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*Number 43

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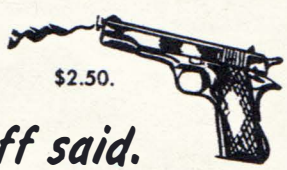

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2. Stories should not exceed 10,000 words.

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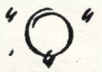

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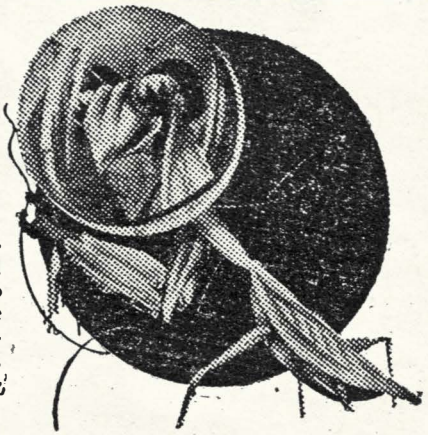

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Philip MacDonald has told the world little of his private life. Even the date of his birth is unknown to the public. But he has not been able to conceal the record of his work, which has been both prodigious and distinguished. Author of two acknowledged classics in the detective field —* THE RASP *published in 1924 and* WARRANT FOR X *published in 1938 — Mr. MacDonald has written over thirty other novels, several plays, quite a few short stories, and such impressive screenplays as "The Lost Patrol" for RKO, "Mister X" for MGM, "Blind Alley" for Columbia, and "Rebecca" for Selznick. Some of his books have appeared under pseudonyms — he has called himself Oliver Fleming, Anthony Lawless, and Martin Porlock. His most famous character is the "always hot and bothered," nerves-at-fever-pitch Colonel Anthony Gethryn, rated by most critics as one of the really topflight detectives in fiction. And now, for EQMM's Second Annual Contest, Mr. MacDonald has written his first short story about Colonel Gethryn — one of the most important "firsts" it has ever been your Editor's privilege to bring to American fans. Although Mr. MacDonald is extremely reticent about his own work, he did make one comment about the first Colonel Gethryn short story. We pass it along to you because it is one of those provocative little observations that has always stirred your Editor's imagination. "The first Colonel Gethryn short story has been in the back of my head for quite a long time" — thus wrote Philip MacDonald . . .*

THE WOOD-FOR-THE-TREES

by PHILIP MACDONALD

IT WAS in the summer of '36 — to be exact upon the 5th of August in that year — that the countryside around the village of Friars' Wick in Downshire, in the southwest of England, was shocked by the discovery of a singularly brutal murder.

The biggest paper in the county, *The Mostyn Courier*, reported the outrage at some length — but since the victim was old, poverty-stricken, female but ill-favored, and with neither friends nor kin, the event passed practically unnoticed by the London Press, even though the killer was uncaught.

Passed unnoticed, that is, until, exactly twenty-four hours later and within a mile or so of its exact locale, the crime was repeated, the victim being another woman who, except in the matter of age, might have been a replica of the first.

This was a time, if you remember, when there was a plethora of news in the world. There was Spain, for instance. There were Mussolini and Ethiopia. There was Herr Hitler.

There was Japan. There was Russia. There was dissension at home as well as abroad. There was so much, in fact, that people were stunned by it all and pretending to be bored . . .

Which is doubtless why the editor of Lord Otterill's biggest paper, *The Daily Despatch*, gave full rein to its leading crime reporter and splashed that ingenious scrivener's account of the MANIAC MURDERS IN DOWNSHIRE all across the front page of the first edition of August 8th.

The writer had spread himself. He described the slayings in gory, horrifying prose, omitting only such details as were really unprintable. He drew pathetic (and by no means badly written) word-pictures of the two drab women as they had been before they met this sadistic and unpleasing end. And he devoted the last paragraphs of his outpourings to a piece of theorizing which gave added thrills to his fascinated readers.

". . . *can it be*," he asked under the sub-heading 'Wake Up, Police!' "*that these two terrible, maniacal, unspeakable crimes — crimes with no motive other than the lust of some depraved and distorted mind, can be but the beginning of a wave of murder such as that which terrorized London in the eighties, when the uncaptured, unknown 'Jack the Ripper' ran his blood-stained gamut of killing?*"

You will have noted the date of the *Despatch* article — August 8th. Which was the day after the *Queen Guinivere* sailed from New York for England. Which explains how it came about that Anthony Gethryn, who was a passenger on the great liner, knew nothing whatsoever of the unpleasant occurrences near Friars' Wick. Which is odd, because — although he'd never been there before and had no intention of ever going there again after his simple mission had been fulfilled — it was to Friars' Wick that he must make his way immediately the ship arrived at home.

An odd quirk of fate: one of those peculiar spins of the Wheel.

