the old doll is nobody but Miss Abigail Ardsley. Furthermore, she does not seem at all alarmed, or even much surprised at seeing Lance in her house.

Of course Lance knows who Miss Abigail Ardsley is, because he often reads stories in the newspapers about her the same as everybody else, and he always figures such a character must be slightly daffy to cut herself off from everybody when she has all the potatoes in the world, and there is so much fun going on, but he is very courteous to her, because after all he is a guest in her home.

"You are young," the old doll says to Lance McGowan, looking him in the kisser. "It is many years since a young man comes through yonder door."

And with this she lets out a big sigh, and looks so very sad that Lance McGowan's heart is touched.

"Forty-five years now," the old doll says in a low voice, as if she is talking to herself. "So young, so handsome, and so good."

And although Lance is in no mood to listen to reminiscences at this time, the next thing he knows he is hearing a very pathetic love story, because it seems that Miss Abigail Ardsley is once all hotted up over a young guy who is a clerk in her papa's office.

It seems from what Lance McGowan gathers that there is nothing wrong with the young guy that a million bobs will not cure, but Miss Abigail Ardsley's papa is a mean old waffle, and he will never listen to her having any truck with a poor guy.

But it seems that Miss Abigail Ardsley's ever-loving young guy has plenty of moxie, and every night he comes to see her after her papa goes to the hay, and she lets him in through the same side door Lance McGowan comes through, and they sit by the fire and hold hands, and talk in low tones, and plan what they will do when the young guy makes a scratch.

Then one night it seems Miss Abigail Ardsley's papa has the stomach ache, or some such, and cannot sleep a wink, so he comes wandering downstairs looking for the Jamaica ginger, and catches Miss Abigail Ardsley and her ever-loving guy in a clutch that will win the title for any wrestler that can ever learn it.

Well, this scene is so repulsive to Miss Abigail Ardsley's papa that he is practically speechless for a minute, and then he orders the young guy out of his life in every respect, and tells him never to darken his door again, especially the side door.

But it seems that by this time a great storm is raging outside, and Miss Abigail Ardsley begs and pleads with her papa to let the young guy at least remain until the storm subsides, but between being all sored up at the clutching scene he witnesses, and his stomach ache, Mr. Ardsley is very hard-hearted, indeed, and he makes the young guy take the wind.

The next morning the poor young

guy is found at the side door frozen as stiff as a board, because it seems that the storm that is raging is the blizzard of 1888, which is a very famous event in the history of New York, although up to this time Lance McGowan never hears of it before, and does not believe it until he looks the matter up afterwards. It seems from what Miss Abigail Ardsley says that as near as anyone can make out, the young guy must return to the door seeking shelter after wandering about in the storm a while, but of course by this time her papa has the door all bolted up, and nobody hears the young guy.

"And," Miss Abigail Ardsley says to Lance McGowan, after giving him all these details, "I never speak to my papa again as long as he lives, and no other man ever comes in or out of yonder door, or any other door of this house, until your appearance tonight, although," she says, "this side door is never locked in case such a young man comes seeking shelter."

Then she looks at Lance McGowan in such a way that he wonders if Miss Abigail Ardsley hears the sawed-offs going when Angie the Ox and Mockie Max are tossing slugs at him.

Well, all these old-time memories seem to make Miss Abigail Ardsley feel very tough, and by and by she starts to weep, and if there is one thing Lance McGowan cannot stand, it is a doll weeping, even if she is nothing but an old doll. So he starts in to cheer Miss Abigail Ardsley up, and he pats her on the arm, and says to her like this:

"Why," Lance says, "I am greatly surprised to hear your statement about the doors around here being so little used. Why, Sweetheart," Lance says, "if I know there is a doll as good-looking as you in the neighborhood, and a door unlocked, I will be busting in myself every night. Come, come, come," Lance says, "let us talk things over and maybe have a few laughs, because I may have to stick around here a while. Listen, Sweetheart," he says, "do you happen to have a drink in the joint?"

Well, at this Miss Abigail Ardsley dries her eyes, and smiles again, and then she pulls a sort of a rope near her, and in comes a guy who seems about ninety years old, and who seems greatly surprised to see Lance there. In fact, he is so surprised that he is practically tottering when he leaves the room after hearing Miss Abigail Ardsley tell him to bring some wine and sandwiches.

Well, Lance sits there with Miss Abigail Ardsley sipping wine and eating sandwiches, and all the time he is telling her stories of one kind and another, some of which he cleans up a little when he figures they may be a little too snappy for her, and by and by he has her laughing quite heartily indeed.

Finally he figures there is no chance of Angie and his sawed-offs being outside waiting for him, so he says he guesses he will be going, and Miss Abigail Ardsley personally sees him to the door, and this time it is the front door, and as Lance is leaving he

thinks of something he once sees a guy do on the stage, and he takes Miss Abigail Ardsley's hand and raises it to his lips and gives it a large kiss, all of which is very surprising to Miss Abigail Ardsley, but more so to Lance McGowan when he gets to thinking about it afterwards.

Just as he figures, there is no one in sight when he gets out in the street, so he goes on over to the Humming Bird Club, where he learns that many citizens are greatly disturbed by his absence, and are wondering if he is in The Louse Kid's burlap bag, for by this time it is pretty well known that Angie the Ox and his fellow citizens of Brooklyn are around and about.

In fact, somebody tells Lance that Angie is at the moment over in Good Time Charley's little speak in West Forty-ninth Street, buying drinks for one and all, and telling how he makes Lance McGowan hop a brick wall, which of course sounds most disparaging of Lance.

Well, while Angie is still buying these drinks, and still speaking of making Lance a brick-wall hopper, all of a sudden the door of Good Time Charley's speak opens and in comes a guy with a Betsy in his hand and this guy throws four slugs into Angie the Ox before anybody can say hello.

Furthermore, the guy throws one slug into Mockie Max, and one slug into The Louse Kid, who are still with Angie the Ox, so the next thing anybody knows there is Angie as dead as a doornail, and there is Mockie Max even deader than Angie, and there is The Louse making a terrible fuss over a slug in his leg, and nobody can remember what the guy who plugs them looks like, except a couple of stool pigeons who state that the guy looks very much like Lance McGowan.

So what happens but early the next morning, Johnny Brannigan, the plainclothes copper, puts the arm on Lance McGowan for plugging Angie the Ox, and Mockie Max and The Louse Kid.

So the collar of Lance McGowan is water on the wheel of one and all because Lance is so prominent, and anybody will tell you that it looks as if it is a sure thing that Lance will be very severely punished, and maybe sent to the electric chair, although he hires Judge Goldstein, who is one of the surest-footed lawyers in this town, to defend him. But even Judge Goldstein admits that Lance is in a tough spot, especially as the newspapers are demanding justice, and printing long stories about Lance, and pictures of him, and calling him some very uncouth names.

Finally Lance himself commences to worry about his predicament, although up to this time a little thing like being charged with murder in the first degree never bothers Lance very much. And in fact he will not be bothering very much about this particular charge if he does not find the D. A. very fussy about letting him out on bail. In fact, it is nearly two weeks before he lets Lance out on

bail, and all this time Lance is in the sneezer.

Well, by the time Lance's trial comes up, you can get 3 to 1 anywhere that he will be convicted, and the price goes up to 5 when the prosecution gets through with its case, and proves by the stool pigeons that at exactly twelve o'clock on the night of January 5th, Lance McGowan steps into Good Time Charley's little speak and plugs Angie the Ox, Mockie Max, and The Louse Kid.

Furthermore, several other witnesses who claim they know Lance McGowan by sight testify that they see Lance in the neighborhood of Good Time Charley's around twelve o'clock, so by the time it comes Judge Goldstein's turn to put on the defense, many citizens are saying that if he can do no more than beat the chair for Lance he will be doing a wonderful job.

Well, it is late in the afternoon when Judge Goldstein gets up and looks all around the courtroom, and without making any opening statement to the jury for the defense, as these mouth pieces usually do, he says like this:

"Call Miss Abigail Ardsley," he says.

At first nobody quite realizes just who Judge Goldstein is calling for, although the name sounds familiar to one and all present who read the newspapers, when in comes a little old doll in a black silk dress that almost reaches the floor, and a black bonnet.

Afterwards I read in one of the newspapers that she looks like she steps down out of an old-fashioned ivory miniature and that she is practically beautiful.

Anyway, she comes into the courtroom surrounded by so many old guys you will think it must be recess at the Old Men's Home, except they are all dressed up in clawhammer coat tails, and high collars, and afterwards it turns out that they are the biggest lawyers in this town, and they all represent Miss Abigail Ardsley one way or another, and they are present to see that her interests are protected.

Nobody ever sees so much bowing and scraping before in a courtroom. In fact, even the judge bows, and although I am only a spectator I find myself bowing too, because the way I look at it, anybody with as many potatoes as Miss Abigail Ardsley is entitled to a general bowing. When she takes the witness stand, her lawyers grab chairs and move up as close to her as possible, and in the street outside there is practically a riot as word goes around that Miss Abigail Ardsley is in the court, and citizens come running from every which way, hoping to get a peek at the richest old doll in the world.

Well, when all hands finally get settled down a little, Judge Goldstein speaks to Miss Abigail Ardsley as follows:

"Miss Ardsley," he says, "I am going to ask you just two or three questions. Kindly look at this defendant," Judge Goldstein says, point-

ing at Lance McGowan, and giving Lance the office to stand up. "Do you recognize him?"

Well, the little old doll takes a gander at Lance, and nods her head yes, and Lance gives her a large smile.

"Is he a caller in your home on the night of January fifth?" Judge Goldstein asks.

"He is," Miss Abigail Ardsley says.

"Is there a clock in the living-room in which you receive this defendant?" Judge Goldstein says.

"There is," Miss Abigail Ardsley says. "A large clock," she says. "A grandfather's clock."

"Do you happen to notice," Judge Goldstein says, "and do you now recall the hour indicated by this clock when the defendant leaves your home?"

"Yes," Miss Abigail Ardsley says, "I do happen to notice. It is just twelve o'clock by my clock," she says.

Well, this statement creates a large sensation in the courtroom, because if it is twelve o'clock when Lance McGowan leaves Miss Abigail Ardsley's house in West Fifty-fourth Street, anybody can see that there is no way he can be in Good Time Charley's little speak over five blocks away at the same minute unless he is a magician, and the judge begins peeking over his specs at the coppers in the courtroom very severe, and the cops begin scowling at the stool pigeons, and I am willing to lay plenty of 6 to 5 that the stools will wish they are never born before they hear the last of this matter from the gendarmes.

Furthermore, the guys from the D. A.'s office who are handling the prosecution are looking much embarrassed, and the jurors are muttering to each other, and right away Judge Goldstein says he moves that the case against his client be dismissed, and the judge says he is in favor of the motion.

So there is Lance as free as anybody, and as he starts to leave the courtroom he stops by Miss Abigail Ardsley, who is still sitting in the witness chair surrounded by her mouthpieces, and he shakes her hand and thanks her, and Miss Abigail Ardsley says to Lance in a low voice, like this:

"I will be expecting you again some night, young man," she says.

"Some night, Sweetheart," Lance says, "at twelve o'clock."

And then he goes on about his business, and Miss Abigail Ardsley goes on about hers, and everybody says it is certainly a wonderful thing that a doll as rich as Miss Abigail Ardsley comes forward in the interests of justice to save a guy like Lance McGowan from a wrong rap.

But of course it is just as well for Lance that Miss Abigail Ardsley does not explain to the court that when she recovers from the shock of the finding of her ever-loving young guy frozen to death, she stops all the clocks in her house at the hour she sees him last, so for forty-five years it is always twelve o'clock in her house.

NO ERRORS

by F. R. BUCK

"And it was my pride — it *is* my pride —" said the thin old gentleman.

"This is Judge Raleigh, Bill," said the fat man wearily. "Oldest member of the club. Used to be judge around here."

The old gentleman arose and bowed. The man from Chicago, starting late on Southern manners, compromised by retaining his chair in the posture of a sitting hen alarmed.

"In our community on business, sir, I presume," said the thin old gentleman, reseating himself. "I regret that we should present you with such a spectacle as today's."

"Oh, that's nothing," said the man from Chicago. "We got worse at home."

"In point of numbers killed by gangsters, doubtless," said the judge politely. "I was alluding, however, to the acquittal of the murderers. As I was saying, it was my pride, and is becoming more so, sir, as times change, that I could always say that never did any culprit who appeared before me escape punishment — if I was myself convinced of his guilt."

"That's fine," said the fat man. "An' now, Bill, what're you havin'? Judge, can you be tempted?"

The thin old gentleman smiled and shook his head, and from the depths of the chair into which he had relapsed, arose, bowed once more, and withdrew, though not very far. It was dusk in the smoking-room, and the man from Chicago thought he had gone.

"Who's the old —"

He paused before a powerful wink.

"Club bore — old fool," whispered the fat man; and then in a louder tone: "Speaking of crime, I don't suppose you ever heard about our prize murder, up your way? The Gilson case?"

"I don't think —"

"Oh; you wouldn't. It was years ago, but don't you imagine it wasn't a hell-bender. It just goes to show that gangsters didn't invent everything. Nor prohibition, neither. There used to be a prohibition about runnin' after another guy's wife, but that's just what this Gilson did, and when the woman's husband got after him, Gilson shot him. He was a poor sap anyway, the husband. Hired a couple private detectives — had 'em right there when he busted in on Gilson, but they didn't do him much good. He says somethin' like 'Now I caught you,' I suppose; an' this Gilson says, 'Oh, yeah?' an' shoots him.

"Of course they arrest Gilson an' when the D. A. says, 'How come?' he says, 'Self-defense'; an' when the two dicks say the husband didn't have a gun, he says they're liars; an'

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when they commit him for trial, he says, 'What of it!' an' comes out on fifty thousand dollars bail. Oh, sure, he had it. He was *old* man Gilson's son. The big oil works.

"Well, they came to trial, an' the jury disagreed; an' they got a new trial, an' the jury disagreed an' three of the jurors went to jail for bribe-takin' — five or six years apiece, see? The D. A. was hell-bent he'd convict Gilson. And accordingly they got all set and they tried him for the third time. And right in the middle of the trial one of the state's witnesses disappeared, an' one of the private detectives said the husband *had* had a gun, an' that the other dick was lyin'; an' up comes the guy's wife, an' weeps an' says she perjured herself the other times, an' Willie did try to shoot her boy friend, an' Gilson was quite right to let him have it. So the detective gets five years for perjury, an' the wife gets two but don't serve it, and Gilson gets acquitted!"

"No kidding?"

"Haw, haw! Cert'nly," said the fat man. "An' the *funniest* thing is that the judge in the case was that old duck that was just talkin' about how in all his years on the bench he hadn't — Oh, sorry, Judge! I thought you'd gone home."

The thin old gentleman arose.

"On the contrary, gentlemen," he said serenely, "you will excuse me for my inadvertent eavesdropping. Good evening."

With a step that was less a totter than a delicate precision of tread, he crossed the wide room and passed through the door leading to the staircase. In the meantime the fat man was finishing the story.

"Old Raleigh resigned right after that, an' he musta been off the bench twenty years now. And, funny thing. After spendin' all that money to save his neck, Gilson went along a coupla years, an' then somebody bumped *him* off. Shot him. Some husband or somebody — they never found out."

Downstairs, the cloak-room porter was talking to an old gentleman who seemed abstracted.

"Yes, a fine evening," said Judge Raleigh, fastening his gloves. "Michael, you read that those gunmen were acquitted?"

"I did, sorr. They should have had you there, sorr!"

"Yes. Do you know it was — it *is* my boast," said the judge, "that not one culprit who appeared before me, when I was on the bench, ever — if I personally believed him to be guilty — escaped the proper punishment."

"Is that so, sorr?"

The thin old gentleman turned his gaze on Michael. Usually, it was a mild blue gaze; but now, for just an instant, Michael was startled.

As the fat man upstairs broke into a distant but still loud guffaw, Judge Raleigh took his cane and added the final set to his shiny top hat with a final, old-fashioned rap. Like a pistol shot.

"Yes, that's so, Michael," he said crisply. "*Not a single one!* Good night!"

WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE: WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

There is a type of story which leaves the most interesting part unsaid, which ends on the very threshold of suspense, leaving it to the reader to speculate on the unwritten and undisclosed climax. Of this type of story, which pays an enormous compliment to the reader, Wilbur Daniel Steele is a modern master. We will say no more until after you have read "The Lady-Killer" . . .

THE LADY-KILLER

by WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

B. J. (Bee Jay) Cantra butted through a belt of sumac, head down, wind sobbing. Bullbriar ripped another gap in his thirty-dollar gunning-shirt. He didn't know. If he had he wouldn't have cared. Bee Jay was lost, and he was deathly scared.

The foliage gave way and he saw a quiet pool at his feet, no bigger than a bathtub, fed by a ferny trickle from some spring. Thirst grabbed him. First, to prove himself collected, he thought to lay his gun down carefully; it was imported. He discovered he had no gun. When had he thrown that away?

He sank to his knees and leaned forward on his hands. The water made a mirror to give his face back. Panic had creased it and dirty sweat lined the creases. It made him look of a sudden forty-seven years and five months old.

What would Eleanor Wye have thought? What would Sonya Seely have thought? Or — what-was-her-name? — the brunette bit of youngness last week, Harriday's party at Twenty-One, and afterwards — what would she have thought to see him now, anybody's forty-seven?

But still most pressing, what would Eleanor Wye have thought? He remembered Grand Central, him and Bert Wye and Harriday with their guncases bidding their wives goodbye. And Bert saying how he'd have to be back in town in time to catch a train for Chicago Friday to sell a bridge. And with that, Eleanor's glance crossing with Bee Jay's, swiftly, privily, yet plainly: "Did you hear that? Friday evening, then."

Apple-cheeked Bert, so long a side-kick, so suddenly a sap.

Damned creased face! The man broke the image by plunging his mouth into the water. When he'd sucked up all his belly would hold he remained there on all fours, drips falling down off his chin.

"Friday"! What a bloody joke now! Friday, Bert might be off for Chicago all right, but where would B. J. Cantra be? But no — no Chicago for Bert — to hell with a bridge sale, he'd be right here in the wilds of Carolina, along with the posses, the rangers, combing the woods with failing hope, good old Bert.

"Friday"? . . . Thursday, Wednesday, Tuesday. Could this be only Tuesday? The half-dozen hours since he'd found himself separated from Bert and Harriday seemed weeks. Still Tuesday.

Words hardly noted at the time came back. About now, at home, Eleanor would be with Harriet — "for cocktails and a dish of dirt, Eleanor dear." Harriet had made the date laughingly, there at Grand Central. With Eleanor, of all people, innocent-sweet, knowing one bit of dirt she wasn't likely to dish out to Harriet Cantra!

A sudden illogical fury filled the man. He saw his wife as he hadn't seen her for how many years, still something the stranger, pretty with youth, preoccupied with her "two boys" — him and the baby — no time yet, no need yet, to know what was what and learn the answers. And now that an outside woman should have it over Harriet in cynical secret —

Bee Jay went to pieces. "Harriet, I'm a bum!" He wailed aloud: "Harriet! *Do* something! I'm lost! Hear me? I'm going to die! Lost in the woods!"