He didn't want to break his journey to London and home by going to Friars' Wick, or, indeed, any other place. He'd been away — upon a diplomatic task of secrecy, importance, and inescapable tedium — for three months. And he wanted to see his wife and his son, and see them with the least possible delay.

But there it was: he had in his charge a letter which a Personage of Extreme Importance had asked him to deliver into the hands of another (if lesser known) P.O.E.I. The request had been made courteously, and just after the first P.O.E.I. had gone out of his way to do a service for A. R. Gethryn. *Ergo*, A. R. Gethryn must deliver the letter — which, by the way, has nothing in itself to do with this story.

So, upon the afternoon of August the eleventh, Anthony was driving from the port of Normouth to the hamlet of Friars' Wick and the country house of Sir Adrian LeFane.

He pushed the Voisin along at

speed, thankful they'd managed to send it down to Normouth for him. The alternatives would have been a hired car or a train — and on a stifling day like this the thought of either was insupportable.

The ship had docked late, and it was already after six when he reached the outskirts of Mostyn and slowed to a crawl through its narrow streets and came out sweating on the other side. The low gray arch of the sky seemed lower still — and the grayness was becoming tinged with black. The trees which lined the road stood drooping and still, and over everything was a soft and ominous hush through which the sound of passing cars and even the singing of his own tires seemed muted.

He reduced his speed as he drew near the Bastwick crossroads. Up to here he had known his way — but now he must traverse unknown territory.

He stopped the car altogether, and peered at a signpost. Its fourth and most easterly arm said, with simple helpfulness, "FRIARS' WICK — 8."

He followed the pointing arm and found himself boxed in between high and unkempt hedgerows, driving along a narrow lane which twisted up and across the shoulder of a frowning, sparsely-wooded hill. There were no cars here; no traffic of any kind; no sign of humanity. The sky had grown more black than gray, and the light had a gloom-laden, coppery quality. The heavy air was difficult to breathe.

The Voisin breasted the hill — and the road shook itself and straightened out as it coasted down, now steep and straight, between wide and barren stretches of heathland.

The village of Friars' Wick, hidden by the foot of another hill, came upon Anthony suddenly, after rounding the first curve in the winding valley.

Although he was going slowly, for the corner had seemed dangerous, the abrupt emergence of the small township — materializing, it seemed, out of nothingness — was almost a physical shock. He slowed still more, and the big black car rolled silently along the narrow street, between slate-fronted cottages and occasional little shops.

It was a gray place, sullen and resentful and with something about it at once strange and familiar; an air which at the same time fascinated and repelled him; an aura which touched some sixth sense and set up a strange tingling inside him. . . .

He recognized the feeling but wasn't sure if it were genuine; it might have been induced by a combination of the weather and his personal irritation at having to come so far out of his way from London and home.

He reached the end of the main and only street of Friars' Wick, the point where the small church faces the inn across a traditional triangle of emerald grass. Here he stopped the car. He knew he must be within a mile or so of LeFane's house, and the easiest way to find it was to ask.

He looked around for someone to ask. He saw there was no human being in sight — and for the first time realized there had been none at all since he had come around the hill and into the village.

Something hit the leather of the seat beside him with a small, smacking sound. A single florin-sized raindrop.

He looked up at the sky. Now it was so close, so lowering, that it seemed almost to brush the tops of the big elms behind the white-fronted inn. A spatter of the big drops hit the dust of the road, each one separated by feet from its fellows. He realized he was waiting for thunder.

But no thunder came — and no relief. The coppery light was greener now, and the hush almost palpable.

And then he saw a man. A man who stood beside the out-buildings of the inn, some twenty yards away.

He was an ordinary-looking man. He fitted his surroundings, yet seemed to stand out from them in sharp relief.

He wore a shapeless hat, and a shapeless coat, and he had a shotgun under his arm.

Anthony felt an increase of the odd tingling. He looked back along the gray street and still saw no one. He looked at the man again. He looked the other way and saw for the first time the cluster of oaks on the rise away to his left; saw too, above the oaks, the chimneys of a big house.

He drove off. He followed his eyes, and sent the car up another twisting lane and came presently to imposing wrought-iron gates.

The gates stood open, and he turned the Voisin into them — and at once was in a different world. Outside, the land had been dead and tired and sterile, but here it was lush and well-groomed and self-conscious. A hundred feet above, and still half a mile away, he could see the chimneys and the rambling Tudor building beneath them.

There came another flurry of the outsized raindrops, and he thought of stopping and closing the car. He slowed and as he did so his attention was attracted by something off the road to his right. A figure which stood under one of the trees and looked at him. A large and square and gauntly powerful figure, as motionless as the man in the deserted village had been.

He stared, and for some reason stopped the car. The figure was clad in nondescript clothes, and it was with something of a shock that he realized it was a woman's.

He went on staring — and it turned abruptly and strode off into the shadows of a copse. . . .

There were no more raindrops and he drove on, toward the lawns and gardens and the house itself. . .

When the rain came in earnest, it was a solid sheet of water, a deluge. It started almost as soon as Anthony was in the house — while, in fact, he was being greeted by his hostess, who was blondish and handsome and just verging upon the haggard. She was

ultra-smart, and over-nervous. She laughed a great deal, but her eyes never changed. She was, it appeared, Mrs. Peter Crecy, and she was also the daughter of Sir Adrian LeFane. She swept Anthony away from the butler and took him to a room which was half-library, half-salon, and wholly luxurious. She gave him a drink and sprayed him with staccato, half-finished sentences. He gathered that he couldn't see her father just yet — "the man, as usual, doesn't seem to *be* anywhere . . ." He gathered that he was expected to stay the night — "But you *must* — my parent gave the strictest orders . . ."

So he murmured politely and resigned himself, helped no little by the sight of the rain beyond the mullioned windows.

He was given eventually into the care of a black-coated discretion named Phillips, who led him up stairs and along corridors to a sybaritic and most un-Tudorlike suite.

He bathed luxuriously and when he had finished, found his trunk unpacked, his dinner clothes laid out. In shirt-sleeves, he walked over to a window and looked out and saw the rain still a heavy, glittering, unbroken veil over the half-dark world. He lit a cigarette, dropped into a chair, stretched out his long legs, and found himself wondering about the village of Friars' Wick and its odd and ominous and indescribable air. But he didn't wonder either long or seriously for, from somewhere below, he heard the booming of a gong.

He put on his coat and slipped LeFane's letter into his breast-pocket and made a leisurely way downstairs.

He had expected a dinner which would at the most have a couple of other guests besides himself. He found instead, when he was directed to the drawing-room, a collection of eight or ten people. They were clustered in the middle of the room, and from the centre of the cluster the voice of Mrs. Peter Crecy rose and fell like a syncopated fountain.

"Well, that's settled!" it was saying. "Not a word about it — too frightfully macabre! . . ."

Anthony made unobtrusive entrance, but she saw him immediately and surged towards him. She was contriving paradoxically to look handsomer and yet more haggard in a black-and-gold evening gown. She led him on a tour of introduction. He met, and idly catalogued in his mind, a Lord and Lady Bracksworth (obvious Master of Fox Hounds — wife knits); a Mr. and Mrs. Shelton-Jones (obvious Foreign Office — wife aspiring Ambassadress); a Professor Martel (possible Physicist, Middle-European, bearded, egocentric); a Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey Dale (newspaper-owner, leader-writing wife) — and then, an oasis in this desert, his old friend Carol Dunning.

She was sitting in an enormous, high-winged chair and he hadn't seen her until Mrs. Crecy led him towards it.

"And — Miss Dunning," said Mrs. Crecy. "The novelist, of course . . .

But I believe you know each other — Carol Rushworth Dunning—"

"Hi, there!" said Miss Dunning refreshingly. A wide and impish smile creased her impish and ageless and unmistakably American face.

"What would happen," asked Miss Dunning, "if I said, long time no see?"

"Nothing," Anthony said. "I concur. *Too* long."

He noted with relief that Mrs. Crecy had left them. He saw a servant with a tray of cocktails and got one for Miss Dunning and another for himself.

"Thanks," said Miss Dunning. "Mud in your eye!" She took half the drink at a gulp and looked up at Anthony. "If the answer wasn't so obvious, I'd ask what brought you into this *galère?*"

Anthony said, "Same to you." He reflected on the letter in his pocket. "And what's obvious? Or has the Diplomatic Service —"

He broke off, looking across the room at a man who hadn't merely come into it, but had effected an entrance. A tall, slight, stoop-shouldered person with a velvet dinner jacket, a mane of gray hair, and a certain distinction of which he was entirely aware.

"Enter Right Centre," Anthony said to Miss Dunning. "But who? I've lost my program."

She looked at him in surprise. "Curiouser and curiouser," she said. "So the man doesn't know his own host. That's him — Sir Adrian LeFane in person. Old World, huh?"

"Well, well," said Anthony, and stood up as LeFane, having hovered momentarily over the central group with a courtly smile of general greeting, came straight towards him.

"Colonel Gethryn?" He held out a slim white hand, beautifully shaped. "I trust you'll forgive me for not being here to welcome you. But —" the hand sketched a vague, graceful movement in the air — "I was forced to be elsewhere . . ." The hand came down and offered itself again and Anthony shook it.

"Out, were you?" said Miss Dunning. "Caught in the rain?"