No-no-no! He staggered up, turning round and round, hollering with his raw throat: "*Bert! Hy-eeee! Harriday! Somebody!*"

Embarrassment born of hysteria hushed him. In the silence came a whisper near at hand among the ferns that hid the feeding trickle. Even as he jerked his eyes it ceased. A flat triangular head lifted and hung. A moccasin had been lying coiled there all the while.

Bee Jay inched backwards, heel by heel. Brush laid hands on him. He broke out bleating: "O God — oh please —"

He whirled and fought the brush, broke through, ran at stumbling random. "O God I'll be good!" A cloud of aspen blinded him. He pitched across a ribbon of light, landed in a bunchy darkness of jack-pine. "O Jesus — O Harriet —"

By and by a limb of naked deadwood barred him. He stood and gaped at it. He grabbed it and hung on, realizing what it was, the rail of a snake-fence zigzagging through the woods.

He followed along, hardly daring let go. The woods fell away. Down across scraggly pastureland he saw two paintless cabins, one a house and one a barn. He leaned on the fence and laughed aloud.

"This is one on you, Bee Jay! This is one for the book!"

Hysteria? Not a bit. Shame? No. That but minutes ago he'd been stumbling in circles, fighting trees, bleating prayers, soaking his clothes

with sweat till they stank of terror, was all rubbed right out. Houses! B. J. Cantra had the world by the tail again.

It was going to be too good to keep. Already he could hear himself, maybe over old-fashioneds for two in a hotel nook, or maybe, towel-swathed, in the locker-room at Agwamis: "For one while there, till I happened on that fence, Baby was I lonesome!"

Across the glimpse between house-cabin and barn-cabin a figure passed. Instantly Bee Jay took his elbow off the fence. He got out a handkerchief and went over his face and neck, hard in the creases. He laid his thinning top hair back where it belonged with a comb of fingers. By edging his shoulderblades together in back, in front he lifted and flattened the bag of stomach muscles below the rib-arch. All this mechanical. You tauten a string and a tin monkey climbs.

The glimpsed figure down there wore a skirt.

The skirt had once been turkey red, but wear, work and weather had turned it a dungy brown. Milk spattered it now, though the wearer had hiked it up over her knees to keep it out of the pail under the lean cow's belly. She was barefoot because of the barn dirt.

It took Bee Jay a minute to get all this. What light there was came in at the doorway in which he stood; piled fodder-corn stopped the one window. And even outdoors it was growing dusk.

The girl, or woman, whichever she was, had glanced at him once, around the cow's rear, and returned to her milking.

"Well-er —" He twinkled to himself, re-cleared his throat. "Waal now — howdy, lady."

Once more she tipped her face in sight, eyes small, widely set, heavy cheekbones and chin.

"He's to Hebers. He' be back."

Bee Jay was thinking: what an animal; though, come to look at it, that neck of hers isn't so worse — if someone would take a scraper to it. "Pardon, what did you say? He? Who? Where?"

"To Hebers. He' be back. You quit that." The last, all of a stolid piece, was to the restless cow. And on with the milking.

"But see here — look here — I'm in a bad fix."

Chee-chee, chee-chee, jets in foam was all he got for answer. This was something new for B. J. Cantra. Involuntarily he wet a thumb and tried to iron out the worst of the V-shaped tears in his Abercrombie shirt. But then he came to, and was amused.

He turned out of the doorway and studied the yard, naked red earth, its only adornment chicken-traces. The dwelling, built like the barn of mill-waste from which bark hung like hair, was plainly of but a single room. Bee Jay had to smile. "Primitive" was a word people tossed

around. Eleanor was addicted to it. A lot she knew! He'd have an earful for her Friday night and a good laugh.

The thought of Friday, three days off, brought him back to where he was. Better than lost in the woods, yes. But still! Moreover, he was hungry. Moreover, damn it all . . . Uneasy rancor pulled his shoulder-blades together, repairing his silhouette. A palm did something mechanical to his under-chin. Who the devil did she think she was, to go on pumping at a cow in there, when plenty of dames that were really something —

But she had finished. She stood in the doorway, pail in hand.

He spoke sharply. "Now listen, honey, look at me."

She looked somewhere else, no more expression than a turnip.

"I'm hungry, I'm tired. If you'll tell me how I get from here to Jones Camp, Mayburg — Are you listening? *Look at me!*"

Less than a turnip, a sack of meal. She hung her head, eyes on her feet. The feet were the color of old brown shoes, and the down on her legs gave the stain that faded up them the look of fancy stockings. One great-toe fumbled out to touch the other. Then the other did the same by it. Bee Jay had a brain-wave: *She's afraid of me.*

Life bloomed again. He was tickled. No, doggone it, he was thrilled. It made him think, somehow, of his first try of canned rattlesnake; though it had brought his gorge up it had thrilled him. Bee Jay knew so many weary females whose main play was being "frightened." But here was the real thing. As real as rags and red clay. This was primitive.

Compassion filled him. "See here, my girl." He laid a hand on the hair of the bent head, tied back out of the way with a flannel string like a horse's tail on a muddy track. (He'd been right; it did feel like horse-hair.) "See here, don't be silly. Can't you say something?"

"Thur he comes," she said.

"What's that?"

"Thur he comes."

A wagon came in sight, clear of the house corner, drawn by a mule and a pony. They approached and halted of their own accord. The driver threw the reins over them, unhunched himself, climbed down and started to unhook the many-mended traces from the near singletree.

"My name is Cantra. B. J. Cantra."

"Hunh? . . . Keep care o' the wire off that trace, Cath."

From the off-side, where she'd gone to unhitch, Cath said: "My husband's a little bit deef in the ears."

Bee Jay felt like laughing. Undersized, mean in health, a mite wry-necked and "deef in the ears" to boot, the fellow gave Bee Jay a sense of personal bigness and muscularity. Primitive stuff. *I could break him with my hands. Dumb as she is, she must see that.*

He bent with complacence and raised his voice. "I lost my way in

the woods . . . Wait a second there, before you unharness — I want to get you to take me to a place called Mayburg, Jones Camp."

The man went right on. "Mornin', mebby. They're tuckered."

"Now see here! I'm paying for this, you understand, Mr. — er —"

"Judah," Cath supplied. "Jess Judah." She too went right on, throwing the traces over the pony's loins.

"When I say pay, I mean pay well. Listen — good God, man!"

"Been a furr piece. They're wore down, I tell yuh. Giddap!"

The animals moved a step and let the pole drop. The hames were unlinked. The harness was stripped and thrown into the wagonbed. Judah slapped the mule on the croup. "Go 'long!" The creature wandered off, the pony following. In the barn the cow lowed. Cath reentered, brought her out and sent her after the draught-beasts, already grabbing at rags of grass up the hill. Taking the milk-pail she went into the house, and light appeared at the single window. Her husband stood. He got out the remnant of a twist of chewing and bit off a piece. Night had come down, dark enough for the first stars.

Bee Jay quit holding in. "This is a swell fix, this is pretty!" He went sky-high. "What the hell do you think I'm to *do?*" He shut his mouth tight, drummed the earth with a sole. "I don't suppose it would put you out *too* much, Mister Judah, just to tell me the *way*. I'll *walk*."

"Mayburg? Kinda furr piece. Mite tricky after dark, 'thout you know the road. Got a flash?"

"Don't make me laugh."

"I ain't got one."

"That's too bad." Bee Jay sat himself on the wagon-pole, one knee over the other. Here he was. It was up to Judah.

The stars brightened. Somewhere a bullbat whirred. Judah moved off, merging with the shadow of the house. There came a sound of tinware and slop of water. He returned bearing a basin.

"Thur's fodder in the barn 'll sleep yuh. I don't doubt Cath'll find yuh a bite to eat, such as it is. Aim to wash?"

The single room had a stove, a table, two chairs, and an iron bedstead. Two pots simmered on the stove.

"Set, and we'll eat." Judah pulled himself a chair and propped his elbows on the table, his brow between his hands. Like his beasts, he too was wore down. "How 'bout it, Cath? . . . *Cath!*" He looked up and around the room. "Where's Cath?"

He rose and went to peer out of the door, this way, that way.

"Cath! Where yuh at? . . . I never seen her go out, did you?"

"No," said Bee Jay. She hadn't been there when they came in.

Judah came back and sat awhile, head in hands. He got madder and madder. He stormed up, got spoons and plates from a box nailed to the wall, and was about to go at the pots, when Cath's feet were heard

approaching the door in shoes. And stockings.

"Fer gawwww sake, where you been, Cath?"

More wooden than sullen: "Down to the crick."

"This time o' night!"

" 'Twarn't cold, in."

"And us-all waitin' supper!" Judah appealed to Bee Jay. "What's got into her?"

Bee Jay flattered himself he knew what had got into her, poor clod. Funny as it was, still he was moved. He *was*. Doggone it, this got under his skin. He tried to catch her eye as she clumped to the stove, to reward her by showing he was wise, and pretending she'd made a hit with him.

Why bother? Well, why not? You'd do that much for a dog. Moreover, hung up here in godforsaken nowhere, what else had he to work on? It amused him to philosophize: nine chances in ten a banker cast away on a desert isle would fall to adding up seashells, partly to kill time and partly to keep his hand in.

From one pot came cornmeal mush, from the other a watery mess of greens in which stray bits of sidemeat made oily rings. The sight of it was too much for Bee Jay. But so was hunger too much for him. Spoon by spoon he got some down, keeping his face away from the bed corner where Cath had withdrawn with her plate.

Why show her his disgust of her providing? You wouldn't do that to a dog. On the other hand it was too much to ask of Bee Jay that he should hold out on any female by keeping his face from sight too long. Especially when there were two birds to be killed.

So he turned in profile, and it was Judah at his feeding that revolted him, anyone could see. Heavy-hung head right down over his slop; worse than a hungry pig, a sleepy pig! A thing like that —

Oh dear! Visibly, Bee Jay caught himself. He turned abashed eyes toward the corner, full of a suave dismay that said as plain as plain: "You're mistaken; I admire him immensely; great fellow. Even though *you* know and *I* know what a ghastly tragedy for such as you to be tied to a thing like that."

The trouble was, Cath wasn't looking, so the whole play misfired. Bee Jay explained it: "Devil, she was too quick with her eyes." But no, why kid himself? She was just a vegetable. A man like him should worry!

Judah had finished. He got up, stretched, yawned, lighted a lantern and went to wait in the doorway. "When you're through," he said, without even looking back.

Bee Jay got to his feet. "I'll be right along."

Cath came from the corner, bringing her plate to put in the dish-wash bucket, crossing behind Bee Jay.

He lowered his voice. "Nice feed. Nice girl." He pawed out back, caught her free hand and stopped her. She stood like a held horse. It was all playful impulse with Bee Jay, just to

see what would happen. He squeezed. The hand hung loppy on its wrist, so much dead beefsteak. . . . To hell with her!

Bee Jay didn't sleep in the barn. He hadn't been there in the fodder five minutes after Judah left with the lantern before he knew it was no go. It wasn't the ribby lying so much as it was the ammonia. He had to get out in the air.

There was the wagon. He took the harness out of the rough board bed and draped it at the front end, hanging down over the doubletree. Returning into the barn he brought out all the fodder he could carry. Three trips and he had enough. He climbed in over a wheel and lay flat, looking right up at the stars. They began to weaken. A new pallor was spreading. Somewhere the moon was going to rise.

Bee Jay was cold. He tried to pull some of the cornstalks over him, sitting up to get at them. He stopped and studied the cabin. Human hog-house, black-asleep.

Asleep, like fun! The *man* might be. If he wasn't quite yet, that explained it; she was waiting till he was. Lying there, still as still, heart thumping, breath held, thinking of the handsome stranger in the barn. No? Bee Jay could smile. You couldn't fool Bee Jay about the way it was with women.

He sat there watching and waiting for what seemed the devil of a while. His smile thinned and rancor rose. All right, *let* her come out! All the good it would do her! Ho-hum, baby, go take yourself a walk, I'm not interested. . . . It might do her good, at that. Deflate her turnip-swollen ego.

He lay down again. He set himself to think of Friday evening. Beginning at the beginning. The elevator. The penthouse bell. The maid. "Yes, Mr. Cantra, Mrs. Wye is in." The hall. The drawing-room. Gladioli, and with their faint scent a fainter scent of "Nuit de Paris." Eleanor would be coming forward, hand coolly out. "Ah, Bee Jay — couldn't Harriet come?" (For the maid wouldn't be quite out of hearing yet.) And he'd take the hand in his and give it a squeeze . . . (dead beefsteak)!

Up Bee Jay sat, glowering over the wagon-side at the cabin. Homely, smelly, hairy-legged lump, who did she think she was? The moon was nearly up, but the end of the cabin toward the wagon was still too dark to make out whether the door was shut or left open.

"The hell with her! I'll give her one minute more."

Again he lay down. He yawned. He'd give her two more minutes, then he'd go to sleep. He counted slowly, "One — two — three —" A hundred and twenty it would be. "— thirty-one — thirty-two —" Look out! he'd be asleep before he finished if he didn't take care. It acted like sheep. "— forty-seven —"

He'd lost it. Where had he been? The moon was up. Lifting on an elbow he looked at the house. The

door *was* open. . . . There may have been a sound he didn't know he heard. Turning his head quickly he saw her in the moonlight at the barn, hesitant, peering in at the door. The heart lifted and sang within him. Who was loony now?

Unaware of him, she hesitated still a moment. Then she stole in a step (she was barefoot again, though otherwise clothed as she had been.) Cut in two by moon and shadow, she stood peering, listening. Another step and she was gone in the dark inside. The first she knew of Bee Jay was when she turned to find him behind her in the doorway.

"Well, well, well! Look who's here."

"I — I got thinkin', mister —" She took a wadded blanket from under an arm. "Yuh might be chilly."

"Now if that isn't too sweet! I call that service. Honest, you don't know what it does to me, to think of a girl like you worrying her pretty head over a poor lost bum — Or wait a second!" He put a twinkle in it, so she'd know he was on to how things were, and only kidding. "Or was it *hubby* thought of it?"

"Unh-unh. He's asleep."

Wise chuckle. "Isn't that just too bad. Sleep sound, does he?"

"Un-huh. 'Count he's deef. . . . I gotta go back in now."

Right out of the book, the cue for dismay. "Aw now listen, Beautiful, have a heart!"

"I gotta go in now." No more come-back than putty. She held out the blanket, looking neither at it nor at him. "Case yuh might be cold."

Talk about primitive! that one had whiskers. Okay, he'd play.

"Cold! *Brrrrrr!* I was just about to give up and freeze to death." He took the blanket, laughing low. "Yeah?" He tossed it away. "Listen, baby, look at me."

"I'm goin' in now." She advanced one heavy pace toward him and the door, the slant moonlight climbing up her to the waist. Of a sudden his brow wrinkled with a wild and weazening misdoubt. What if she had in fact come out just to bring him a blanket! He wouldn't put it past the dumbhead. And him the city sucker with a sign on, "Kick me!"

Another step she came, moonlit almost to her averted eyes. And now Bee Jay saw something he hadn't seen before; hung around her neck a string of pearls, five-and-ten-cent. . . . Oh yes? That fixed it.

"So you've got to go back in to hubby, have you, you pretty thing?"

"Uh-huh."

"Okay." He took down his barring arms with a knowing grin, stepped in past her, lay back at ease on his elbows on the hill of fodder. He watched her move; waited till she was right in the doorway. "Now Angel, quit fooling."

"Hunh?"

"Shhhh! not so loud. Come back in, nearer. You don't want him waking up and out with a gun, do you? . . . Has he a gun?"

"Uh-huh. Got no loads fer it though."

"Isn't that just too bad?" It was something off the mind, all the same. *I could break him with my hands.* This primitive stuff, by God it got you. Even the barn-stink. Like learning to like anchovies. Bee Jay patted the corn beside him.

"Come on back, hear me?"

"Unh-unh." She came, though, halfway, and stood with her back to him, looking nowhere. "It's time I gone in."

He just laughed, patted the fodder. "Right this way. Come sit down. Have a nice talk or something."

"Unh-unh." Nothing stirring. "Talk about what?"

"Pshaw — anything. You and me on a desert island, what?"

It mustn't be thought that B. J. Cantra always talked like this; at a board-meeting, say. Nor was it now because Cath Judah was a hick and a moron. Bee Jay knew the type of jitterbug slanging the women fell for, right away up to the very best of them. They might try to go penthouse-Radcliffe on him to start with, but he'd yet to know the time it didn't work out in the end.

"Think of it, poor us, all alone on a desert isle. Nothing but white sands and a tropic moon and palms sighing in the sea-breeze — not a thing on our minds — ho-hum! Eh, Cath? Does that sound —"

Bee Jay broke off. Deaf, dumb, deadweight, she made it sound like so much nothing. What would she know about a desert island?

"Or gay Paree!" Bee Jay got off his elbows, sat up to the job. "Imagine you and me —" How could she imagine Paris? Damn her! Wasn't there anything could penetrate, waken her excitement?

"I gotta go in, mister."

Bee Jay rose from the fodder, went around and planted himself in her way. It had become suddenly hard work to be playful.

He'd damn-well do it, though. "You fraud! I bet you're Cinderalla in disguise. Come out of it, Booful! That sort of thing's all right in Holly — Hey! *Hollywood!* . . . Know what you and I would be doing this minute out there, my pretty maid? Well, it just happens there's a party on, out at Clark's. You know, Clark Gable. I know Clarkie well. Joan, Gary, Bette, Myrna — just the regulars — not a *big* party. Whaddaya say, honey heart? Of course we don't *have* to go, if we don't — Hey! Whoa! First we'll see Adrian, what? You know *Adrian.* . . . *Cath, look at me!*"

"I'm goin' along in, I reckon." Eyes on the door, mouth half open, more with the look of adenoids than of any interest.

He forced a comedy wail. "Don't you *like* Hollywood?" Perspiration wet his temples. "*Adrian* — you know, Cath — he dresses all the stars. He'll do anything for a sweetheart of mine. Well, let's see now. How about something in dark, dark gold, to match my lady's eyes? And slippers — we're going to make this a knockout from feet right up. . . ."

From the feet right up, Bee Jay dressed her. Dressed her in beauty. Beauty that grew and grew, there in the moon-shadow of the cow-shack, till it obsessed him. There's where the trouble had been till now; tongue in cheek, you'll never sell a passion. You've got to let it get you yourself. See it vivid. Be obsessed.

Fury broke right out of the middle of it. "For God-sake shut that *mouth*, can you! Do you have to look like —"

He caught himself, appalled. Now he'd done it! He begged of her: "I didn't mean — honest — I'm sorry —" His hand went out. By chance it tangled with the five-and-ten-cent pearls. "Pretty necklace, pretty neck," he stalled.

With that she came alive. For the first time she flashed a look at him, then jerked her eyes back away, far as she could get them over a shoulder. Under his touch on her throat he felt a little paroxysm pass. The sob of a caught breath.

What a sap he'd been; all this bother with desert isles and Paris and Hollywood!

"It *is* a pretty neck. Pretty, be damned! It's beautiful!"

"Unh-unh — 'tain't — very."

Sap! The minute he'd seen that what she'd put on was a necklace he should have had the tip-off.

"Not very? Don't be a silly. You know as well as I do, Cath, what a lovely, lovely throat God gave you."

"Naw I don't . . . 'Tain't nothin' so much . . . I gotta go in. . . . Unh-unh — naw, mister — naw —"

You couldn't fool Bee Jay. He drew her by the shoulders, bent, dragged a slow kiss up the throat, up the chin.

"Unh-unh — naw —"

He stopped her mouth with his mouth. Her lips lay flaccid. But you couldn't fool Bee Jay . . .

When she'd gone back in the house, Bee Jay lay on the corn in the wagon-bed with the blanket over him. Peace possessed him. Sleep came toward him. He didn't want it; he wanted to dream awake a while. Begin at the beginning. The switchboard girl: "You're to go right up, Mr. Cantra." The elevator. The bell. The maid: "Yes, Mr. Cantra, Mrs. Wye is in. . . ."

Small noises and jouncings worked at him; growing bigger they waked him up. It was the gray before dawn. It took Bee Jay a moment to know where he was and what the shakings and clackings were. The wagon was in motion, to a sound of hoofs.

His first thought was: "He's certainly early at it." Then, with further recollection: "Fine! This works out fine." Rolling on an elbow he craned up at the driver's back and saw who it was. He could have killed her.

She had on a coat, faded to the color of lichens, and a felt toque. The thought came to him: "I'm going to throw up."

He was too mad, though. He felt like shouting at the unconscious back: "Here, you, I'm paying your husband to do this; what's the big idea *your* taking it over? You're not doing it *to do the nice thing*, my God!"

He was so mad he was helpless.

Glancing back she caught him with his chin hanging, crimson.

"You waked up?" Her eyes went stolidly somewhere else. "I meant you should sleep yer sleep out."

"And I meant you ditto. I supposed it would be your husband —"

"Tha's all right . . . Whoa."

She got out and disappeared ahead. There came a sound of bars being lowered. At a clucked command the mule and pony went on through the gate and stopped. Over the wagon-tail Bee Jay watched her putting the bars back. Beyond and above her the two cabins stood out against the mist of the further slope and the still higher woods. Redness touched the roofs, from the east. But it didn't seem to brighten or warm them any.

Cath came along, climbed up, gathered the reins. Bee Jay got to his knees. It was time he did something. He got to his feet and laid a hand on her shoulder.

"See here, I'd rather your husband —"

"Tha's all right, I keep tellin' yuh . . . Geddap!"

The start unbalanced him, made him hang on the harder.

"It's not all right. Stop, turn around, let's go back."

"Don't keep sayin' that!" She hit the mule a lick with the reins. "Keep care o' them eggs," she said over her shoulder.

Under the seat there was a wooden bucket of eggs, and a shoebox tied with string.

The trees closed in, making a tunnel of the rut-road.

Presently, Bee Jay: "Is it far to Mayburg?"

"Mayburg? Not a great piece . . . Are your things there?"

Bee Jay sat back on the wagon's high side-board. A hundred yards to the rear a doe and fawn came out to cross the road. The fawn leaped straight in the air at sight of the wagon and nearly turned a somersault getting back into the growth. It was comical. Bee Jay wanted to hold his sides and hear himself roar with laughter . . . *Are my things there? This is one for the book!*

Up he sprang. "Listen, now, wait, I want to get this all clear." He had money out of a pocket, a five and a twenty. To hell with the five! this was no time. He thrust the twenty around in front of her face. "Let's get this all straight. Is that okay? Or wait." He added the five.

She didn't seem to understand. "Unh-unh," she shook her head. She pushed hand and money back on him. "I ain't much used to handlin' money. You go on handle the hull of it. It's goin' to be a furr piece to Hollywood."

Apparently the pony missed a step, bumping the pole.

"Quit lookin' at me!" she cried, without turning to see that Bee Jay was. Now it was the mule that swerved, head reared, hauling the pony sidewise. Bee Jay realized suddenly it was her hand on the reins was doing it. "Give me those!" He

reached over her and got them away.

Her face was gray-green. She slithered down over a wheel and he saw her running off into the underbrush to the left . . . He saw himself getting down the other side, running off into the cover the other way. Saw himself bumping into trees, tearing through bullbriar, through anything, anywhere . . . So he saw himself. But still he was right here, leaning awkwardly, holding the reins, when she came back.

"All right," she said, taking them from him, starting the team. By and by: "I been nervy, kinda. It's good I got it up and over with. Here we come to Heber's . . . Hy-yah, Heber."

An opening on a dim crossroad. Shanty store. Shanty storekeeper.

"Hy-yah, Cath . . . Day to yuh, stranger."

"He's Mister Cantra. He got lost. Here's yer eggs I brought along down, save yuh the trip up there."

"That's obligin' . . . How's Judah?"

"Good. He's gone to Spartanburg a spell, wanted I should tell yuh . . . Come boys, geddap!"

On across the crossroad.

What was B. J. Cantra doing here in this wagon?

"Good I thought of it bein' Wednesday, warn't it."

"Wednesday?"

"Egg day. He won't have no call to go pryin' up around there now 'fore Friday, anyway."

The trees closed in, making a tunnel again.

Now that you have finished Wilbur Daniel Steele's "The Lady-Killer" — perhaps we should have said, apparently *finished — you see that the* real *story is yet to come. It is not clothed in words and printed on these pages: the* real *story is in your own mind.*

It is perfectly clear that Cath Judah killed her husband Jess because of a preposterous dream of Hollywood created by Bee Jay in the backwoodswoman's moronic brain. But having created a Frankenstein's monster of a dream, Bee Jay now finds himself in a terrible position. What is he going to do? What can *he do?*

Persuade Cath Judah to leave? Not that cloddish, doltish, spineless woman!

Perhaps there is only one way out for B. J. Cantra: to kill Cath and dump her body by the roadside.

But, with unconscious or native cunning, the illiterate woman who took Bee Jay too literally has identified her lover by name to Heber, the Mayburg storekeeper.

No, Bee Jay won't get away with it . . .

WINNER OF A THIRD PRIZE: VIOLA BROTHERS SHORE

Every so often your Editors are invited to talk to the students of a college writing class. Dashiell Hammett once introduced us as a triple-threat man, meaning that we had a three-cornered auctorial background — that of writer, editor, and critic. (When we used the same term in an editorial comment in THE QUEEN'S AWARDS, 1947, *and when that anthology was published in England, the British proof-reader must have found himself over his head etymologically: the term finally emerged in the London printing as "triple-theatre" — whatever that may mean!)*

Well, as you know, Viola Brothers Shore is currently teaching a course in Advanced Short Story Writing at New York University. The most recent time we appeared as her Guest Lecturer — or as we prefer to call it, in the role of Visiting Ferretman — the students had prepared a series of questions which they asked us to answer ad lib. Here are some of the questions — and bright, searching, pin-the-man-down questions they are!

Where does the emphasis lie in the contemporary or to-be-developed detective story?

Is a surprise ending necessary?

What are the sex limitations in the mystery story?

Are the short stories of today, generally, as good as or better than the stories of the 1930s? In writing? In substance?

How far can you stretch the long arm of coincidence?

Does an unusual background, if tied in with the plot, help sell a story?

How far can humor be carried in stories of murder?

Your Editors spoke for two solid hours . . .

Now we bring you Viola Brothers Shore's latest prize-winning story, and you will find the answers to at least half of the questions above in Miss Shore's own story. But we caution you: read the story carefully . . . Further comment when you have finished . . .

THE CASE OF KAREN SMITH

by VIOLA BROTHERS SHORE

IN Reagan's Department everybody is a Character except The Boys (Reagan's Boys) and The Bums — the boys that Reagan's Boys are after. This character in the lumpy, fur-lined coat blew in around 11:30 and Janicek tried to steer her to Missing Persons.

"Unless your cousin was murdered, Madam, you're in the wrong Department."

But she'd been to Missing Persons and they hadn't taken any interest. "I thought you'd take an interest. She said you were a friend of hers. Karen Smith?"

His eyebrows came together in a straight black line. He didn't have so very many friends.

"She look like you?" he asked doubtfully.

"We both have the Smith eyes, but she's younger and thinner with a lot of curly red hair." Red hair. Something was trying to ring in the back of his mind — something tied in with cloudy gray-blue eyes — but he couldn't picture red curls over that sunken upper lip. She was holding a creased sheet of Hotel Endicott stationery and he wondered automatically why a character with nice hands didn't buy herself some store teeth and a girdle.

> Dear Cousin Em [said the neat, tight little writing] —
>
> Excuse me for not writing sooner but you said some day you were coming East and I would give anything for a talk, Em, as I have nobody else. Wally is away most of the time so I could put you up. Please let me know if you decide you can come East now.
>
> With love,
>
> Karen

"You can see she was having some kind of trouble," Emma Smith was saying, "and I'm her only relation outside of Cousin John down South, so I gave up my job — I can always get a housekeeping job." She went on quickly, as if nobody had to worry about Emma Smith. "I wired her to meet the 9 o'clock Greyhound this morning, but she wasn't there. And the Endicott Hotel don't know any Mrs. Wally Smith." He started to say something. "The wire wasn't there, so she must have picked it up. Why didn't she meet me or wire me — unless something happened to her?"

There might be a million reasons, but he was beginning to take an interest. "She always wrote from the Endicott?"

"It's the only letter I got since she left Toledo back in 1940. She got a raw deal from a fellow there and she was ashamed to write — at least, that's how she put it last year. I'd moved around a lot with people I worked for, but Wally had some business in Kansas City and she looked me up."

"How?" he asked, from force of habit.

"Through Cousin John, he always keeps in touch." During that visit the cousin from the East had mentioned her friend Janicek. "It's a name that sticks in your mind."

Janicek scratched his square wooden jaw. "In what way? What'd she say?"

"I can tell you her exact words. We were talking about her mother, my Aunt Carrie, all her life trying to make a gentleman out of Uncle Charlie and Karen said, 'Wally's a perfect gentleman, Em. But if I had a daughter I'd tell her not to worry so much if a man's a gentleman, but

more if a gentleman's a man. Now my friend Janicek, there's a man.' "

The back of his neck felt warm as he bent over to pick up the phone book. "Her husband's name is Smith too? Wally for Walter?"

"Or Wallace maybe. He's in real estate. Or insurance. Some kind of broker." He put back the book and picking up her new straw suitcase, bundled her into his car. He had to tear uptown to see his sidekick who had a busted leg. On the way, he dropped her at Fernanda Freed's. Fernanda was looking for a housekeeper and it might be a break for both. Later when he knocked off work, he would put in a little time on this character who blew into Kansas City in a new mink coat with a husband (same name) who didn't come along to meet her family.

"I'll be in touch with you," he promised Emma, "and meanwhile you could get in touch with Cousin John."

Fernanda Freed walked with him to the elevator. She had also begun to take an interest. "I'll be away till Sunday, so she'll have time to look around. What do you think happened to her cousin?"

Janicek had no answers. Karen Smith, he puzzled, driving up to the Hospital. And he asked his sidekick, "Do you place any Karen Smith?" But Morrie didn't, although they'd been teamed for years. "Gray-blue eyes, red hair —"

And suddenly it all came back — the green sofa cushions and a low table with homemade applecake and a pair of worried gray-blue eyes under a copper mop. He had rung a doorbell on a routine deal and she had asked him to step in, and Janicek never turned down a cup of coffee. There was something homey about the place and about her green flowered housedress and somehow two hours flew out the window. She said, "Mr. Smith is away a lot," and he got the feeling she was starved for somebody to talk to, and had something she was dying to talk about — something tied in with the character in a glass frame on the piano.

He hadn't mentioned it to Morrie. But he couldn't get her out of his mind and he thought he would drop in again and ask her out for chop suey. But then he thought, "Watch it, Yanny — don't start something you can't finish," and now he couldn't even remember the house where he had rung the doorbells. But it would come back.

A clock opposite the Chelsea Apartments struck once for 12:30. In 7C a woman in a fur-trimmed cap with a fringe of red bang was on the phone, spelling out a wire to the Greyhound bus — "due from Kansas City at 9 P.M. . . . P.M.," she repeated sharply, conscious of the Super listening in at the switchboard.

Her eyes swept the rooms, the closet, the fireplace where she had burned papers, labels, and photographs; but they avoided what lay on the bed. She knew if she touched

him he would feel cold. "I should be feeling something," she thought, but there was only this tightness in her stomach, while a machine in her head ticked off the moves she had to make.

Her brown fur coat lay folded over the black-and-white airplane bag. The homemade black bangs were in her purse, with strips of adhesive, ready to paste into her hat. And the horn specs and the keys to the vault she had just rented in Newark. The other keys would go down the incinerator. The laundry marks on his shirts could be traced, but by that time there would be no more Karen Smith. She got the idea from a book, thinking, "A person could disappear that way" — not thinking she would ever want to. Until she came back from Boston. But even while she was laying all her plans, she hadn't really believed she was going through with it. Until Thursday night. Last night . . .

He always phoned when he was coming to town but she'd heard his key in the lock. Her knees jelled and she barely managed to get behind the bathroom door. Waiting for his voice, she heard bureau drawers opening and asked, "What are you looking for?" Which was easier than saying Hello.

He shut the drawer hastily, his eye avoiding hers in the mirror. He made no move to take her in his arms. "What were you doing in Boston — spying on me?" Something in her laughed and he went on angrily, "If you must know, that was my daughter Lila." She steadied herself against the door. She had only caught a glimpse of the girl in the ermine wrap, and it was true his daughter was about that age. "I'm sorry I knocked you down but I couldn't have a scene in front of Lila. Where shall we eat?"

"You go to the Club — I don't feel like dressing." For seven years she had dressed however and whenever he wanted, and would have again if he had asked her. But he seemed glad to escape. She bolted the door after him and called a Syracuse telephone number. A voice told her Miss Lila was out of town. "Boston?" she asked breathlessly.

"No, she's in Nevada with her mother. Who is this?"

Even if she had wanted to answer, she had no voice. The whole thing was sickeningly clear. His wife had finally gone to Reno but he was going to marry the girl who had come out of the night club on his arm. And what he had wanted from the bureau was the vault key.

When he came back he said, "I'm turning in early." So he could be over at the bank by nine, and empty the vault they had held jointly for five years. And then his lawyer would offer her a settlement — a small one, because there was no way to make a splash with it. She knew him so well.

Always when he came back from a trip he was anxious to get her into bed. If he had only taken her in his

arms, cared what became of her —

"Fix me a drink," he said. To get her out of the room so he could look for the keys. They were in a cup in the kitchen. The sleeping tablets were there too.

When she came out of the bathroom, he was dead to the world. She took off his clothes, her fingers weakening at the feel of him, helpless, like a little boy. But when his hand slid intimately over her body, it was the first time she ever recoiled from his touch.

He lay on his face, his arm tightening around her pillow. But it was not *her* body he was pressing to him, not her name his lips were mumbling. She bent down to catch the words. "Keys . . . hidakeys . . . breakergoddamneck. . . ."

They were the last words he ever said . . .

The hall was empty and she double-locked the door. No snooping Super could get in with the passkey. Wally and she often ran away for weekends. About Monday his office would start checking with Boston and Syracuse.

When she stepped out of the self-service, the Super was mopping the foyer. "Not running away, Miz Smith?" She had an impulse to run past him, but he had picked up the black-and-white bag. "What about your cousin — want me to let her in?"

"Do please — if she wants to use the apartment." She even managed a smile as the taxi pulled out.

On the Philadelphia Express she had a discussion with the conductor about mink coats. In the station she checked her bag and overtipping the porter, asked where she could buy a good used car. At the Agency she priced a green Buick. "Like all redheads, I go for green," she told the salesman, but hesitated at buying the first thing she saw. He assured her she could come back if anything went wrong. "I — I won't be coming back this way," she stammered, selecting a brilliant travel folder marked Mexico.

When they began to look for Karen Smith, there would be a clear line to follow . . .

Inside a pay cubicle she changed into a dark dress, pasting the black bangs into her hat. Her coat had a reversible lining and it hung from her shoulders, cloth side out. In hornrim specs she was Mrs. Kate Selby, buying a ticket for Nashville, and she checked her bag through in that name. Sunday she would fly to Nashville and leave a further trail in the green dress. And that would be the last of Karen Smith . . .

Funny how you could see your whole life go without regret. It didn't seem like much of a life, looking back. And still, she hadn't wanted anything different from what most other girls wanted — her own home and money in the bank and a man who was a gentleman. It was what she had hoped to find with Jerry. And again with Wally . . .

She mustn't think about Wally. Think of the home she would buy, some day, with the money lying in

the vault in Newark. Think of Emma. That was going to be a real problem. Above all, think of being set in a new job when the hue and cry went up. She could count on at least a week before Wally's office did anything so drastic as breaking down a door. . . .

But Saturday night Janicek remembered the house where he had rung the bells, and picking up Emma he drove her to The Chelsea, a modest apartment building on the West side. The Super was only too happy to tell about the Smiths; how Mrs. Smith hadn't been herself all week, and that was probably why they went away; how she had wired the bus and left word for her cousin to use the apartment. "She must have mixed the time," Emma sighed, and proceeded to print her new address in big, left-handed letters to leave in the mailbox.

But Janicek asked the Super, "How do you mean, not herself?"

Well, he meant last Sunday when she went away with her little square overnight bag looking — well, all upset. And Monday morning she was back, with her face all swollen and without her bag. And when he asked her, "Did you lose something?" she began to laugh. "I just thought it was something for seven years." Which was a funny thing to say. And then there was the phone call from Mr. Smith's office. That was funny too. When the Super told them Mr. Smith had left town, they hit the ceiling and said that was *impossible* because he had come to town especially to see his lawyer.

Janicek asked if Smith had seemed upset when he left. And there was another funny thing. He hadn't seen Mr. Smith go, although he'd been around all day.

There were too many funny things. But the funniest was leaving word for Emma at The Chelsea after writing her from the Endicott. The Super was willing enough to open the door, but it was double-locked.

You need more than a smell of fish to break down a door. But the Super's ladder reached from the fire-escape rail to the Smith bedroom window. It was a drop of seven stories and Emma begged Janicek not to take a chance. But Janicek was used to taking chances when he started following his nose. Gripping the top of the open window, he poked his flash through the venetian slats. And it picked up what was on the bed . . .

The Medical Examiner said, "Strangled — some time Thursday night." He would know more after the P.M. but the twisted bathrobe cord had done the trick. Nobody questioned who had twisted it. Emma Smith went to pieces and before the newspapers got her phone number, Janicek bundled her off to Fernanda Freed's.

When he looked in Sunday night, both women were having coffee. Reagan had dropped the case in his lap and the D.A.'s office was tickled to have Emma out of reach of re-

porters. They all agreed that Karen's powderkeg had exploded before her cousin arrived, and sooner or later she would try to get in touch with her.

Janicek pulled up a chair and gave them the dope that would be in Monday's papers. The long-distance call from 7C had been checked to the home of Walter St. John Schuyler, a Syracuse broker with additional offices in New York and Boston. A business associate had already identified the body. The wife and daughter were flying in from Reno.

"Reno?" Fernanda never missed a trick. "Was he planning to marry somebody else?" They were working on that angle, the D.A. hoping it would supply the motive. Emma seemed stunned at the case shaping up against her cousin.

"I wonder how she's fixed for money?" Janicek asked innocently.

Emma pushed back her chair. "If Karen killed Wally, she must have had good reasons. So don't expect any help from me." And she marched into her room behind the kitchen.

"Emma's nobody's fool." Fernanda was in her thirties, but her short hair, threaded with white, made her seem older than Janicek. "You're hoping she'll hear from Karen, but how would Karen know where to find her?"