"Not — ah — noticeably, my dear." LeFane gave her an avuncular smile. "I regard myself as fortunate —"

But he never told them why — for at that moment his daughter joined them, words preceding her like fire from a flame-thrower. She was worried, it seemed, about someone, or thing, called "Marya" — you could hear the "y" — who, or which, should have put in appearance.

She led her parent away — and again Anthony was relieved. He looked at Miss Dunning and said:

"Who is Marya, what is she? Or it, maybe? Or even he?"

"Dax."

"An impolite sound." Anthony surveyed her. "Unless — oh, shades of Angelo! Do you mean the sculptress? The Riondetto group at Geneva? The Icarus at Hendon?"

"Right!" Miss Dunning looked at the door and pointed. "And here she is . . ."

Striding from the door towards the advancing LeFane was a gaunt giant of a woman. Despite her size — she must have topped six feet — and her extraordinary appearance, she wore a strange, flowing, monk-like garment of some harsh, dark-green material. She was impressive rather than ludicrous. Her crag-like face gave no answer to the best of LeFane's smiles, but she permitted herself to be steered towards the group around Mrs. Crecy, and in a moment seemed to become its pivot.

"Well?" said Miss Dunning.

"Remarkable," said Anthony. "In fact, I remarked her a couple of hours ago. She was under a tree. Looking."

"Like what?" Miss Dunning wanted to know.

But she wasn't answered. Two more people were entering the room — a well-built, pleasant-faced man of thirty-odd, with a tired look and what used to be called "professional" appearance; a small, angular, weather-beaten little woman, with no proportions and a face like a happy horse.

Once more Anthony looked at Miss Dunning, and once more she enlightened him.

"Human beings," said Miss Dunning. "Refreshing, isn't it? Local doctor and wife. I like 'em." She looked at her empty glass and handed it to Anthony. "See what you can do," she said.

But he had no chance to do it. Mrs. Crecy swooped, and he was drawn towards Marya Dax, and presented, and surveyed by strange dark eyes which seemed to be all pupil and were almost on a level with his own.

He murmured some politeness, and was ignored. He turned away and was pounced upon again, and found himself meeting Dr. and Mrs. Carmichael. Looking at the woman's freckled, equine face, he was assailed by a flicker of memory.

He shook hands with the husband, but they hadn't said a word to each other when the wife spoke.

"You don't remember me, do you?" She looked up at Anthony with bright, small eyes.

"That's the worst thing you can do to anyone, Min!" her husband chided her affectionately. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"If you'll let me have a moment, I'll tell you," Anthony said — and then, "It's some time ago — and I remember pigtails — of course! You're Henry Martin's daughter."

"There!" Mrs. Carmichael caught hold of her husband's arm. "He did it!"

"And he'd have done it before," said Carmichael, smiling at her, "only he couldn't see Little Miss Moneybags as the wife of a country sawbones." He patted her hand.

"Colonel Gethryn," said Mrs. Carmichael, "I'm going to trade on old acquaintance. I'm going to ask you a — an indiscreet question. I —"

Her husband moved his broad shoulders uncomfortably. "Please, Min, go easy," he said.

"Don't be silly, Jim. You've *got* to try — and Colonel Gethryn won't mind."

She looked up at Anthony like an earnest foal. "Will you?"

Anthony looked down at the appealing face. "I shouldn't think so," he said, and was going to add, "Try me out," when dinner was announced and the party began to split into their pairs and he found, with pleasure, that he was to take in Miss Dunning.

The meal, although heavy and of ceremonious splendor, was excellent, and the wines were beyond reproach. So that Anthony found time passing pleasantly enough until, as he chatted with Miss Dunning beside him, he heard his name emerge from what appeared to be a heated argument lower down the table.

" . . . Surely Colonel Gethryn's the one to tell us that!" came the husky voice of Mrs. Carmichael. "After all, he's probably the only person here who knows anything about that sort of thing."

Anthony, as he was obviously meant to, turned his head. He found many eyes upon him, and said to Mrs. Carmichael, "What sort of thing? Or shouldn't I ask?"

"Crime, of course!" Mrs. Carmichael looked as if she were pricking her ears forward. "Crime in general and, of course, one crime in particular. Or two, I should say."

Anthony repressed a sigh. He said, hopefully, "If they're new and British-made, I'm afraid I can't help you. I've been away for months, and only landed this afternoon. I haven't even seen an English paper for a fortnight."

With a smile alarming in its area and determination, Mrs. Crecy cut into the talk. She said:

"How fortunate for you, Mr. Gethryn. So abysmally dull they've been! And I think it's a *shame* the way these people are trying to make you talk shop . . ."

She transferred the ferocious smile to little Mrs. Carmichael, who shriveled and muttered something about being "terribly sorry, Jacqueline," and tried to start a conversation with Lord Bracksworth about hunting.