"Same way she found her in Kansas. Did she mention the whereabouts of this Cousin John?"

"No, but finding a John Smith somewhere Down South should be duck soup for the Finest Force in the World." She always poked fun at his job and he used to kid the stuff she wrote. "Detective" stories. Some amateur superduperman (who would never get a nose inside a real homicide) was forever copping off fresh prints that the dumb dicks couldn't see — and that finally cleared some lily they had stuck on ice. But now he wasn't kidding around. "Did she tell you anything?"

"About Karen's girlhood, but you're not interested in what makes murderers, only in catching them." Emma had told him Toledo, and they already had Karen's Beauty Operator's license out there. "Wouldn't you rather pursue a Character named Smith?"

"I met her once," he said evenly.

"Oh?" Fernanda's eyebrow went up. "But that won't stop you from baiting all the traps."

Why should it? Because Karen Smith had said, "My friend Janicek"? A murderer has no friends. Not in Reagan's Department. "If Emma does say anything —"

He had never seen Fernanda so broiled. "You have enough men to tail Emma when she leaves here. But this is her home now, and she regards me as her friend!"

"If she hears from Karen, she'll be an accessory."

"Spying on people for what they might do is more dangerous than letting one Karen Smith get away. Besides how do you know she hasn't —" She broke off, but he got

it. From Friday noon to Saturday night Emma had been on her own, and he had advised her to get in touch with Cousin John. So when she tried to keep him from climbing the railing at The Chelsea she already knew. Well, at least he had her measure. She was in a sweet spot to tip off Karen to a lot of stuff. But that would keep them in touch with each other —

Fernanda could suit herself. For him personally, there was no person named Karen Smith. Only X. Find Madame X.

It was a top assignment. Murder with a sex angle rates big newspaper space, and the girl in Boston was Junior League. The D.A. was tickled with the stuff coming from Boston. By the time the Monday papers were screaming *BROKER STRANGLED IN LOVE NEST*, Boston had dug up a taxi which had taken Schuyler, together with a young lady in ermine, from a nightspot the previous Sunday. Schuyler had been waylaid by a redheaded woman in a brown fur coat (Yes, the driver guessed it was mink), and there had been a mixup in the alley where Schuyler had brushed her off. The cabby thought maybe he had flattened her out —

"If you were a man instead of a cop, you wouldn't even try to find her," Fernanda said, when she heard.

Janicek's square hand was clenched around his cup. He set it down deliberately. "She was in Philly on Friday."

"My, my," Fernanda mocked. "By miracles known only to modern science, the Wizards of 20th St. dug up the Chelsea Super who broke down and confessed he put her in a Yellow cab."

"It was a Green," Janicek said, making no attempt to keep his voice down. The china had stopped rattling in the kitchen. "Took her to Penn Station. Conductor remembers a redhead in mink. Porter told her where to buy a car and she priced a green Buick and picked up a folder on Mexico." He always got a kick out of all the gears meshing — gears that stretched across the country.

Fernanda laughed. "Law Enforcement Agencies from here to the border are watching for a redhaired woman in mink, driving a green car." She smashed out her cigarette. "She certainly handed you a green light."

Janicek's match burned out in midair . . .

Redheaded women in mink were seen everywhere, and Sheriffs' offices from here to Texas were tracking down leads. Janicek was on a different track. His ace investigator, Lombardi, had dug up her bank account. It had been closed out and the $120 balance withdrawn. "It don't match," said Lombardi. "Not with mink it don't." Janicek told him to keep digging. You can't buy much car with 120 bucks.

The boys wanted to go through Emma's room while she was out, so he walked Fernanda along to The

Chelsea, steering the talk around to women's furs. He let her poke through the closets while he went through the desk. The only thing the boys had overlooked was a column of figures jotted on the flyleaf of a book of detective stories. They added up to a total of 98 grand.

"Maybe you're right about detective stories," he said, putting the book in his pocket.

Fernanda was frowning at two green dresses left on hangers. "Homemade," she remarked. "The drapes too. Why did such a thrifty girl leave two perfectly good new dresses?" She herself had given the answer. Because he was supposed to follow a green line.

Lombardi almost split a gut when he heard. "Then she ain't even headed for Mexico!" No, and not dressed in green or in mink. He had learned from Fernanda that good muskrat can fool a lot of train conductors and cabbies and even cousins.

"And not redheaded either," Janicek added. "She used to work in a beauty joint."

"We should have known this case started off too easy," Reagan said. "She might be working in a beauty parlor right now."

"I'm on that angle — and Lombardi's sticking with Schuyler's books." Janicek sounded quite cheerful. Now they were rid of the camouflage, they could concentrate on the other angles — the money, Cousin John, Emma, and the beauty parlors. He felt better about chasing down a character who thought she could make a monkey out of Reagan's Department.

When she was with people she was all right, keeping her ears open and her wits about her. Only when she was alone, she had this feeling of someone walking over her grave.

She shut the door of her small, airshaft room and went down the hall to pick up Gabrielle Laroche, who did facials. Nobody ever looked at you and wondered if you were Karen Smith, because their minds were fixed on a colorful figure in flight, not a plain dark-haired woman going to a movie with a friend. Gabrielle didn't read much English and so paid little attention to headlines, and she incuriously dropped a letter in a postbox, together with her own.

The letter was the one move she could make with safety. The black-and-white bag was still lying in a baggage room in Nashville, because her friend Janicek had jumped the gun and it was impossible to move with the whole country alerted. My friend Janicek, she thought bitterly, making no attempt to follow the newsreel.

She had really liked him the day they sat and talked — not the way she liked Wally — but Wally treated her like a possession, there to serve his pleasure and his needs. The solid man across the coffee table had made her feel like a person. She had liked the squareness of his shoulders — his

jaw — his whole face topped by the even ridges of dark hair. Maybe if there'd been no Wally —

No use figuring Ifs. He was against her now, and not for any gin-rummy stakes. She knew the three danger points were Emma, the money in the vault, and Cousin John. The letter, typed on her employer's machine, should take care of the Cousin John angle. Emma would stay clammed up. And she was living off her salary. It would be a long time before she had to go near that Newark bank vault, taken out in the name of her old pal Leona, because that seemed better than making up a name which you might forget. She hadn't seen Leona Lewis in seven years.

She sat back and relaxed. Gabrielle wanted to walk home and they turned down a side street. On the 7th floor of The Chelsea there was a light and figures moving behind the venetian slats. Everything in her turned to stone and ice. Somehow she made her feet carry her to the Avenue. Why did she have this crazy urge to walk past The Chelsea? To reassure herself that the Super wouldn't recognize her without red hair and make-up? She had already done that. No, it was because Karen Smith was still inside her. And that was the real danger point. Not relatives, acquaintances, old friends. She had broken with all her old friends because of Wally. Karen Smith's life for seven years had been a sheet of glass. Looking into it, Janicek would see only Wally. Wally . . .

Janicek was free to look. Only she mustn't.

The D.A. was ready to put the screws on Emma to make her cough up Cousin John's address. But the morning mail brought a letter, typed and posted at Times Square.

> Dear Cousin Em —
>
> I called you but got no answer, so take this way of letting you know I have left town till this terrible thing is over, as I would not like to testify for or against. A tourist driving to Maine offered me a lift and it seemed like the Hand of God. I will continue to pray to Him for help for us all.
>
> Your cousin,
>
> Karen

"This is one sweet case," said Reagan's Boys. "Every blasted lead blows up in your face."

But Lombardi's spade had turned up pay dirt. Even an incomplete audit of Schuyler's books showed that he had been juggling accounts in his three offices since '44, siphoning off around twenty grand a year. "A hundred grand of his own dough. Where the hell did it go?"

"When we know that we'll have Karen Smith," said Janicek, thinking of the numbers on a flyleaf. Somewhere, under some name there should be a safe-deposit box —

They found it, of course, rented in 1944 to Walter and Caroline Smith. But it was empty. Karen Smith had been there on the morning of the murder. "With a hundred grand she can be anywhere," Reagan said. He didn't nag his boys, but this one had

him worried. "For cryin' out, Yanny, what's about the Beauty Parlors?" The N. Y. Bureau had no record of any license issued to Karen Smith or any Carrie or Caroline Smith that wasn't accounted for. "She must have supported herself before she met Schuyler."

"I'm digging, Chief," Janicek said, and dredged up a sentence out of that rambling talk over the applecake. "I was living with another girl and we came over here to a dentist where I met Mr. Smith" — Came over here. Over here to New York City. Came over the River?

The State of New Jersey had issued a beauty parlor license in 1940 to Caroline Smith at an address in Newark. And to a Leona Lewis listed at the same address. Leona Lewis was still living in Newark. He stopped off for Fernanda Freed.

"Redheaded Borgia! Garrote Girl!" She had the afternoon papers and was raging at the headlines. "Why can't they give her a break?"

"Somebody ought to do a piece with a human angle," Janicek suggested, and took her along to Newark.

Leona Lewis turned out to be a marble-eyed character who hadn't come forward because she didn't want to get mixed in, and anyway she hadn't seen Karen in seven years. None of the old crowd had. "Not since she left here and went to live with Wally. He was scared to death it would get back to The Leech in Syracuse that he was spending money keeping a girl."

"My husband my ducats," muttered Fernanda. But it was the ducats that interested Janicek. He left Fernanda soaking up human interest while he went out to call his office. When she first came East, Newark had been home to Karen Smith. A woman with something to salt away would think of home . . .

That night he dropped around but Fernanda had gone for a walk. "I want to talk to you," he told Emma, and was following her when a paper in the Corona caught his eye. Fernanda had been typing before she went for a walk.

> She grew up in a small Ohio town where her father had a job on the force.

he read. So that's how she got the idea of playing games with Reagan's boys.

> Her mother spent her life dreaming of Better Things. But the only distinction Charlie Smith ever achieved was the bang-up funeral they gave him when he dropped dead in harness.
>
> Karen went to work in a Toledo Beauty Shop. She could have been a beauty herself, with all that handsome copper hair, and the other girls urged her to have her front teeth fixed and get some fun out of life. But she made her own clothes and banked her pay, dreaming about a home of her own with Jerry Clay.
>
> They warned her about "Gentleman Jerry," but Karen knew he was a perfect gentleman and gave him her savings for the down payment on a little house. When both disappeared Karen sold her hope chest and went East. And located Jerry Clay in Newark. But the money was gone.
>
> She decided then to get some fun out

of life. And in the office of a fashionable dentist who did undetectable bridge work, she met Walter St. John Schuyler. Much more of a gentleman than Jerry Clay. And she fell more in love with him, pouring all her bubbling energy into the single job of making a little flat into a home for him.

But she wanted a real home and a real marriage. His wife wouldn't give him a divorce without bleeding him dry. Karen, who didn't take things lying down, must have helped with the idea of putting by enough to start somewhere else, and then signing over everything visible in return for a divorce.

But by that time Karen had become an old story and he had met a girl who had family, looks, and above all, youth. When Karen followed him to Boston, he left her lying in an alley like a common tramp . . . Karen Smith who had built her life around the hope of marrying him . . . Karen Smith who didn't take things lying down . . . If there had been anything else in her life — meaningful work to give her the assurance of a place in the world — she might have found another outlet for the rage that must have consumed her after she picked herself up out of that alley. Perhaps a friend — one friend — might have saved her . . .

"Sorry I had to run out," said Fernanda Freed from the doorway behind him, "but I left it where you could find it. Can't you see how things were stacked against that girl?"

"Behind every deal there's people with reasons. That's why we have courts," Janicek said, and went into the kitchen to beard Emma. The Kansas Sphinx, Lombardi called her, but for once she was willing to talk. She was sick of New York, sick of being followed every step she took. She wanted to go back to Kansas where a woman could go to church without a long horseface trailing behind her.

Fernanda had told her about Leona Lewis and she was getting the wind up, Janicek thought. Fine. "I'm sorry, Emma, but the D.A. wants you right here in New York. He's going before the Grand Jury and if you don't answer what they ask, they'll clap you in jail."

She was scared all right, but she didn't crack. "If it's a crime to stick to my own flesh and blood, go ahead. You'll never get anything out of me to hurt Karen."

That's why they'd given her rope, instead of cracking down sooner. But now — "Okay, Emma, that's up to you. But your cousin thinks she hasn't left a clue since she walked out of that auto agency. Only *that's* a clue. It means she's holed up somewhere nearby. If she doubled back to New York, in any color dress and with any color hair, we'll find her. And the money too."

Let her get that to Karen Smith — through the laundryman, the neighbors, however she was doing it. He used to get gophers, when he was a boy, by smoking them out . . .

She had to take the heat off Emma. Dressed in black, with a veil half-hiding the fringe of black hair, she boarded a Boston plane on Saturday. Her hand shook as she presented the check for the small fitted bag she

had not reclaimed the night she picked herself out of the alley. It matched the famous black-and-white bag the Super had carried to the taxi. There must be thousands of that pattern, she told herself. Just the same, it burned her hand when she took it from the checkroom. It had been a gift from Wally on their first trip —

She mustn't think about those trips, about those days, about Wally, she told herself as she signed the register at the hotel where Wally had been staying . . .

"Wally —" she moaned, hours later into a wet bunched pillow. But there were no tears left. Everything in her was dried up. The rest of her life stretched ahead that way — dry — like a desert. Stretched ahead to what —?

There was a knock at the door and from habit she braced herself and powdered her face. The chambermaid carried clean towels into the bathroom. "Why don't I give her the overnight bag?" she thought wearily. "I might as well . . ."

He was in a rotten humor Monday even before they brought him the letter from Boston. Because he knew now he had been taken for a ride. Not only by Karen Smith. "Employer away for the weekend. Subject stayed at home," read the report on Emma. But he knew that part of the time the radio had played to an empty room. The search of the room had yielded nothing. The locked closet held only a few Sunday-best clothes. It had struck him too late, the meaning of that locked closet. A man never pictures clothes put together, but there was nothing to stop Emma from putting them together with a girdle and even a set of store teeth, and walking past his boys to meet anybody.

"She beat us all along the line," Lombardi said, when they opened the letter on Parker House stationery, airmailed to Emma. It was written in a small, familiar script. Only it was no longer neat, no longer under control, and the paper was water-blurred.

Dear Em —
I thought they wouldn't look for me up here and maybe I'd join John in Canada — but it all came back — I don't want to go on — every hand against me and against anybody who tries to help me. Don't feel bad, Em — it's the only way I'll ever be happy — with Wally — Goodbye, Em —

At the Parker House in Boston the room assigned to Kate Selby was empty. A scared chambermaid brought out a black-and-white overnight case and a claim check for another bag in Nashville, Tenn. "She said she wouldn't be using them any more —"

At Rockport, Mass., some boys found a hat with a false bang on the rocks above the surf. And a green bag with the Schuyler clippings and a key to the room at the Parker House.

"Goodbye, Karen Smith," Reagan said, and told Janicek to go home and get some sleep. But he couldn't sleep.

GARROTE GIRL SUICIDE IN ROCKPORT, the headlines screamed — before the tone changed and the sob brigade went to town.

"*De mortuis*," Fernanda Freed said bitterly, but her own piece was no different. It was mostly the stuff he had read. Except the end.

> What happened when Walter St. John Schuyler came in from Boston to see his lawyer? Her plans were made. But for seven years she had loved him blindly and selflessly. Surely if he had faced the fact that she needed tenderness and help, he might have been alive today. But Walter Schuyler never faced anything. There were no signs of a quarrel. Perhaps some little thing snapped the last hairline between love and hate — some added humiliation — one more shoddy lie. It always takes one last degree of heat to turn water into steam.
>
> If there is any moral in this story, it is not that Walter Schuyler paid the piper for his dance of love. But he took what was best in a human being and turned it into its opposite. Stripped of her human dignity and all hope, Karen Smith was an animal at bay. And an animal at bay strikes to kill.
>
> But probably the real moral lies in the waste of all that woman — ingenuity and courage. Karen Smith should have used them to build a life which did not depend on her appeal for one man. Maybe there was a better man somewhere, who would have helped her become the full, rounded human being every woman is meant to be. All of us, by the shoddy values we assign to women, helped Karen Smith murder Walter Schuyler. And all of us had a hand in murdering Karen Smith.

Janicek told Emma she could leave as soon as they recovered the body. "I know you'll want to take her home. I can't understand why she didn't leave you anything —" Emma shrugged. She had got along all her life without anybody giving her anything and she'd rather not talk about it. But Janicek went on thoughtfully, "All that money I figure is in a box under some other name. Too bad it'll all go to Mrs. Schuyler. Because we know the date she must have rented a box and she couldn't have gone far between the time she emptied the first one and the time she left The Chelsea. So we'll find that second box, you can see that."

Yes, Emma could see that, all right.

There were no men following her when she went to market. Emma had become fairly expert at spotting them and giving them the slip. Just the same, she took three buses to the tube. She was certain nobody trailed her to the bank in Newark.

Only the old man was in the vault and a young guard in uniform. Still her hand shook as she signed the slip. The old man consulted the file and then he looked over at the guard, and she knew, even before she felt the hand on her shoulder, that she had walked into a trap. When Janicek said, "We'll find that second box," he had already found it and they were there waiting for her at the bank.

He came down the stairs and said, "Hello Emma," and then he picked up the slip on which she had written Leona Lewis with her right hand. And if he didn't know it before, he now had all the proof he needed that

Emma and Karen Smith were the same person . . .

He finally read all the stories in the book and one of them was called *The Purloined Letter.* He wondered if Fernanda Freed had known it all the time. The Cousin John letter had been typed on Fernanda's machine. Or the dyed hair might have tipped her off. Or the coat that was cloth outside with the muskrat lining. Or the fact that she could use both hands. Women notice those things. It didn't matter. The case was closed and Reagan had advised him to go out and celebrate. But he didn't feel like celebrating. There were times when he was fed up with his job — when a deal was washed up and there was no more X to find. Only the memory of a woman named Karen Smith whom somebody might have saved . . .

Viola Brothers Shore has played absolutely fair with you in "The Case of Karen Smith." If there is the slightest doubt in your mind, re-read the story and you will discover that every apparently misleading statement, every seeming discrepancy, is, on analysis, absolutely truthful — once you know the truth! Here is the perfect modern blend of the detective story — the whydunit in terms of whodunit technique.

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A. A. Milne's major contribution to the detective field is his novel, THE RED HOUSE MYSTERY. *Published in 1922, and still in print, the book has been the subject of considerable controversy. It is a matter of record, for example, that Raymond Chandler dismissed the book with contempt and condemnation. But Mr. Chandler, in the role of critic, was rather guilty of stacking the cards: he judged the book chiefly from the only standpoint he apparently knows or is interested in — the so-called hardboiled.* THE RED HOUSE MYSTERY *was not written from the roughtough-realistic point of view, and an author's intention should at least be taken into account. There is no denying that* THE RED HOUSE MYSTERY *has flaws and faults, and serious ones; but the basis of true understanding is tolerance — he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone . . .*

Howard Haycraft considered THE RED HOUSE MYSTERY *sufficiently important historically to include it in his Readers' List of Detective Story "Cornerstones." What will be the future appraisal of the book? Will 'tec taste change? Who knows? Today there is a return to fundamentals in detective-story writing, and we shout hallelujah. More and more the writers are beginning to develop form rather than formula, and in this newer conception of values we believe the hardboiled technique will go the way of all flash. There can be no doubt that style, as always, will continue to be tremendously important in the ultimate literary balance, but Mr. Chandler, we think, makes the rather common critical mistake of rating style as* all-*important. It would be just as colossal an error to consider story (plot) as all-important. As between the two — how a thing is said as against what is said — the latter is more likely to retain the greater degree of importance.*

All of which, in our usual roundabout fashion, brings us to A. A. Milne's newest story. As the title itself suggests, you will find no rough realism here. To the contrary, the story combines Mr. Milne's long suits — whimsy and nostalgia — and will be enjoyed most not by those fans who like the Chandler type of thriller exclusively but by those readers who have an enduring affection for auld lang syne . . .

IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO

by A. A. MILNE

ARTHUR CARSTAIRS was born in London in 1917, to the sound of one of those air-raids which have seemed so small an affair since, but which were so terrifying then. His mother was continuously frightened anyhow, for her husband was a subaltern in Flanders, soon to be

killed. Mrs. Carstairs and her baby retired to a cottage on the outskirts of the country-town of Kingsfield, and lived as best they could on what little money there was. When he was old enough, Arthur went as a day-boy to Kingsfield Grammar School. Not surprisingly, he grew up a quiet, rather shy, industrious boy, with none of the vices and few of the picturesque virtues, clinging to his mother more from a sense of duty than because he desired no other companionship. When she died on his twentieth birthday, he had never kissed a girl, nor climbed a mountain, nor swum in the sea, nor spent a night in the open, and all the adventures he had had were adventures of the mind — romantic, exciting, but, as he well knew, not for him. Mr. Margate, one of Kingsfield's three solicitors and a good friend of his mother's, had given him his articles, and had promised him a post in the office when he had passed his finals. It seemed to him now at twenty-one that he would remain in Kingsfield forever, a commonplace lawyer whom the world would pass by. Perhaps, he thought sometimes, it would be better if he tried for a job in London when he was qualified. In London, adventure waited on the doorstep, as his reading of Robert Louis Stevenson had assured him. In London, jeweled hands beckoned to you from broughams . . .

On his mother's death her cottage had been sold, and he lived now in lodgings close to Mr. Margate's office. Occasionally, after dinner, he would go round to the *Cap and Bells* and have a glass of beer; not because he liked beer, nor the atmosphere of public houses, but because he felt that in this way he was seeing life. He was a nice-looking boy, with an earnest, innocent face which appealed to aging barmaids; who called him 'Ducks,' as if they really meant it, and made him feel a man. And a rather highly-colored sporting gentleman called Platt, who frequented the *Cap and Bells*, had made friends with him one night over a double cherry-brandy, and had received, as one man of the world from another, all Arthur's confidences. This encouraged him to think more hopefully of the future. He told himself that when he had passed his finals, he would open up a little more, spending at least three evenings a week at the *Cap and Bells*. He might even learn to play billiards, which Platt had offered to teach him. His own game was chess; but an offer to teach Platt chess had been unacknowledged at the time, and not repeated. Presumably, in the noisy environment of the public bar, Platt had not heard.

On this January evening in 1939 Arthur had just finished dinner and was sitting over his books, when his landlady put her head in at the door and said suspiciously, "There's a lady to see you."

He looked up with a start, trying to make sense of it, and then asked nervously, "Who is it?" He had the absurd idea that Doris the barmaid

had come to fetch him, and that Mrs. Heavitree didn't approve of her.

"Didn't give a name. Said she wanted to see you professionally."

"Oh! Oh well, you see, the office is closed, and she may have gone round to Mr. Margate's house, and he may be out, and she may have been sent —" He broke off, thinking ashamedly, "Why am I such a coward, why am I apologizing for what is none of her business?" and said firmly, looking as much like a solicitor as he could, "Show her up, please, Mrs. Heavitree." As she closed the door, he hurried into his bedroom and brushed his hair. A pity that the remains of a rice-pudding were on the table, but if she were a nice old lady they could laugh it off together.

There was a knock at the door. He called "Come in!" and she came in.

Arthur stood up to receive her. He had been preparing to say "Good evening, Mrs. — er — won't you sit down and tell me what I can do for you?" What he did say was "Good lord!"

She was young, she was lovely, she was everything which he had hoped that a girl might be, she was the girl of his dreams. He stood gaping at her.

She had a low, deep voice, wonderfully sweet. She said, "Do forgive me, Mr. Carstairs, for coming at this time," and he pulled himself together and said, "Not at all, sit down, won't you?" Apologies for the springs of the armchair and the death-throes of the rice pudding rose to his lips, but her pretty "Thank you" and the smile she gave him left him speechless.

"Mr. Carstairs," she said, "you are a solicitor, are you not?"

"Well — er," he said, "yes, and — er — no. I mean, I shall be — I hope — in a short time, as soon as I have passed my final examination, but actually I'm not yet qualified. Does it matter?" he added anxiously.

"Oh, dear!" she said. "I thought you were a solicitor."

"Well, I am in a way. What it comes to is that I could give you my advice, my help, unprofessionally — I mean, without payment — but then," he hurried on, "of course I shouldn't want that anyhow. I mean —"

She smiled and said, "You mean I could thank you without offending your legal etiquette?"

"Yes, of course. I mean — er — well, perhaps you had better tell me what it is. I expect it will be all right."

"It's a question of a will. Must you have a qualified solicitor to write a will for you?"

"Anybody can write a will. People generally employ a solicitor so as to be sure of covering all the ground, and the solicitor employs a special legal language so as to be sure of doing this. But anybody can write in plain English on a piece of paper: 'I leave my gold cigarette-case to John Smith,' and if it's properly signed and witnessed, John Smith gets it."

She smiled at him delightedly and

said, "Then there you are! You read this will which my father has made, you assure him as a friend that it is legally correct, properly signed and witnessed, and then we thank you, we show our gratitude —" she held him for an endless moment with her wonderful eyes — "in any way you wish. So long, of course, as it does not include six-and-eightpence."

She laughed as she ended, and her laughter was divine music to him.

"That's right," he said, laughing too.

"Then you will come with me?"

"Of course, if you really —"

"To Norton St. Giles?"

He nearly said, "To the ends of the earth!" but stopped himself just in time.

"Norton St. Giles? I don't think I —"

"It's a village about twenty-five miles from here. We're a little way out of it. The Old Barn."

"Twenty-five miles! I say! But I don't understand." He frowned at her, trying to remember that he was nearly a solicitor. "It doesn't make sense."

She rose from the broken chair as if it were a throne, and held out her hand to him.

"Nevertheless, because I ask you, you will come — Arthur?"

He was on his feet, taking her hand in his, saying huskily that he would come, seeing the squalid room as it would be if she left him alone in it, romance and beauty gone from his life forever.

She pressed his hand, thanking him with her eyes, and, surprisingly, sat down again. She smiled at him and said, "I knew I could be sure of you. So now let's make sense of it."

He pushed his books farther out of the way, and leaned forward, chin on hands, watching her eagerly.

"My name is Lydia Clyde. My father and I live alone together. I am all that he has left in the world, and I am devoted to him. He is, I am afraid, a sick man." She put her hand to her left breast. "He may die at any moment, the doctors tell us; but he and I —" she gave a confident little laugh — "we don't believe the doctors. And yet sometimes — do you understand? — we do believe. For weeks now he has been insisting that he must make a will, so as to leave me provided for. You know how it is; one puts off doing a thing for years, telling oneself that there is no hurry, and then, when one suddenly decides to do it, every wasted minute seems of importance. So I arranged with a London friend of ours, a lawyer, to come down for a night. I would meet him at the Junction, for we are many miles from a station. But he is not there! So I ring up my father, and I learn that our friend has telegraphed to say that he is prevented from coming. My father implores me to find some other lawyer and bring him back with me. He dare not put it off any longer. Foolish, unreasonable, I know — he may live for twenty years yet, but —" she shrugged her shoulders — "sick men *are* unreason-

able. And I cannot have him worrying. So —" she broke off, and looked at him gratefully — "yes!"

"Yes, but how —"

"You have met a man, Roger Platt, at — the *Cap and Bells*, is it?"

"Is he a friend of yours?" he asked, surprised.

"We have known him a long time, but that is not to say he is a man I approve of altogether. Poor Roger! He is not —" she smiled at him confidingly — "our sort. But he has spoken to me of you. He has a great admiration for you, did you know? So, when I was so badly in need of a friend — a friend who was also a lawyer, but a friend who was young enough not to mind doing an unusual thing — I remembered suddenly what he had said of you. You will come? I have my car outside."

"Of course," said Arthur, flattered to think that he had made such an impression. But he looked at her in a puzzled way, for there was something which still didn't make sense.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Your father —"

"Yes?"

"You are his only child. Then why the urgent need for a will? Everything will be yours anyhow."

She gave him the most pathetic look which he had ever received from a human being. She turned away from him, and her lovely head drooped upon her shoulder. "Don't you understand?" she whispered.

To show that he was a man of the world and practically a qualified solicitor he said quickly that he did, of course he did, but — and stopped, hoping that she would explain.

"I didn't want to tell you," she murmured. "I wanted to keep my poor little secret. But I cannot have secrets from my friend. You see, Arthur, I am his daughter, but — oh, must I say it?"

"Oh!" Now he understood. "You mean — he never married your mother?"

She bowed her head.

He got up, saying, "I'm a fool, forgive me. I'll just get my coat." As he went into his bedroom she looked at her watch. It was 7:47.

They said little on the way. As they wound out of the half-lit streets into the deep blackness of the country lanes, she asked him if he were ever frightened in a car, and he said, "Not with you." She gave him her hand for a moment, saying simply, "I am a good driver and the roads will be empty." He was too happy to be frightened. Once or twice his heart turned over, but her reassuring smile, her little apology, brought forgetfulness. They flashed through a village and she said, "Barton Langley, halfway," and he looked at his watch to find that it was only just after 8. Twelve and a half miles — why, that was fifty miles an hour! Fifty miles an hour on a pitch-black night with a lovely girl — this, he told himself, was life.

"There! Thirty-three minutes. That's as good as I've ever done at night. Come along!"

She switched off the lights, took his hand, and drew him after her. She opened the front door into darkness, saying, "The lights went out this evening, you must keep hold of me," and he was glad to be still holding her hand. They went into a room on the left.

It was a man's room, lit now by many candles; plainly furnished with a couple of comfortable chairs and a sofa, all in green linen covers on which were brightly colored patchwork cushions. At a gate-legged table with a check tablecloth, an elderly man was playing Patience. He rose, sweeping the cards together, as Lydia said, "Darling, this is Mr. Carstairs, who has very kindly come to help us."

Mr. Clyde bowed low from behind the table, saying, "Mr. Carstairs, I am your most obliged humble servant." He was an oddly old-fashioned figure, thought Arthur, in his black velvet jacket and black stock, with an eyeglass, dependent from a black ribbon, now in his eye. He had a long, pale, rather melancholy face in a setting of crinkly, silver hair, but his eyes shone alertly, and his hand, as he held it out, did not tremble.

"I'll get the drinks," said Lydia. "Have you got the will ready, Father? We mustn't keep Mr. Carstairs." She took a candle and went out. Arthur turned to watch her go, saw the picture on the wall, and gave a gasp of astonishment. Mr. Clyde, fumbling among some papers on his table, presumably for the will, said, "Ah, you have seen my Corot, then."

Arthur was surprised, for he did not associate Corot with nudes, and it was certainly difficult to associate him with this particular one. She sat on a rock, her crossed feet just in the water, and she was leaning back on her hands, looking up into the sunlight, her eyes bright with the joy of living. She was so real, he felt, that if he called to her she would look down and smile at him, and say, "Ah, there you are!" happy to have found him; as Lydia was happy to have found him such a little while ago. For the face was the face of Lydia, alive, unmistakable.

He looked quickly away, and saw what he supposed was the Corot on the other wall. Pale, delicate fantasy, a dream world, an eggshell world which broke at a touch, insubstantial fairyland which somehow made the other picture doubly alive, filling the room with Lydia.

"It's lovely," stammered Arthur, and the old man chuckled to himself.

And now Arthur was to be startled into admiration again, for on a small table in the window a chess-board was laid out, with the most elaborately carved red and white ivory men which he had ever seen. The knights were real knights, the bishops real bishops; to sit down behind them would be to fight a battle, not to play a game. He wondered how long it would take to get used to them, whether it would upset one's game not to have familiar pieces under one's hand. He longed to try.

Lydia came back with a tray. Arthur felt shy of her suddenly. He wanted to look at the picture again, and then at her. He was afraid to look at either, to look at the picture under her eyes, or to look at her with the secret of the picture showing in his own eyes.

"I must have left the will in the other room," said Mr. Clyde, coming from behind his table. "No, no, Lydia," he cried testily, "I am *not* dying. I *can* walk into the other room. I am *not* going upstairs." He took a candle and went out.

She felt his uncomfortableness. She took his hand and deliberately turned him round to the picture.

"Are you shocked?" she asked gently.

He blushed and said, "It's too beautiful for that. I've never — it's just beauty. Oh, Lydia!"

"I was a model before my father found me again. It was either that or — the other thing. You don't despise me?"

"No, no, no!"

"I think it is only a few special people who recognize me. To most it is just —" she shrugged — "Aurora or June Morning or Sea Maiden. But you are different. I knew — didn't I say so? — that I could have no secrets from you." She pressed his hand and left it there as the old man came back.

"Now, Mr. Carstairs, here you are. It's quite short, as you see, and I don't want any nonsense about messuages and hereditaments, because I haven't got any. These ridiculous doctors order me from one place to another, and my life is lived, you might say, in short leases."

Arthur read the will and said, "It seems all right. I see you just say 'my daughter Lydia'. I think —"

"Exactly. As you notice, I've left a space there."

"Well, legally — er — it's a question of — I mean —"

"I've told him, Father," said Lydia.

"Then what are you stammering about, young man? Go ahead."

"Well, is her name Clyde?"

"Yes. She took it by deed poll as soon as — well, some years ago."

"That's good. Any other Christian name?"

"Lydia Rosaline," said Lydia.

"Then I should say 'my daughter Lydia Rosaline Clyde, who is now living with me,' and then I don't see how there could be any doubt."

"That's exactly what I want. Thank you." He began to write.

"We shall need another witness, of course," said Arthur.

"We only want two, don't we?" said Lydia. "You and me. . . . Why, what's the matter?"

It was absurd that anybody shouldn't know what he knew so well. He smiled at her, as he would have smiled at a child, and said, "A witness can't benefit from a will, you know. We need some other independent person. A servant will do."

"Father, did *you* know that?"

"I take no interest in the artificiali-

ties of the law," said Mr. Clyde grandly.

"But we have no servant here!" cried Lydia. "A woman comes in, but she is ill and hasn't been coming this week. What are we to do?"

"One of your neighbors?"

"We hardly know them. Father's health — oh, if I'd only known, we could have brought Roger with us!"

"Then as you didn't," said Mr. Clyde, "may I suggest that the simplest thing would be to go and fetch him now?"

"But, Father —" she looked at her watch — "half-past eight. I couldn't be back before 9:40, say, and to keep Mr. Carstairs waiting about all that time —"

"You'll keep him waiting about much longer, if you're going round from one strange house to another trying to persuade somebody to come out on a cold night, and probably getting nobody in the end. Don't you worry about Mr. Carstairs — I'll look after him. You play chess, Mr. Carstairs?"

"Yes, rather, I — er —"

"Well, if you'd like a game —"

"Oh, I say, I'd love it!"

"There you are, my dear. You aren't the only attraction in this house. Now then, don't waste any more time, off you go."

"Well, if you really don't mind — Arthur?"

"It's quite all right — Lydia!"

"You're very sweet." She gave him a warm, loving smile, glanced up at her picture, and said in a low voice, "I shall be watching over you. Look at me sometimes." She pressed his hand. Mr. Clyde busied himself with the chessmen.

It was a curious game which they played. The strangeness of the pieces; the insistent presence of Lydia; the urge to look at her which made it so difficult to concentrate on the board; a sort of nightmare feeling that he could not escape from his opponent, that every move was a foolish move to which the counter was inevitable and should have been foreseen — and then, unable to be resisted any longer, Lydia, beautiful, desirable, filling the room. The game came to an end with the noise of wheels on the gravel, so completely was it in the other man's control.

"9:35!" cried Lydia gaily. "I beat our record, Arthur."

"I should say she did," said Platt. "Evening, Carstairs."

Arthur nodded to him — as the family solicitor might nod to some rather undesirable member of the family with whom he had a business appointment.

"It's good of you to come, my boy," said Mr. Clyde. "Now then, Mr. Carstairs, tell us what we have to do."

"Lead me to the dotted line," said Platt, taking out his pen.

The will was signed, and witnessed.

"Exhausting," said Platt, putting his pen away. "I must have a drink, Lyd."

"Only a small one, darling, you're going to drive us back."

"That's nice."

"And you'll take forty-five minutes exactly."

"When they tell you, Carstairs, don't argue, just do it."

"Arthur?" She looked at him, decanter poised over glass.

"Just a very little," he said nervously. He had never drunk whiskey before.

"There! And a very small one for me. I like driving fast, but I don't like being driven fast. We'll sit comfortably together at the back without hitting the roof. Through Barton Langley, Roger — it's the better way."

"Oh, right."

The moon had risen, relieving the blackness a little. Arthur and Lydia sat in silence together, a rug wrapped round them, clasping hands beneath. He saw nothing but her face beside him, her picture on the wall, and a magic future in which, somewhere, somehow, they were together for always. . . .

"The *Cap and Bells*," said Platt, as the car came to rest, "and that's that, as far as I'm concerned. Lyd you can take Carstairs home. And a very good night to you both."

"Thank you for everything, darling, ever so much."

He got out of the car, waved to them, and went inside. She moved into the driver's seat, and Arthur sat next to her. It was only a few hundred yards to his lodging. The street was empty. She turned to him, holding out her arms. He clung to her, kissing her cheeks clumsily, whispering, "Oh, darling! Oh, Lydia!" She guided his mouth to her own. He had never known such ecstasy.

He was almost suffocating when she released him. She said smilingly, "Better than six-and-eightpence?" and then, "Darling, you must go."

"I shall see you again — soon?"

"I expect so," she smiled. "In a day or two. Goodbye, darling, and thank you a thousand times. You can't think what a help you have been."

He was out on the pavement. She had pulled the door shut, kissed her hand to him, and was gone. He stumbled up the stairs to his sordid little room. It was 10:30. Just three short hours, and he had experienced a new world. He undressed. He lay in bed in the dark, seeing her picture on the wall . . .

That was Tuesday. On the Thursday morning he was summoned to Mr. Margate's room. Vaguely apprehensive, feeling, as he had felt ever since, that he had done something unprofessional on that evening and was to be reprimanded, he went in. There was another man there. Mr. Margate said, "Oh, good morning, Arthur. This is Inspector Wells. I'll leave you to him. Answer his questions and help him in any way you can." Completely bewildered, a little alarmed at contact with the police, yet relieved that his conduct as a solicitor was not to be impeached, Arthur waited. The Inspector sat

negligently on the corner of Mr. Margate's desk, one leg swinging. He was a stocky, pleasant-looking man.

"Just a few questions," he murmured. "Nothing much." He smiled in a friendly way and added, "I can hardly ask you to sit down in your own office, but you'd be more comfortable."