But she was cut off in mid-sentence by Marya Dax, who was sitting on Adrian LeFane's right, and therefore obliquely across the table from Anthony. Throughout the meal she had sat like a silent, brooding Norn but now she leaned forward, gripping the edge of the table with enormous, blunt-fingered hands, and fixing her dark gaze on Anthony, she said, in a harsh contralto:

"Perhaps you have no need to read the papers. Perhaps you can smell where there is evil."

It was neither question nor statement and Anthony, smiling a smile which might have meant anything, prepared to let it lie.

But the Foreign Office, in the person of Mr. Shelton-Jones, saw opportunity for conversation.

"An interesting thought, Miss Dax," said Mr. Shelton-Jones, turning

his horn-rimmed gaze upon the Norn. "Whether or not the trained mind becomes attuned, as it were, to appreciating the *atmosphere*, the *wavelength* — perhaps I should call it the *aura* — which might very well emanate from wrongdoing."

The Norn didn't so much as glance at Mr. Shelton-Jones: she kept her dark gaze fixed upon Anthony's face.

But Mr. Shelton-Jones was undaunted and now he too looked at Anthony.

"What do you say, Mr. Gethryn?" he asked. "*Is* there a criminal aura? Have you ever known of any — ah — 'case' in which the investigator was assisted by any such — ah — metaphysical emanation?"

Anthony sighed inwardly; but this was too direct to leave unanswered. He said, "You mean what the Americans might call a super-hunch? I'm no professional, of course, but I have known of such things."

The Press joined in now, in the slender shape of Mrs. Dale. "How *fas*-cinating!" she said. "Could you possibly tell us — "

"Please!" Anthony smiled. "I was going on to say that the super-hunch — the 'emanation' — is utterly untrustworthy. Therefore, it's worse than useless — it's dangerous. It has to be ignored."

Surprisingly, because he had been silent throughout the meal, it was the bearded physicist Martel who chimed in now. He jutted the beard aggressively in Anthony's direction, and demanded, "Unt why iss that?" in a tone notably devoid of courtesy.

Anthony surveyed him. "Because," he said coolly, "one can never be sure the impact of the super-hunch is genuine. The feeling might very well be caused by indigestion."

There were smiles, but not from the Professor, who glared, grunted, and turned back to his plate.

Someone said, "But seriously, Colonel Gethryn — "

Anthony said, "I am serious." The topic couldn't be dropped now, so he might as well deal with it properly. He said:

"I can even give you a recent instance of what I mean . . . I was at the Captain's dinner on the *Guinivere* last night. I drank too much. I didn't get quite enough sleep. And when I landed, the current deluge was brewing. Result, as I drove through Friars' Wick, which I'd never seen before, I had the father and mother of all super-hunches. The countryside — the village itself — the fact that there didn't happen to be anyone about — the black sky — everything combined to produce a definite feeling of — " he shrugged — "well, of evil. Which is patently absurd. And almost certainly, when you think of the Captain's dinner, stomachic in origin."

He was surprised — very much and most unusually surprised — by the absolute silence which fell on the company as he finished speaking. He looked from face to face and saw on every one a ruling astonishment. Except in the case of Professor Martel,

who scowled sourly and managed at the same time to twist his mouth into a sardonic smile of disbelief.

Someone said, "That's — *extraordinary*, Colonel Gethryn!"

Martel said, "You ssay you haff not read the paperss. But you haff hear the wireless — perhaps . . ."

Anthony looked at the beard, then at the eyes above it. He said, "I don't know what that means . . . Just as well, no doubt."

Marya Dax looked down the table at Martel, examining him with remote eyes. She said, to no one in particular. "That man should be made to keep quiet!" and there was a moment of raw and uncomfortable tension. Mrs. Crecy bit at her lips as if to restrain them from trembling. Adrian LeFane propped an elbow on the table and put a hand up to his face, half-hiding it.

Miss Dunning saved the day. She turned to Anthony beside her with semi-comic amazement wrinkling her goblin face. She said, on exactly the right note:

"Remarkable, my dear Holmes!" And then she laughed exactly the right laugh. "And the odd thing is — you don't know what you've done. Maybe you'd better find out."

The tension relaxed, and Anthony said, "I seem to have caused a sensation." He looked around the table again. "It could mean there *is* something — " he glanced at the Norn — "evil-smelling in Friars' Wick."

There was a babble of five or six voices then, all talking at once, and through them, quite clearly, came the husky eagerness of Mrs. Carmichael's.

". . . most wonderful thing I ever heard of! Colonel Gethryn, do you realize you've *proved* what Miss Dax was saying."

Anthony looked at Mrs. Carmichael and smiled. "That isn't proof," he said. "Might be coincidence. The Captain's dinner was — lavish."