Arthur sat down.

"Never mind for the moment why I'm asking these questions. If you do happen to guess, well, you're a lawyer and can keep a confidence. That right?"

"Of course."

"Know a man called Roger Platt?"

"I've met him once or twice."

"When did you last see him?"

"Tuesday night."

"Where? At what time?"

"At about 10:30, going into the *Cap and Bells*."

The Inspector was silent for a little, swinging his leg, and then said, "I'm trying to confirm his account of himself on Tuesday evening. It involves among other people, some friends of his called Clyde, who live at Norton St. Giles, and yourself. Now give me *your* account."

Arthur gave it. The Inspector smiled and said, "I gather that the lady is not ill-looking." Arthur blushed and said, "Yes — I mean, no."

"All the same, if you can drive fifty miles on a dark winter's night for a lady, you can drive fifty miles for a mere policeman on a nice sunny morning. Can't you?"

Arthur couldn't keep the excitement out of his eyes and voice as he asked, "Do you mean you want me to come with you to Norton St. Giles — now?"

"That's the idea. I gather that it finds favor with you."

Arthur blushed again and said defensively, "Well, it's better than stuffing in an office."

"No doubt. Now just a word before we start. You would, of course, vouch for the honesty and integrity of your friends the Clydes?"

"Of course!"

"Although you only met them on Tuesday. Well, I'm not saying you're wrong. But would you also vouch for Mr. Roger Platt?"

"No-no," said Arthur. "I suppose I wouldn't."

"You wouldn't — and I'm not saying you're right. You see, the police can't come to these quick decisions. To the police every man might be a liar, and every woman is one. I don't feel bound to accept the Clydes' word, nor Platt's, nor yours. But if you all agree on something, then it's probably the truth. What you've just told me is that Platt was in a certain place at 9:35 Tuesday night in the company of yourself and Mr. and Miss Clyde. If he was there, then he can't have been thirty-five miles away at 9:15 — in which case I've no more interest in him. So, with your permission, we'll just make sure that you're speaking the truth, and that's where you were yourself at 9:35. No offense?"

"Of course not."

"Right. Then let's go. I've warned them that we're coming."

They went out to the police car. A constable driver was studying a map.

"Found the way, Lewis?"

"There seem to be two ways, sir. I don't know that there's much choice."

"Perhaps Mr. Carstairs can tell us."

Arthur was about to explain that it was much too dark to see anything, when he remembered. "We go through Barton Langley," he said.

"That's right," said Lewis. "I thought that looked the better way."

"All right, then. Step on it."

It was like coming home to be in that room again; to see the picture, the two pictures, and the great chessmen under the window, and old Mr. Clyde with his Patience spread out on the chequered table-cloth, and now, making her even dearer, Lydia in a chair before the fire busy with her needle. "I've brought a friend of yours with me," the Inspector had said, and her eyes had lit up, and she had cried, "Oh, how nice!" and held out a hand to him, and the old man had chuckled and said, "Hello, boy, come for your revenge?" The Inspector had managed it all very tactfully, leaving Lydia a little bewildered, a little anxious for Roger, and the old man cynically amused.

"Yes, you want to keep your eye on that gentleman, Inspector. Reckless young devil. You never know what he'll be up to next. What's he done now? Didn't run over anybody, did he, when he drove Mr. Carstairs back?"

"Of course he didn't, darling. I don't know what it's all about."

"Just a matter of confirmation, Miss Clyde," said the Inspector vaguely. "You know how it is, one friend recommends a book, and you say, 'Really?' Another friend recommends it, and you say, 'Oh, I must get it.' Then a third friend recommends it, and you really do get it. Same with evidence."

Now he was saying goodbye to Lydia. Now he was saying goodbye to the other Lydia, the Lydia of the picture, and then he was in the car, and perhaps would never see her again.

"And that's where you were at 9:35 on Tuesday night, Mr. Carstairs?"

"Yes."

"Playing chess with Mr. Clyde when Miss Clyde came back with Platt?"

"Yes."

"Good enough," said Inspector Wells regretfully, and began to talk about football.

Six years later Arthur was in Cairo. He had been half round the world; he had kissed girls of many nationalities; he had climbed mountains, swum in strange seas, and spent more nights under the stars than he could count. He had seen life and he had seen death. Now he was in Cairo, having what he called a spot of leave.

A hand came on his shoulder and turned him round. He saw a pleasant-looking, middle-aged man in captain's uniform.

"Carstairs, surely?" said the other. "Though it's a long time since we met."

"I'm afraid," began Arthur, looked at the man again, and went on, "Yes, but I do know your face, only — I'm sorry — I can't for the moment —"

"I used to be Inspector Wells. Field Security now. Same job really."

"Of course! Nice to meet you again. Are you dug in here? I'm just on leave."

"Then you must let me give you a drink. Groppi's suit you?"

"Anything you say."

They sat out at a little table with their drinks, and he was stirred by a vague feeling of happiness, because he was in the company of someone who knew his own particular corner of England.

"Did you ever see your friends the Clydes again?" asked Wells, after they had exchanged immediate news about themselves.

"No," said Arthur shortly. He could still feel ashamed of his utter surrender to that revelation of Lydia; still remember with contempt the feverish anxiety in which he had waited for some message from her, had written to her imploringly, and reckoned the hours by the deliveries of a postman who never came; how he had hired a bicycle at last and ridden out one Sunday to find the house in possession of new tenants who could give him no forwarding address. And although five years in the Army had put her now in her right place, somewhere well below the W.A.A.F.S. and the A.T.S. and the pretty Italian girls with whom he had fallen in love since, he could still imagine himself meeting her again and discovering that nothing had changed between them.

"I could give you news of them — if you were interested."

"Oh? Yes, I should like to hear." He tried to sound indifferent, but already his heart was beating out an absurd message that she was here in Cairo — now! Was that the news?

Wells puffed at his pipe for a little, as if wondering where to begin.

"I could have told you this five years ago or more. In fact, I went round to see you, but you'd already joined up. Funny our meeting like this. I often wondered — when I asked you all those questions, did you know what I was after?"

"Not at first. I hardly ever bothered with the newspapers in those days. Afterwards, when I heard about the jewel robbery at Glendower House, I wondered if it was that."

"It was."

"And you thought Platt might have done it?"

"Well, yes and no. It wanted somebody quicker and neater and more active to do the actual robbery, but there was evidence to show that he had been interesting himself in the lay-out of the house — hanging around, taking her ladyship's maid to

the pictures, that sort of thing. My idea was that he prepared the ground, and somebody else nipped in and did it. Possibly there was a third person in the background who organized it all."

"But you never got them?"

"Oh, yes, we did. Not then, but later on when they worked it again in another part of the country, and we found some of the Glendower stuff on them. And then we got the whole story out of them, from Platt chiefly. A nasty bit of work, Platt."

"Platt?" said Arthur, astonished. "You mean he *was* in the Glendower show?"

"Oh, yes. The girl actually did it, of course, and it was Clyde who had worked it all out. A great organizer that man. Pity he had to go to prison — he'd have done well in the Army."

"The girl?" cried Arthur. "What are you talking about, Wells?"

"Lydia."

Arthur gave a loud, mocking laugh. Wells raised his eyebrows, shrugged, and said nothing. A little disconcerted, Arthur said, "Perhaps I'm getting it all wrong. When did the robbery take place?"

"Everybody was at dinner, all the bedrooms empty. It was the night of the Hunt Ball, but the women didn't really plaster themselves with the stuff until they were ready to start. So she made a pretty good haul. Accidentally, as we thought at first, she knocked over the ladder as she came down. It crashed onto the terrace, and brought everybody out. The moon had just risen, and they saw a figure running. Time, definite and fixed — 9:15."

"And twenty minutes later she was thirty-five miles away! Ha-ha!"

Wells didn't say anything, and Arthur asked a little anxiously, "Glendower *is* 35 miles from Norton St. Giles, isn't it?"

"Ten miles due south of Kingsfield, and another twenty-five north. That's right."

"Well, then!"

"This is the ingenious part." He put a hand for a moment on Arthur's knee, and said, "Don't think that you have anything to reproach yourself with. I was taken in just as badly, and I was a policeman."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Well, you see, Carstairs, you never were at Norton St. Giles. *You were never more than a mile from Kingsfield* — and ten miles from Glendower House."

"But — but, my good man, I went there with *you!*"

"Oh, next morning, yes."

"To the same house."

"No."

"But I could swear —"

"You couldn't swear it was the same house, because you never saw the house that night. You saw only one room."

"All right, then, the same room."

"No."

"Really, Wells, I know I was an innocent young fool in those days, but I wasn't blind."

"Everyone is blind to the things

at which he isn't looking. What did you see in that room? That picture. What else? Go on, describe the room."

"The other picture, the Corot. The chessmen on the table by the window. The big table with a check table-cloth — er — blast it, it was six years ago — oh, yes, there were some patchwork cushions, and — er —" He tried to think, but all he could see was Lydia.

"You see? Everything you remember was — *moveable!* It could all have been put in a car, and taken from one house to another; from Clyde's house in Norton St. Giles to Platt's house just outside Kingsfield. Oh, he knew his stuff, that man Clyde. He knew that a young bachelor living in lodgings doesn't take in a room as a woman does, or even as a married man might. Give him something to fix his eyes on, and the rest goes by. So he gave you the portrait of Lydia and the chessmen — your two loves, so to speak — and they furnished the room for you."

"But she drove me there —"

"In the dark, to Barton Langley and back, same as when Platt drove you home. When Lydia left you and Clyde playing chess, she drove straight to Glendower House — only ten miles away — did the job, and drove back to Platt's house where you were just finishing your game. Platt, who was in the pub until 9, walked over and met her outside. Then they burst in together, straight from their *supposed* twenty-five mile drive. Easy."

Arthur sat there, trying to take it in, trying in the light of this revelation to remember all that she had said to him.

"Was he really her father?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly."

Well, at least she had told the truth about that.

"Oh, sorry," said Wells, "I see what you mean. No, no, Clyde was her husband."

"Her *husband?*"

"Yes, he's quite a young man. It was Platt who was her father.

"I daresay it didn't give the girl much chance, having a father like that. Just a common crook. Clyde was the genius, an artist in every sense of the word. He painted that picture, you know."

"Oh?" He didn't want to think of the picture now.

"Typical of him." Wells laughed gently. "It wasn't the girl at all. Just a professional model for Dawn or Summer, or whatever he called it. He painted in his wife's face specially for the occasion. Thought that it would occupy your attention more. He thought of everything."

All of it lies, and this the crowning lie of all! He could forgive her everything but this, this outrage on his modesty. Blast her! And who the hell cared? Edna was having dinner with him tonight. A really good sort. And quite pretty.

"Oh, well," he said indifferently, "I was a bit younger then. And — it was a long time ago."

QUEEN'S QUORUM: *Conclusion*

by ELLERY QUEEN

To E. C. Bentley's famous novel, TRENT'S LAST CASE, we owe the first really successful attempt "to introduce [in the author's own words] a more modern sort of character-drawing . . . The idea at the bottom of it was to get as far away from the Holmes tradition as possible. Trent . . . does not take himself at all seriously. He is not a scientific expert; he is not a professional crime investigator. He is an artist, a painter, by calling, who has strayed accidentally into the business of crime journalism . . . He is not superior to the feelings of average humanity; he does not stand aloof from mankind, but enjoys the society of his fellow creatures and makes friends with everybody. He even goes so far as to fall in love. He does not regard the Scotland Yard men as a set of bungling half-wits, but has the highest respect for their trained abilities. All very unlike Holmes" — and all blended with superb entertainment in

93. E. C. Bentley's
TRENT INTERVENES
London: Thomas Nelson, 1938

As everyone knows, or should know, Carter Dickson and John Dickson Carr are one and the same. Creator of two of the most eminent sleuths in modern fiction — Dr. Gideon Fell and Sir Henry Merrivale (H.M.) — John Dickson Carr grows in stature with each passing year. Long ago the English critic who called himself Torquemada rated Mr. Carr "one of the Big Five." Torquemada probably meant "one of the Big Five" among detective-story writers living in England; actually it is true among *all* detective-story writers.

John Dickson Carr specializes in the particular kind of "miracle" problem which is perhaps the most fascinating gambit in crime literature — that and the "locked room"; that and scrupulous fairplay; that and an unexcelled atmosphere of the supernatural which in the end becomes all too natural and of the "impossible" murder which in the end becomes all too possible. He is a master of deliberate, yet completely honest, misdirec-

Original version of "Queen's Quorum" from TWENTIETH CENTURY DETECTIVE STORIES, *edited by Ellery Queen.* *Copyright, 1948, by The World Publishing Co.*

tion — which is another way of saying that he is a master of criminological camouflage.

His first book of short stories is one of the most important in the modern school. There are eleven tales in

94. Carter Dickson's
THE DEPARTMENT OF QUEER COMPLAINTS
London: William Heinemann, 1940

of which the first seven concern Colonel March, head of the Scotland Yard Department whose curious name serves as the title of the book. In these stories the spirit of two great series of detective-mystery tales intermingles: THE DEPARTMENT OF QUEER COMPLAINTS and Chesterton's THE CLUB OF QUEER TRADES (London: Harper, 1905) seem to meet on the Strand of Detection Town, shake hands, clap each other on the shoulder, chuckle loud enough to be heard all the way to America, and then, arm in arm, strut off together. And something of the same detectival delight pervades John Dickson Carr's second book of short stories — DR. FELL, DETECTIVE (New York: American Mercury, 1947).

The decade ended with William MacHarg's second major contribution to the form. MacHarg's short stories about detective O'Malley — really they are "short shorts," averaging only 3000 words in length — are almost object lessons in Basic English; the author rarely uses a long or unfamiliar word and the sentence structure is simplicity itself. But don't be deceived: the tales are not soft — they are tough and terse and muscular, and their natural, completely unaffected style represents as close an approach to true realism as is possible in the genre. It is startling to realize that

95. William MacHarg's
THE AFFAIRS OF O'MALLEY
New York: Dial Press, 1940

spans thirty years of important pioneering by the author. Collaborator on a key book in 1910 (see THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF LUTHER TRANT), William MacHarg is still writing significant shorts today; a trail-blazer in the First Golden Era, he is a Modern in the fullest sense. His prose-lean affairs of O'Malley — the smartest of all "dumb cops" — focus a policeman's lot with the clarity of a literary candid-camera.

The Second Moderns (1931–1940) gave us M. Froget, The Saint, Ellery Queen, Trevis Tarrant, Albert Campion, Philip Trent, Colonel March, and O'Malley, among other greats — thirteen more cornerstones in the homicidal house of many mansions — bringing us to the present decade with all its wondrous promise for the future.

IX. The Renaissance

Our own decade is called the Renaissance because the detective-crime short story is on the march again, pushing toward new heights both in quantity and quality. In 1941 we hear the overture in Rufus King's DIAGNOSIS: MURDER (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1941) about Dr. Colin Starr, and in

96. H. Bustos Domecq's
SEIS PROBLEMAS PARA DON ISIDRO PARODI
(SIX PROBLEMS FOR DON ISIDRO PARODI)
Buenos Aires: Sur, 1942

which is a noteworthy opus — probably the first book of detective short stories in the Spanish language. The criminological concert hit Carnegie Hall stride with the appearance of William Irish's first book of short stories — I WOULDN'T BE IN YOUR SHOES (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1943). Personally, we prefer as his cornerstone contribution

97. William Irish's
AFTER-DINNER STORY
New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1944

although the author's THE DANCING DETECTIVE (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1946) is equally brilliant. William Irish is the pen-name of Cornell Woolrich, one of the most dynamic talents in contemporary crime writing. Most of his stories are psychological thrillers, powerful in their atmosphere of terror and suspense, and usually ending in a whiplash of surprise that reveals the subtlest integration of plot, style, and technique. Anthony Boucher rightfully attributes to Irish-Woolrich's work an "enormous impact of the everyday-gone-wrong" — the kindling of that peculiar *cauld grue* or *frisson d'horreur* which lurks in and around the commonplace.

The year 1944 also marked the appearance of Dashiell Hammett's first book of short stories* — the symphony of our contemporary crime-concert. Hammett is the acknowledged founder of the hardboiled school which specializes in word savagery — savagery in style, sophistication, sex, slugging, and sleuthing. Just how does Hammett achieve, against a background of sheer melodrama, the brittle lacquer of realism which we now associate with the hardboiled species? The secret lies in his method: Hammett tells modern fairy tales in *terms* of realism. He combines extreme romanticism of plot with extreme realism of characterization. His *stories* are the stuff of

* Although not collected in book form until 1944, Dashiell Hammett's short stories began to appear in magazines, principally in "Black Mask," in the early 1920's.

dreams; his *characters* are the flesh-and-blood of reality. The stories are flamboyant extravaganzas, but the characters in those stories are authentic human beings who talk, think, and act like real people. Their speech is tough, earthy, two-syllabled; their desires, moods, frustrations are laid bare with probing frankness. That we owe a great debt to Hammett no honest writer, reader, or reviewer of detective fiction can deny. He broke away — violently — from the overpowering influence of the polished English crimeteers; he divorced us from effete, nambypamby classicism; he gave us the first 100 per cent *American*, the first truly *native*, detective story. He did not invent a new kind of detective story — he invented a new way of telling the old one.

All the Hammett books of short stories are important but without question the cornerstone is

> 98. Dashiell Hammett's
> THE ADVENTURES OF SAM SPADE
> New York: Lawrence E. Spivak, 1944

with THE CONTINENTAL OP (New York: Lawrence E. Spivak, 1945), THE RETURN OF THE CONTINENTAL OP (New York: Jonathan Press, 1945), HAMMETT HOMICIDES (New York: American Mercury, 1946), DEAD YELLOW WOMEN (New York: Jonathan Press, 1947), and NIGHTMARE TOWN (New York: American Mercury, 1948) completing a homicidal hexad or sleuthian sextology, as you prefer, unparalleled in this decade.

Following Hammett on the program is the crime-concerto — the belatedly compiled books of shorts written by Raymond Chandler, the current white-haired boy of the rough, tough, guts-gore-and-gals school. The first volume

> 99. Raymond Chandler's
> FIVE MURDERERS
> New York: Avon, 1944

was succeeded by FIVE SINISTER CHARACTERS (New York: Avon, 1945) and FINGER MAN (New York: Avon, 1947).

Late in 1943 "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" had inaugurated a series of historical detective stories by Lillian de la Torre. These tales had as their protagonist the Great Cham of Literature, the Sage of Fleet Street, the jovial, Jovian Dr. Sam: Johnson who devoted his prodigious learning to the detection of Eighteenth Century crime and chicanery. The origin of the series is interesting: One day it dawned on the author that James Boswell — the immortal Bozzy — was in reality the greatest of "Watsons." Immediately stories in detective form began to shape themselves around

every queer personality and dubious event in Dr. Johnson's lifetime. Just before the first story was published in *EQMM*, Miss de la Torre wrote us that she took "a rather useless [*sic!*] pride in the authenticity" of her facts and language. The larger truth is, the author recreated that grand old gentleman-and-scholar in all his glory and produced in

100. Lillian de la Torre's
DR. SAM: JOHNSON, DETECTOR
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946

the finest series of historical detective stories ever written — in scholarship, humor, flavor, and compelling detail.

Meanwhile, in Mexico, Antonio Helú was founding a south-of-the-border school of detection, developing the first great Mexican manhunter, Máximo Roldán. In the earliest tale to appear in the United States, Roldán solved an intricate and baffling murder to prove that crime does pay: for by solving the murder Roldán was able to pocket 10,000 pesos in jewels, thus combining (bloodhound) business with (pilfering) pleasure. The wages of sin, in Roldán's lexicon of larceny, is — detection. The astonishing adventure of this Mexican Arsène Lupin appeared in

101. Antonio Helú's
LA OBLIGACION DE ASESINAR
(THE COMPULSION TO MURDER)
Mexico City: Albatros, 1946

The year 1947 contributed two four-star books. The first was a volume of Hildegarde Withers short stories. The homicide-hunting Hildy is unquestionably one of the most famous of female-sleuths. Plain fans and fancy *aficionados* do not have to be told that Hildegarde Withers's adventures (and misadventures) are not intended to illustrate dead-serious whodunit-ing. Quite the contrary, they are frolics in ferretry. As Robert Browning did not say in PIPPA PASSES: When Hildy's in her heaven, all's right with the world. That super-duper snooper, that irrepressible, irresistible, irreproachable Hildy hashes hilarity and homicide in

102. Stuart Palmer's
THE RIDDLES OF HILDEGARDE WITHERS
New York: Jonathan Press, 1947

The second 1947 cornerstone came from the typewriter of Roy Vickers, the most brilliant contemporary manipulator of the "inverted" method invented by R. Austin Freeman. All the short stories in

103. Roy Vickers's
THE DEPARTMENT OF DEAD ENDS
New York: American Mercury, 1947
London: Faber and Faber, 1949

relate the full case histories of unusual murders — "a minute and detailed description of the crime, setting forth the antecedents, motives, and all attendant circumstances." Readers "see the crime committed, know all about the criminal." The Department of Dead Ends tales are not as deductively conceived as Dr. Freeman's "inverted" stories — the nature of the evidence is not as scientific or irrefutable. But compared with Dr. Freeman's earlier classics, the Vickers stories are even more gripping in their psychological interest, and they generate a suspense that Dr. Freeman never achieved. They also project a kind of realism unmatched in their field. That realism is neither drab nor prosaic: it is shot through with the credible fantasy which occurs repeatedly in real life — that peculiar touch of the unreal which somehow stamps all works of genuine imagination with the very trademark of reality.

Another volume of "inverted" detective stories, worthy of mention, is Freeman Wills Crofts's MURDERERS MAKE MISTAKES (London: Hodder & Stoughton). Although the verso of the title-page of the first edition clearly says "First Printed February 1947," the book was not actually published until March 8, 1948. This volume contains twenty-three stories, twelve of the "inverted" type (called Double Stories), and eleven "of the more usual type" (called Single Stories). All the tales feature Chief Inspector French, Crofts's realistically conceived sleuth, and are based on two series of radio plays by Mr. Crofts which were broadcast by the BBC in '43-'45; according to the author, however, "the stories are not identical with the plays, being not only differently arranged, but containing fuller details."

It is not commonly known that there was a previous book-appearance of Chief Inspector French in the short-story form. In the early 1940s (*circa* 1943) Vallancey Press of London issued a slim paperback titled THE HUNT BALL MURDER, containing a single short story; this story was later included in MURDERERS MAKE MISTAKES as *The Case of The Hunt Ball*, but altered by the author so that "there is a different *dénouement*."

The year 1949 produced a major cornerstone with the publication of a volume of six stories about Uncle Gavin —

104. William Faulkner's
KNIGHT'S GAMBIT
New York: Random House, 1949

The first time we read a detective short story about Uncle Gavin, the protagonist's surname was never mentioned; nor was any name whatever given to the chronicler, Uncle Gavin's young nephew. This led us to believe that there were certain affinities between Faulkner's characters and similar characters created earlier by Melville Davisson Post — Uncle Abner and his anonymous boy-"Watson." But in later Faulkner stories, we learned that Uncle Gavin was named Gavin Stevens, and that his boy-Watson was named Chick Mallison.

Yet instinct can be right where all the "facts" are wrong. The deeper kinship between Post's characters and Faulkner's holds true. Both Uncle Abner and Uncle Gavin emerge with a dignity approaching grandeur; both are imbued with an inordinate passion for justice; both speak and think in an aura of mysticism; both are remarkably stalwart men, ethically, religiously, humanitarianly; and both are American to the core.

Gavin Stevens's philosophy of detection is not precisely orthodox, yet Uncle Abner would have subscribed to it wholeheartedly, as would every other really great detective in fiction (or fact). Gavin says: "I am more interested in justice and human beings than in truth. In my time I have seen truth that was anything under the sun but just, and I have seen justice using tools I wouldn't want to touch with a ten-foot fence-rail." Here is the Phi Beta Kappa Harvard graduate who could discuss Einstein with college professors and who could spend whole afternoons among the squatting men of county and country stores, talking to them in their own idiom.

The publication, advertising, and critical reviews of Faulkner's KNIGHT'S GAMBIT have emphasized once more the shameful literary snobbishness that has always existed, and still exists, in America. Too many publishers and critics regard detective stories as the illegitimate children of literature, to be treated with arrogance and disdain. For example, the publishers of KNIGHT'S GAMBIT, conscious of William Faulkner's position as an eventual Nobel Prize winner, advertised the book as the author's first "detective story." First? What was Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST (1948) if not a detective story? And why the quotation marks? — as if detective were a dirty word. "The New York Times" referred to the book week after week as a volume of short stories "with a whodunit twist" — a superciliousness of attitude which implied that the author had gone slumming for one literary season. And in the sacred "Saturday Review of Literature" Howard Mumford Jones described Uncle Gavin rather contemptuously as "not much more than a variant on the amateur detective." "In one sense," said Mr. Jones, "the stories in this book are mystery stories" — as if that automatically stamped them as inferior; he conceded Faulkner's "narrative

power," but was then careful to point out: "But narrative power is not synonymous with plot" — as if plot, *per se*, were a despicable virtue.

The pure and simple truth is, KNIGHT'S GAMBIT is a book of detective stories, and far from being scorned as such, should be judged on its larger merits. That a writer of Faulkner's stature should unashamedly write detective stories proves once again — if such proof is still needed by the literary snobs — that the detective story has long since come of age. The criminological cornerstones of 109 years — from Poe through Faulkner — were laid not only by such detective-story writers as Conan Doyle, Melville Davisson Post, G. K. Chesterton, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Dashiell Hammett, John Dickson Carr, and Cornell Woolrich, but by such literary figures as Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, H. G. Wells, O. Henry, W. Somerset Maugham — and William Faulkner. . . .

Thus the history of the detective-crime-mystery short story and its 104 most important books from the Bible through the year 1949 . . .

The future of the detective-crime short story is bright indeed. The decade of the Renaissance, commencing in 1941, has already produced nine key books of exceptional quality. The decades to come will not fail to yield an even richer harvest, giving promise of a Third Golden Era which will reinstate the detective-crime short story to the grandeur that was Poe and Post and the glory that was Doyle and Chesterton. For remember that in the beginning Poe said: Let there be a detective story; and it was so; and when Poe created the detective story in his own image, and saw everything that he had made, behold, it was very good; and he cast the detective story originally in the short form, and that form was, is, and forever will be the true form.

Amen.

THE KNITTED SILK SCARF

by ROY VICKERS

SCOTLAND YARD, like any other human institution, has its little vanities, its departmental bigotries. To this day senior officials insist on "admitting" that Harold Maggan outwitted them, which is not accurate. When they found that he had been Dorothy Colmore's lover and had not asked his wife for a divorce, they assumed that here was the usual triangle murder. They misled themselves. That is why they build him

up as a personality, endowing him with truly astonishing qualities.

The truth is that Maggan's alleged brilliance was no more than a prudent mistrust of his own strength of character. When he became aware that his anger was growing like a noxious weed which would eventually choke his conscience, he had the sense to be alarmed. As a man might fear the urge to gamble with the family capital, Maggan feared that he might turn to murder.

Intelligently enough, he applied to himself the social principle that prevention of crime is more to be desired than the certainty of detection. He took steps to insure that the murder should be as difficult and as unprofitable to himself as possible. In this he was no more eccentric than any businessman who erects safeguards against his own over-adventurousness.

At twenty-eight Maggan was receiving a salary of eight hundred pounds from an old established firm of City solicitors, being himself fully qualified. As a result of his father's death, two years previously, he was possessed of some thirty-odd thousand pounds. The dividends, added to his salary, gave him an income which, in 1927, meant a great deal of solid comfort for two.

Muriel — daughter of Professor Whenbane, a biologist of some distinction — was the same age. At their first meeting Maggan was overwhelmed: at their second he believed he had made an impression, so he invited her to accompany him to *Madame Butterfly*, and proposed during the performance.

It may be wondered why Muriel Whenbane, to whom nature and circumstance had given a wide choice, should have chosen the unmagnetic Harold Maggan. She was vital without being self-assertive: she was more than ordinarily good-looking and she knew how to live up to her physical gifts.

Maggan was inexplicably lucky and knew it — the more so, as Muriel would have said the same of herself. They rented a house at Rorbiton, with an ample garden. For four winters and five summers their luck held.

There was one deep shadow — Muriel's growing disquiet at their protracted childlessness. Nevertheless, they were happy years. Harold was a domesticated, hearty type of man, with those tastes which are so often called wholesome, including a facility for crooning at the piano, mainly in comedy. He had a number of equally jolly and rather noisy friends whom Muriel seemed to accept and like.

Dorothy Colmore was not one of their set. He first saw her one sunny evening in August 1930 when he was driving home, alone. Ahead of him a big car turned the corner on the wrong side. He turned onto the empty sidewalk, but the big car hit him nearly broadside on. The last image in his consciousness was that

of the crisp, ash-blonde curls, the wide mouth, and the inconsiderable nose of Dorothy Colmore.

He was a month in the nursing home and ought to have stayed longer. The upper part of him had escaped with negligible surface cuts, but his right shin and thigh had been fractured. He was one of those men, active in work and leisure, to whom immobilization is a form of torture — the most difficult kind of patient.

During the first week the shock kept him quiet. During the second week he began to snap at the nurses.

"Miss Colmore has called to see you, Mr. Maggan. Dr. Bence said you could have visitors. Shall I ask her to come up?"

"Certainly not."

"Come now, Mr. Maggan! A visitor brightens one up so, I always think!"

"But the night nurse brightened me up when she woke me at dawn. And you brightened me up before lunch. Also — now I come to think of it — when you brought me that milk." He added: "As a matter of fact, that woman will depress me. So on second thought, I would like to see her."

Dorothy Colmore was a sprig of nobility who had been paid off, as it were, by her family, with a liberal annuity protected by a trust fund. She was unvicious, invariably generous in intention, noteworthy only for her ebullient irresponsibility.

The sight of those crisp, ash-blonde curls, associated with the accident, gave Maggan a second or so of animal fear, during which his leg hurt him violently.

"I've come to tell you that I know it was wholly my fault. I was more than half drunk." Her voice was low and penitent. "I don't ask you to forgive me."

"Please do not blame yourself, Miss Colmore." The formal insincerity of it was as effective as he had hoped. "I assure you I take a quite impersonal view." He closed his eyes as if he were racked with pain. "Thank you for calling."

That beat her. She slunk out of the cubicle without attempting to save her face. For a few minutes Maggan, normally an easy-going fellow, was able to be puzzled at his own maliciousness. He soon abandoned the problem in favor of working out devices for baiting the nurses — obliquely — without giving a quotable grievance.

All the same, the nurses did complain among themselves. An echo reached Muriel, who doubled her visits, to everyone's satisfaction. His fractiousness melted whenever she came; the good effect of her visit would remain with him for an hour or more after she had gone. He liked her to sit a little way from the bed where he could see nearly all of her. The mere fact of her presence brought him contentment. Now and again he would urge her to prattle about her shopping, the house, and the garden.

"Get me out of here, darling. This place is driving me mad. I shall pick up quickly at home."

So the drawing-room was turned into a bedroom for him, and a double ramp was fitted to the French windows for his wheel-chair. Before the new routine was established, he contracted pneumonia. Two professional nurses were installed in the house which, even so, was not as convenient a place in which to be thoroughly ill as was the nursing home.

The nurses stayed until he was well out of danger. Then Muriel increased the wages of cook and housemaid and took over the nursing.

That first night without the nurses — his night started at nine-thirty — he settled down comfortably. Muriel would take personal charge of him and he would soon be himself again. His satisfaction was heightened by the music of *Madame Butterfly*, so faintly heard that it seemed to be an echo in his own brain until he realized that it must be coming from the radio in Muriel's room. He fell into a happy drowsiness and was asleep in a few minutes.

When Muriel came in next morning, she detected improvement.

"You look as if you'd had a good night, Harold!"

"I —" he wanted to tell her it had been a perfect night, beginning with *Madame Butterfly*.

"Temperature first!" said Muriel, silencing him with a thermometer. She stood beside him, feeling his pulse, just like the nurses, except that she didn't creak.

"Only half a point above normal. That's splendid! Now that you're sleeping well, you'll soon get strong."

"I didn't know I'd been sleeping well! Since you *have* mentioned it, darling, is it absolutely necessary for you to have the radio on in your room after I'm supposed to be trying to go to sleep?"

That night he did indeed lie awake, calling himself a fool and a worm and worse for venting his irritability on Muriel.

But within a week he was working out little devices for baiting her — obliquely — without giving a quotable grievance — at which he was now adept. He achieved hardly a single success. In Muriel a natural force was at work which reduced his insults to the dimensions of a child's naughtiness. Nursing him occupied her whole thought and energy. The disquiet had left her.

Halfway through the long convalescence, Dorothy Colmore called.

"I'm sorry, I can't let you see him," said Muriel. "He is picking up slowly. But his setback has depressed him. Visitors make him nervy."

"I understand," said Dorothy profoundly. "When do the doctors expect —"

"He should be about again in two or three months. But he will have to regard himself as an invalid for quite a long time — years, perhaps. There's always the danger of pneumonia recurring."

"I must remember that — every day and every night!" Dorothy's contrition had its own sincerity, though it had to be expressed in self-

dramatization. "I've turned your husband into an invalid and you into a nurse. It would be easier if you'd hit back. At least, say outright that you hate me."

"Don't be silly, Miss Colmore." Muriel made it sound not rude but sympathetic. "If it will ease your mind, the accident has given me a usefulness I never had before. Harold is the world's worst patient. The trained nurses, for all their discipline, can barely endure him. I can. And I can get the doctor's orders obeyed — which they often couldn't!"

"It sounds very grim for you," said Dorothy. "Have you any children?"

"Unfortunately, no," admitted Muriel. "Though I don't regret it now as much as I did."

"Oh!" Dorothy knew a great deal more about men than did Muriel — knew that if you tried to use them as a child-substitute they would explode.

At the end of March, Maggan returned to the office. He had a limp which was slowly yielding to massage. The irritability had dropped from him. Happiness was on the way back to his home, though the next two months were recognized by both as an intermediate phase, having something of the character of a second courtship. To Muriel's satisfaction, he seemed quite willing to regard himself as still being semi-invalid. He continued to sleep in the drawing-room, though the stairs had ceased to be a difficulty.

In May the intermediate phase ended with a suddenness which will bear only a psychological explanation — the more so because circumstance had set the stage for him. Muriel went to Oxford for three days, where her father had urgent need of her as hostess.

On the first day Harold wrote her a long letter, avowing with shame his abominable conduct as an invalid — telling her that he would have died but for her unswerving devotion and sweet temper. He meant every word of it and it was all substantially true, even if he exaggerated a little. The next day he received a reassuring telegram from her. He called furniture men in to restore the drawing-room. He drove the car. He wallowed in normality.

She came back, fresh and vital and, he thought, very beautiful.

"We begin just where we left off!" he told her. "And tonight we'll have a celebration. Dinner in the West End. Show. Dance. Everything."

"How lovely!" she murmured, and presently qualified it, "except for the dance part of it. It's too soon to ask dancing of the poor leg."

"There isn't a poor leg. There isn't a poor anything. I'm me, darling!"

When they were setting out, she produced a present for him — what seemed to him a new kind of evening scarf. It was longer and broader and heavier than any scarf he had ever seen. It would have been troublesome to manage if she had not draped it over his shoulders for him.

"It's alive!" he laughed. "It grumbles to itself when you disturb it."

"It's knitted silk — that's why."

Wrapped round him, the scarf seemed to contract on itself, compressing him.

"I've never felt so dressy in my life! Is it a new fashion for handsome men or something?"

"Of course it is! And it protects the handsome man's lungs."

For a moment there was danger of a return of irritability, but she diverted his attention in time. The evening was a great success, though it somehow happened that they didn't dance.

In her room he unfastened her cloak, noted for the first time that it was new, as was her dress.

"*Muriel!*"

"Just a minute, Harold. The window is open behind you, and there's quite a cold breeze. You mustn't take unnecessary risks."

He released her, almost sprang away from her, as if in revulsion.

"Harold —" she was shutting the window as she spoke "— do you feel all right, dear?"

"Perfectly all right!" he rapped out. Something was going wrong somewhere. He forced himself to look at her, at the dress she had bought for this occasion, at her shoulders, trying to see her as he had seen her a few seconds ago. This was Muriel — Muriel of *Madame Butterfly* and a hundred dear, delightful memories. This was their reunion.

She had finished with the window. She turned to him again, smiling.

"Sorry, Muriel! Maybe I have overdone it a bit. Maybe — maybe I'd better have a stiff whiskey and try and get some sleep."

He took the stiff whiskey, but it did not send him to sleep. He tried to convince himself that he did not understand why his desire for her had been blown out like a candle.

It was only a monkey trick played on him by his nerves. It was only that he really was overtired and hadn't noticed. It was only — Whatever it was, it would pass away if he would only stop worrying about it.

At a word from Muriel "the gang" rallied. In a round of celebratory evenings Maggan discovered that people tended to congratulate Muriel rather than himself.

"He looks as well and strong as any of the others," he overheard an older woman saying. "You have every right to be proud of your work."

"Not yet!" answered Muriel. "There's the special danger of pneumonia recurring. He'll need watching for years."

It was at that moment that the anger started — to him, a new and disturbing state of mind. It had nothing in common with his earlier irritability. It was something at the back of his thoughts, like a bereavement — but now and again it would come to the surface.

"This scarf, Muriel. I know you had it specially made for me. I appreciate that. It's a grand scarf." He

removed it as if the weight of it taxed his strength. "I'm afraid, though, it isn't quite practical. It sort of tightens itself round the throat. I could hardly breathe just now."

"Oh, Harold! That's only because Brenda made a joke about it. It can't really —"

"Can't it! You try."

He lobbed the scarf over her shoulders, stepped in and folded it across her throat. "Soon, the weight of it begins to tell." He gripped the ends of the scarf —

Some seconds later he had flung the scarf across the hall. Muriel was gasping and coughing.

"You didn't play fair! You pulled ever so hard!"

"So sorry, darling! Clumsy of me. Didn't mean to frighten you."

It was Maggan himself who had been thoroughly frightened. When the scarf was round her throat he had thought how easy it would be to strangle her.

For a month he tried to think about nothing but his work, while his melancholy increased. Then he met Dorothy Colmore.

Again it was a summer evening and again he was driving home alone. This time she was on foot. When he saw the crisp, ash-blonde curls and the wide mouth, a nervous reaction made him brake down hard.