But Mrs. Carmichael wasn't to be deterred. "You've got to hear," she said. "You've *got* to!" She spoke to her husband across the table. "Jim, tell him all about it."

A worried look came into Doctor Carmichael's tired, nice-looking face. He cast a glance towards his hostess, but she said nothing, and Mrs. Carmichael said, "Go *on*, Jim!" and Mrs. Dale said, "Please, Doctor!" and he capitulated.

He looked across the table at Anthony. "I'm deputed for this," he said, "because I happen to look after the Police work in this part of Downshire. Most of the time the job's a sinecure. But lately — "

He blew out his cheeks in a soundless little whistle and proceeded to tell of the two murders which had so much exercised the Press, particularly the *Despatch*. He was precise and vaguely official. He merely *stated* — but yet, and although it was no news to them, everyone else at the table was absolutely silent. They were, for the most part, watching the face of Anthony Ruthven Gethryn.

Who said, when the statement was

over, "H'mm! Sort of Ripper Redivivus." His face had offered no signs of any sort to the watchers. It had, as he listened, been as completely blank as a poker player's, with the lids half-closed over the green eyes.

Doctor Carmichael said slowly, "Yes, I suppose so. If there are any more — which I personally am afraid of — although the Chief Constable doesn't agree with me . . ."

"He doesn't?" Anthony's eyes were fully open now. "Who is he?"

"Major General Sir Rigby Forsythe." Acid had crept into the Doctor's tone. "He 'can't see his way' to calling in Scotland Yard. He considers Inspector Fennell and myself 'alarmists.' He — " Doctor Carmichael cut himself off abruptly.

But Anthony finished the sentence for him. " — refuses to realize that two brutal murders, apparently carried out by a sexual maniac, could possibly be the beginning of a series. That it?"

"Precisely!" Dr. Carmichael brightened at this ready understanding. "And he goes on refusing to realize, in spite of the fact that Fennell's tried a hundred times to show him that as the death of either of those poor women couldn't conceivably have benefited anyone, the murders must have been done by a maniac." A faint expression of disgust passed over Dr. Carmichael's face. "A peculiarly revolting maniac! And maniacs who've found a way of gratifying their mania — well, they don't stop . . ."

"For mysself," came the harshly sibilant voice of Professor Martel, "I do not think a maniac." He was sitting back in his chair now, the beard tilted upward. "I think a public benefactor."

He paused and there came the slightly bewildered silence he had obviously expected. He said:

"Thosse women! Thosse creaturess! I haff sseen them both while they were alife. They sserved no purposse and they were hideouss! The worlt is better less them."

Now the silence was shocked. It was broken by Marya Dax. Again she looked down the table towards Martel, and again seemed to examine him. She said:

"There is one hideous thing here with us. It is your mind." She ceased to examine the man, and went on.

"No human body," she said, "is completely without beauty."

"Oh, come now, my dear Miss Dax," said Lady Bracksworth surprisingly, in a mild but determined little voice. "Although I have nothing but sympathy — " she darted a look of dislike towards Martel — "for those poor unfortunate women, I must say that at least one of them — Sarah Paddock, I mean — was a truly disgraceful object."

The Norn turned slow and blazing eyes upon this impudence.

"This woman," said the Norn, "this Paddock — I suppose you did not ever look at her hands?" She said, "They were dirty always. They were harsh with work. But they were beautiful."

"An interesting thought indeed!" said Mr. Shelton-Jones. "Can beauty in the — ah — human frame be considered, as it were, in *units* — or must it be, before we recognize it, a totality of such units?"

Mrs. Carmichael said, "I think Miss Dax is right." She looked over at her husband. "Don't you think so?"

He smiled at her, but didn't answer and she said insistently, "Isn't she right, Jim? You think she is, don't you?"

"Of course she is," Carmichael said. He looked around the table. "In my profession I see a great many human bodies. And I see a great many — " he looked at Mr. Shelton-Jones — "beautiful 'units' in otherwise ugly specimens. For instance — " he looked at Marya Dax — "I particularly noticed poor Sarah Paddock's hands."

Mr. Shelton-Jones settled his spectacles more firmly astride his nose. "But, my dear sir — if I may be permitted to support my original contention — what beauty can there be in a 'beauty-unit' if such unit is a mere island, as it were, in an ocean of ugliness?" Obviously prepared for debate, he leaned back in his chair, fixing his gaze upon Dr. Carmichael.

Carmichael said, "Plenty. You can't deny, for instance, that Sarah Paddock's hands weren't beautiful in themselves." He seemed nettled by the Parliamentary manner of Mr. Shelton-Jones. "Suppose Miss Dax had modelled them!"

"Then," Mr. Shelton-Jones blandly observed. "they would have been apart from their hideous surroundings."

"Euclidian," said Anthony. "Some of the parts may or may not be equal to their total."

But Dr. Carmichael went on looking at Mr. Shelton-Jones.

"All right," said Dr. Carmichael. "Suppose you saw magnificent shoulders on a — on an extreme case of *lupus vulgaris*. Would the horrible condition of the face and neck make the shoulders repulsive too?"

"The whole picture would be — ah — definitely unpleasing." Mr. Shelton-Jones was blandness itself and the Norn turned her dark, examining gaze upon him.

Color had risen to Dr. Carmichael's face. He stared hard at Mr. Shelton-Jones and said:

"Let's try again. Do you mean to tell me that if you saw titian hair on a typical troglodytic head, you'd think it was ugly, because of its setting?"

"I agree with the doctor," said the Norn. "The other killed woman — her name I forget — was worse formed than the first. But the shape of her skull was noble."

"Umpf-chnff!" remarked Lord Bracksworth. "That'd be the fortune-tellin' one, the Stebbins woman. . . . D'ja know, I was talkin' to that Inspector-fellah s'mornin', and he was tellin' me that when they found her, this old gal —"

At the head of the table Adrian LeFane sat suddenly upright. He brought his open hand violently down upon the cloth, so that the glasses

beside his plate chimed and jingled.

"*Please!*" His face twisted as if with physical pain. "Let us have no more of this — this — intolerable *ugliness!*"

It was about an hour after dinner — which, thanks mainly to the social genius of Miss Dunning, had ended on a subdued but unembarrassing note — that Mrs. Carmichael, her husband in attendance, contrived to corner Anthony in a remote quarter of the vast drawing-room.

He had just come in after a visit to Adrian LeFane's study, where he had at last delivered the letter which has nothing to do with this tale. He allowed himself to be cornered, although he would much rather have talked with Miss Dunning, because there was something desperately appealing in the filly-like gaze of Mrs. Carmichael.

She said, "Oh, please, Colonel Gethryn, *may* we talk to you!" Her long, freckled face was as earnest as her voice.

Anthony said, "Why not?"

Carmichael said, "Oh, Min, why insist on worrying the man?" He gave Anthony a little apologetic smile.

"Because it's worrying *you*, darling!" Mrs. Carmichael laid a hand on her husband's arm, but went on looking at Colonel Gethryn.

"Jim's terribly upset," she said, "about that horrid old Chief Constable. He thinks — I mean, Jim does — that the Downshire police can't possibly catch this dreadful murderer unless they get help from Scotland Yard. And they can't get it unless the Chief Constable asks for it . . ."

Her husband interrupted. "For heaven's sake, dear, Gethryn knows all about that sort of thing!"

She paid no attention to him. She said to Anthony, "And what I was going to ask you: we wondered if there was any way — any way at all — you could use your influence to —"

She left the sentence in mid-air as she caught sight of a servant approaching her husband.

"Dr. Carmichael," said the man. He lowered his voice, but his words came clearly. "Excuse me, sir, but there's an important message for you." A curious blend of horrified dismay and cassandrine pleasure showed through his servitor's mask. He said:

"Inspector Fennell telephoned. There's been another of these dreadful murders. He wants you to come at once, sir, to Pilligrew Lane, where it comes out by Masham's . . ."

"Just around the next corner," said Dr. Carmichael, and braked hard.

Beside him, Anthony grunted — he never has liked and never will like being driven.

The little car skidded around a sharp turn and into the mouth of a lane which lay dark and narrow between a high hedge and the looming backs of three great barns.

Through the steady, glittering sheet of the rain, a group of men and cars showed ahead, barring the way completely and standing out black in the glare of headlights.

Carmichael stopped his engine and scrambled out. Anthony followed and felt the sweeping of the rain down over him and the seeping of viscous mud through his thin shoes. He followed Carmichael towards the group and a figure turned from it, advancing on them and flashing an electric torch — a man in a heavy black storm-coat and the flat, visored cap of a uniformed Police Inspector.

Carmichael said, "Fennell, this is Colonel Gethryn — " and didn't get any further because the man, having darted a look at Anthony, turned back to him in amazement.

"But, Doctor," said Inspector Fennell in a hoarse and confidential whisper, "Sir Rigby's done it already. Did it last night, without saying a word to me. Called London and got the Commissioner, and turned up, after I'd phoned him about this, all complete with a Detective-Inspector who'd just arrived from the Yard!"

Carmichael stared as if he couldn't believe his ears, and Anthony said to Fennell, "Who did they send? Hobday?"

Fennell said, "That's right, sir," and led the way towards the group in the light.

They slithered after him through the mud, and in a moment Hobday was looking at Anthony and saying, "Good Lord, sir, where did *you* drop from?"

And then there was a word with Sir Rigby Forsythe, who seemed somewhat taken aback by Anthony's presence, and a moment or so of waiting while the photographers finished their work over what lay in the ditch against the hedge.