"Why did you stop?" she asked, with an intensity which flummoxed him.

"Why are you foot-slogging?" he countered.

"I've never driven — since it happened. I've lost my nerve."

"Time you got it back!" he snapped. "Jump in." He felt he had the right to bully this particular woman. "Now, you'll drive me down to the tow-path. You will back and turn on the tow-path, *without* tipping the car into the river. Get a move on."

She drove steadily to the tow-path, backed, turned the car with a two-foot margin of safety.

She drove on a dozen yards and stopped. She drooped forward over the steering wheel and burst into tears.

Presently she sat back, turned towards him.

"Thank you, Harold Maggan!" She looked him squarely in the eyes. The tears had streaked her make-up, giving her a quality of starkness. "I'm thirty-one and I've knocked about since I was twenty-two. You are the first — man — I've met."

Maggan was wholly inexperienced in that kind of talk. Something she had said — he didn't even know what it was — had produced a powerful reaction. But he was certain that it was not her physical attractiveness that made him take that messy face in his hands.

"Thank you, Harold Maggan!" she repeated in the same tone of voice. "Don't tell me — but tell your wife why you kissed me — and you won't feel bad about it."

He did not feel bad about kissing Dorothy because, in a sense, he had

not kissed her at all. Not, that is, as a man kisses a girl in a car. The kiss had been a flourish, a token of gratitude for revealing to him a truth about himself.

"The only thing I need," he told Muriel a week later, "is a change. Nothing elaborate. Before we were married I used to stay at the Swan at Wheatbourne — it's only about fifteen miles up the river — go up to the office as usual and do a spot of fishing on fine evenings."

"You don't mean alone, Harold? I wouldn't interfere with the fishing."

"I do mean alone, Muriel. That's the essence of the idea."

"I think I understand, dear." It was the gentle voice she used at the sick bed. "You are worrying about — yourself and me. But there's no need for worry, Harold. Everything will come right. The accident — and your long illness — were much more shattering than you realize."

"They were *not* shattering!" he exploded. "I'm not a crock with one foot in a nursing home. I'm a *man!*"

"Very well, Harold. When d'you think of going there? I'll make a reservation —"

"No need, thanks! They know me well. I'm going tomorrow and — I'll do my packing. I know just what I want to take."

The Swan was an unpretentious, twelve-room inn on a quiet reach of the Thames. The proprietor welcomed him as if there had been no interlude of marriage. After dinner Maggan pottered by himself in a punt, happy as a boy playing truant, reminding himself with a chuckle that if Muriel were there she would say that it was getting chilly. He stayed on the water until after dark.

At breakfast he was still in good spirits. No nonsense about dry toast! He would eat his way through the menu.

By the side of his cup he noticed a little yellow phial. Vitamin tablets. Some other poor devil, no doubt, was being dosed by his wife.

The proprietor himself was helping to serve breakfast.

"I think — *this* — belongs to one of your other guests."

"No, sir, it's quite all right. A parcel came this morning from Mrs. Maggan and a letter asking us to put it on your table. And there's a tonic which is to go up to your room. I didn't know you'd had an illness, Mr. Maggan — I'm sorry. We must try and take special care of you."

Maggan tugged at his collar as if it were too tight — as if it were that knitted silk scarf strangling him.

When he had finished breakfast he would tell the proprietor that he was leaving. No, that would be giving way, and no sensible man would act on an anger impulse. Besides, where could he go? He could not literally disappear, as Muriel could always find him through the office. Wherever he went, she would, in effect, follow — and tell everybody he was not a man any more, but an invalid. He wished he could stop thinking about that knitted silk scarf.

But he couldn't. It would crop up during a slack interval at the office, and it would come fishing with him in the evening. He had deliberately left it at home. He could go home and burn it. But that would be childish, because the scarf was only a symbol. A symbol, he now knew, of a desire to strangle his wife. Before she strangled his manhood.

For a few days he let his panic have full rein. Then he started his practical measures. His bank manager revealed that his capital had slightly appreciated. He could sell out for a trifle over thirty-two thousand. He sold out.

A week later he asked Muriel to meet him for lunch in the City. He told her that the "cure" of bachelordom was beginning to justify itself. He was already feeling very much better, he said, not knowing that he looked haggard. He produced a jeweler's box containing a very presentable diamond bracelet.

"Oh, Harold, what a perfectly beautiful thing! And is it really for me!" There was something in the tone of her voice which suggested a mother receiving a grossly inappropriate present from a schoolboy son. He had forgotten that she had never cared for jewelery. And then came the other standard line: "But, dear, you really oughtn't to have been so dreadfully extravagant!" Only, when Muriel said it, she meant it.

"That was the small change left over after a general tidy-up," he said. "I ought to have arranged our money affairs when we got married. I've tied up thirty thousand pounds for you — the money my father left me. So if you outlive me, as I hope you will, you won't have any worries. After lunch I want you to come to the office. Bellinson is acting for me, and he'll show you where to sign."

She thanked him gracefully but without any marked interest. She was financially uneducated, assumed that it was a paper transaction which in some way protected her without making any perceptible difference to their circumstances.

Bellinson explained to her that Maggan had bought her an annuity in an insurance company, that the income would be paid to her half-yearly for the rest of her life without condition of any kind. She did not ask him how Harold would be situated if she were to die first, so Bellinson did not tell her that he would receive nothing.

Stated from another angle, Harold Maggan was trying to buy off his own murder impulse with thirty thousand pounds. We may say that he would probably have succeeded but for Dorothy Colmore.

He heard her voice in the bar of the Swan when he was sitting in the diminutive lounge one wet evening.

"A double gin, please. And I want to take a bottle away with me."

Maggan thrust his head through the communicating hatch.

"I thought it was you!" he exclaimed. "Why not be sociable?"

Clutching her bottle of gin she came into the lounge.

"By the merest chance," she asserted, "I've taken a bungalow off a friend's hands. In the next reach — not half a mile up. Come over tomorrow evening. Tinned stuff and what's left of this bottle."

He found himself immensely stimulated by her society, though she prattled of friends he did not know and of interests that were meaningless to him. He accepted her invitation to supper.

She had, as she put it, knocked about since she was twenty-two. She was sophisticated. And he was the first *man*, she said, she had met. The stimulus became a white-hot fascination, even if the fascination was with the picture of himself which he was able to discern in her eyes. She certainly treated him as if he were a hybrid of philosopher and wild beast, which was sufficiently near his own definition of a man.

Again, on her invitation, he escaped from the vitamin tablets in the dining-room and the tonic in his bedroom — and moved into her bungalow. The strange mixture of self-deception, of deep inner conflicts on both sides, tempered with honest carnality, soothed his nerves, stimulated his appetite and, as June passed into July, noticeably improved his physical appearance.

His feeling for Dorothy was without sentimentality. When she was away for three days he was incurious, but missed her and was delighted when he found her in the bungalow on the fourth evening. He kissed her long and violently.

"I arrived here at midday," she told him. "I'd just finished a scrap lunch when Muriel turned up!"

"Well, I'm damned!" He was not alarmed but pleased. He had wanted Muriel to know, but had found no dignified way of telling her. "How did she take it?"

"Better ask how I took it! I fed out of her hand. She nearly made me howl, and I thought only you could do that. Apparently she has been watching you — when you leave the office, I think. Sees that you're so much better. Thanked me for cooperating."

"Cooperating! What rot! I say, Dorothy! If she starts a divorce —"

"But she's not starting a divorce."

"If I can persuade her to do so, you'll marry me, won't you?"

"No, darling, certainly not! I'm a confirmed Murielite. She talked terrific sense. I'm unreliable in some ways, Harold, and she knows it. I'd be no earthly good at nursing. I mean, I can keep my head in an emergency — but not when there's *no* emergency."

"Darling, what *are* you talking about?"

"Winter. Fogs and things. She says the dangerous period for you begins about November. I'm to tell you that there's no ill feeling at all, but she thinks I ought to send you back in October. You're not the kind of man one can send anywhere —

but that's not one of the things she knows. But she's right about October. Oh, and she brought this and I promised to see that you wear it if you go out on a chilly night."

He took the knitted silk scarf, ran it through his hands. It creaked and seemed to pull his hands together.

Running the scarf through his hands, gloating over its strength, he understood what was happening to him. In a last desperate attempt to rid himself of the obsession he coiled it up. It seemed to tighten its own coils, as if it were — cooperating. When Dorothy was not looking, he flung it into the river.

They dined out at the Swan, employing surface chatter when necessary. When they returned to the bungalow, she took him in hand — began by turning on dance music.

"Have I grown old and ugly in three short days?"

Her technique was mature and generally effective. He tried to respond, but could not. This time he understood how it was that the candle of his desire had been snuffed.

There was the same trivial necessity to save face.

"Sorry, darling! Had a hard day at the office. If you don't mind, I think I'll take a stiff whiskey and try and get some sleep."

But he did not take the stiff whiskey. He went to bed and at once fell into a half sleep. He was conscious of the passing hours, yet he was resting, accumulating strength. Anger, he discovered, was not in the least the sort of thing one thought it was. Nothing to do with losing your temper. Nothing to do with hating anybody. It was most like the fear of being caught in the weeds of the river and dragged under. You could think quite clearly, but all your thoughts were turned in one direction, so that you were unable to think outside your anger.

The next morning he telephoned Muriel, asked her to meet him at the same restaurant in the City for lunch. He left the office half an hour earlier than was necessary. He reminded himself that he wished to buy a belt, to wear with his flannels on the river. He was waiting outside the restaurant when Muriel arrived.

"This place is pretty well chockfull," he told her. "I know a quiet little joint where we can talk without shouting. It's not two minutes' walk. We can take a short cut through this alley."

The alley led into a bedraggled courtyard in which was a seventeenth-century building, recently declared dangerous and awaiting demolition.

"The firm is handling this property. A client is pulling it down — going to cover the whole site with modern offices. There's a paneling in the hall —" he kicked the door open "— that I think you might like. I'm hoping to scrounge it."

He kicked the door shut.

The belt he had bought was very broad and of good quality leather.

He stayed with her until she was dead.

The leather had made deep weals on her throat and on her neck. He stared at the weals for several seconds, wondering that he could feel no pity for her, no fear for himself.

He noticed that she was wearing the diamond bracelet. He removed it and took the money from her purse. He listened. No footsteps in the courtyard. About to drag the door open, he remembered the belt. They could trace him through that.

He removed the belt, put it round him, under his waistcoat. Then he opened the door, dragged it shut, and walked away. He went back to the original restaurant where he had reserved a table for two.

"I think my wife must have forgotten our date," he told the head waiter. "I shall have to start without her."

When he got back to the office he telephoned his home. The housemaid told him that Mrs. Maggan had left for Town on the eleven fifteen.

"I expect Mrs. Maggan forgot. When she comes in, tell her I rang up and say I'll be at the same restaurant at the same time tomorrow."

The calm held throughout the office day. When he returned to the bungalow it broke into a boisterous cheerfulness.

"Muriel never turned up," he said. "Just as well, perhaps! Sorry I was gloomy last night. Come over here and make up for lost time."

The next morning he was steadier than he had been since Dorothy Colmore had crashed her car into his.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you!" exclaimed Dorothy. "Yesterday I had lunch at the Swan. The lockkeeper turned up with that scarf Muriel brought you — that huge knitted silk thing. How the devil did it get in the river?"

The scarf still held its symbolic terror: it seemed now to be reaching out to drag him back to the bondage from which he had wrenched himself free.

"Well, how the devil *did* it get into the river?"

"I don't know, but it did. It fouled the propeller of a motorboat. The lockkeeper came to the rescue. Being a born detective, as he explained at great length, he was able to deduce that it came from a bungalow rather than a punt, because it isn't the sort of thing people carry in punts. He wouldn't take a tip, and he wouldn't give me the scarf, as I admitted it was your property and not mine. You'll have to go and sign a book. Then, I gather, you'll be allowed to tip."

"Right-o!" he answered, intending to do nothing about it. Two mornings later the lockkeeper, with scarf, buttonholed him on his way to the station.

"I understood from Miss Colmore that this is your property, sir. I daresay she told you how it came into my charge. If you'll sign for it —"

"Miss Colmore was mistaken," said Maggan. "That is not my scarf."

That ended the scarf. If he had the

thing lying about, it might upset him again. The bracelet was already lying in the mud of the river.

Four days later they found the body of Muriel Maggan.

When a wife is found dead, the police tackle the husband as the first suspect. The murder had taken place within a couple of hundred yards of the restaurant at which they were to meet. Medical evidence, though imprecise as to the exact hour of death, did not preclude the possibility of Maggan having met her outside the restaurant and taken her to the building, which he knew to be deserted. Moreover, he was living in a bungalow with another woman. And robbery was a stock blind.

Maggan answered all questions with apparent frankness.

After formal evidence the inquest was adjourned for a month.

During that month Maggan, as a nominally grief-stricken husband, left the bungalow and busied himself with the sale of his furniture and effects, while Chief Inspector Karslake concentrated on the "eternal triangle," without moving substantially beyond his first discoveries — namely, that Maggan might have murdered his wife. At the inquest he received a nasty shock.

"You were living apart from your wife, Mr. Maggan?"

"Literally, yes. In the sense of your words, no. I was convalescing after a car accident, and was the guest of the lady who was the — er — innocent cause of the accident. Our friendship was approved by my wife who, as it so happens, visited Miss Colmore the day before — the last day of her life — largely to confer about the medicines which I have to take."

There was evidence as to the very recent gift of the diamond bracelet which, the housemaid testified, Mrs. Maggan was wearing when she set out to meet her husband.

It was the disclosure of Maggan's purchase of an annuity for his wife that torpedoed the suggestion of motive. No murderer, Karslake had to tell himself, would plan to lose thirty thousand pounds by his murder.

Shortly after the inquest, the dossiers were sent to the Department of Dead Ends.

The following April an enterprising hold-up man, with a sideline in burglary, was laid by the heels. The crook maintained a flat for a girl friend, which was well stocked with suspected goods. Lists of missing goods in all undetected robberies automatically found their way to the Department of Dead Ends.

For each item the girl had a glib explanation.

"Here's a funny sort o' scarf!" remarked Detective Inspector Rason. "Knitted silk, eh! Must weigh a couple o' pounds or more by the feel of it. Which of your wealthy gentleman friends gave you that, Mabel?"

"No one give it me, Mr. Clever. I bought it for meself."

"Cost you a matter o' several quid, eh?"

"Wrong again! It cost me a matter o' thirty-four bob. At the Lost Property auction sale at the Thames Conservancy office."

It was hardly the kind of yarn a girl like that would invent. All the same, Rason made a routine check. At the Conservancy they gave Rason the report filed by the lockkeeper.

Recovered from reach above Wheatbourne lock. Reported as property of H. Maggan, Esq. Ownership denied.

Maggan — Wheatbourne. At the Department of Dead Ends the long chance was routine practice. Rason took a long chance that he might not be wasting his time in turning up the Maggan files. Here he found that Mrs. Maggan had paid a good-will visit to the bungalow at Wheatbourne on what might be a relevant date.

Mrs. Maggan had been found strangled. But there was nothing round the throat. Rason stretched the knitted silk, felt its constricting power. If the hold-up man had used that scarf, how did the scarf get back into the river at Wheatbourne, where the husband of the murdered woman —

One thing at a time! The file gave Maggan's office address. Rason presented himself at the office, with attaché-case containing scarf.

He recited the formula about his regret at reviving a painful matter.

"We do not know yet by what actual means the poor lady was strangled. But we have a clue. It's a roundabout story, Mr. Maggan, which begins with the lockkeeper at Wheatbourne —"

"I remember something of the kind," interrupted Maggan. "He showed me a scarf he had fished out of the river. He thought it was mine. I explained that it wasn't."

"Is this the scarf, Mr. Maggan?"

"I can't swear it's the same. He showed it to me when I was on my way to the station. I wasn't interested. Anyhow, the thing you have there doesn't belong to me."

Back at the Yard it occurred to Rason that, though the scarf was not Maggan's, it still might have been Mrs. Maggan's. It was much more a woman's scarf than a man's.

He tried Dorothy Colmore, who indifferently admitted that it looked like the scarf Mrs. Maggan had brought to the bungalow and left for her husband. She had told Maggan that the lockkeeper had found it. She had no knowledge of any sequel.

Rason traced the cook and housemaid who had been employed by the Maggans. The housemaid knew the woman Mrs. Maggan had employed to knit the scarf. From the housemaid Rason received a mass of information.

Three weeks later, in response to a politely worded invitation, Maggan was being shown into Rason's room at the Yard. Chief Inspector Karslake was with Rason and greeted Maggan as an old acquaintance.

Rason offered cigarettes and seemed in no hurry to begin. He began a rambling story about the hold-up

man. Then he opened a desk drawer.

"But we've found he didn't murder your wife, Mr. Maggan."

The remark hung in the air while Rason took out the knitted silk scarf.

"Is that scarf yours, Mr. Maggan?"

"I have already answered that question, Mr. Rason."

"Yes. You said it wasn't yours. Your ex-housemaid says Mrs. Maggan took it with her when she went to the bungalow. Miss Colmore says she handed it to you and told you later on that the lockkeeper had got it. Five of your friends — I thought five were enough, Mr. Maggan — recognized it at once. They explained that it was a bit of a joke, and that they used to chip you when your wife insisted on wrapping it round you.

"I'll tell you why you denied it was yours, Maggan! *Because you strangled your wife with it!*"

Maggan caught his breath. For an instant the old nightmare had come to life. Then he burst into laughter.

"Oh, my God! Oh — my — God! How utterly absurd! Wrap that thing round my throat, if you like. Wrap it round any part of the human body and pull it until you burst. That scarf couldn't make weals in human flesh — it could only crush it.

"Besides —" he was savoring his laughter — "if you wish to carry your investigations a little farther, you will find that that scarf was in the custody of the lockkeeper when my unhappy wife was murdered."

Chief Inspector Karslake fluttered a sheaf of papers.

"He's quite right, Rason."

"Gor blimey, sir!" exclaimed Rason. "I've tumbled into it again!" Then he added, slowly and calmly: "*How does he know about those weals?* It wasn't mentioned in the evidence."

Karslake dropped the papers.

"I was with you when you identified the body, Maggan," he said. "It was covered to the chin. And no one pulled back the cover."

Maggan did not attempt to answer. He was staring at the scarf so intently that it seemed to move of its own volition. Towards his neck . . .

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4. The judges who will make the final decision in the contest will be Ellery Queen and the editorial staff of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1950.

6. Prize winners will be announced and the prizes awarded by Christmas 1950. The prize-winning stories will appear in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine during 1951.

7. All prize winners and all other contestants whose stories are purchased agree to grant Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine book-anthology rights, and when these rights are exercised, they will be paid for as follows: $35 for the original edition, $25 for reprint editions, $25 for British book anthology rights, and a pro rata share of 25% of the royalties if the anthology should be chosen by a book club. Authors of all stories bought through this contest agree to sell non-exclusive foreign rights for $35 per story; in addition, the first British serial rights, if purchased, shall be paid for at the rate of £18, less the usual ten percent British literary agent's commission.

8. Every care will be taken to return unsuitable manuscripts, but Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine cannot accept responsibility for them. Manuscripts should be typed or legibly written, accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope, and mailed by first-class mail to:

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