Anthony said, "This new victim? I suppose it's a woman — but what kind? Was she another local character?"

Fennell said, "Yes, she's a woman all right, sir. And it's — it's horrible, worse than the others." He glanced towards the ditch and quickly away again. He seemed to realize he had strayed most unprofessionally from the point, and cleared his throat. "I don't think she's — she was a local, sir. So far nobody's recognized her. Seems to've been one of those gipsy basket-menders. She had an old horse and cart — prob'ly was just passing through on her way to Deyning."

Hobday said, "If it hadn't been for the horse, we wouldn't have known yet. But a farm laborer found it wandering and began to look for its owner."

The photographers finished their work, and one of them came up to the Chief Constable and saluted. "All through, sir," he said, his voice shaky and uncertain.

Sir Rigby Forsythe looked at Anthony, then at Carmichael and the others. His weatherbeaten face was lined and pallid. He said, "You fellahs go ahead. I've seen all I need." He stood where he was while Fennell, visibly conquering reluctance, led the way with Carmichael, and Hobday and Anthony followed.

The headlights of the police cars cut through the water-drenched darkness. They made a nightmare tableau of the thing which lay half in and half out of the ditch. Anthony muttered, "God!" and the usually stolid Hobday drew in his breath with a little hiss. Carmichael, his face set and grim, dropped on his knees in the oozing mud. He made a cursory examination.

Then he stood up. "All right," he said. "We can move her now," and then, helped by Anthony and Hobday, lifted the thing and set it upon clean wet grass and in merciful shadow. He straightened the saturated rags of its clothing, and then suddenly dropped on one knee again and said, "Anyone got a torch?"

Hobday gave him one, and he shone the light on the head, and gently moved the heavy, mud-covered mass of red hair away from the features it was covering.

"Just wondering whether I'd ever seen her," he said. He kept the light of the torch on the face, and it stared up at them, washed cleaner every moment by the flooding rain. It was a brutish, sub-human face, and although it was distorted by death and terror, it could have been little more prepossessing in life.

Carmichael shook his head. "No," he said. "They're right. She's a stranger round here." He switched off the torch, but Anthony said. "Just a minute," and took it from him and knelt beside the body himself and switched the light on again and peered at the throat, where a darkness like a big bruise showed in the hollow below the chin.

But after a moment, he too shook his head. "No. It's a birthmark," he said, and Carmichael peered at it and said, "Yes. Or possibly an old scar."

They stood up, and Hobday took the torch and knelt in his turn and began slow, methodical examination.

Anthony said, "Silly question, I know, but about how long since death?" A little cascade of water tumbled from his hat-brim as he bent his head to button his raincoat, which had come undone.

Carmichael said, "Oh — very loosely, and subject to error — not more than five hours, not less than two."

Anthony looked at his watch, whose glowing figures said eleven forty-five, and found himself calculating times. But this didn't get him anywhere, and he was glad when, thirty minutes later, he found himself being driven back to LeFane's house by Carmichael. He said to Carmichael on the way:

"You see, it's definitely not my sort of thing. Mass murders are mad murders, and mad murders, in the ordinary sense of the word, are motiveless. Which makes them a matter for routine policio-military methods. At which I'm worse than useless, while men like Hobday are solid and brilliant at the same time."

Carmichael smiled. "I'm glad you're both here — Hobday and yourself. I'll sleep better tonight than I have for a week."

They reached the house and were no sooner in the big hall than they were surrounded. They were plied with drinks and food, and besieged with questions. Was it really another of the *same* murders? Where had it happened? Was the victim the same *sort* of person? Did they think the murderer would be caught this time? Wasn't there something terribly *wrong* with police methods when things like this were allowed to go on? Wouldn't it be a good idea to have a curfew, or a registration every day of the movements of every man, woman and child in the district?

Mr. Shelton-Jones said, "An interesting point. How far may the liberties of the individual be restricted when such restriction is — ah — for the purpose of protecting the community?"

Miss Dunning said, "Human beings are terrifying, aren't they?" and shuddered a little.

Professor Martel said, "I woult like to know — wass thiss one usseless and hideouss like the otherss?"

Mrs. Carmichael said, "Oh, *had* Sir Rigby sent for Scotland Yard *already?* Oh, thank *goodness!*"

Everyone said something. Except Adrian LeFane and Marya Dax. And they were not present.

Anthony, throwing aside civility, at last forced his way upstairs. It seemed to him that he was even more grateful than the Carmichaels for the advent of Detective-Inspector Hobday.

He made ready for bed and then, smoking a last cigarette and wondering how soon in the morning he could decently leave, strolled over to a window.

The rain had stopped now and a pale moon shone through clouds onto the sodden earth. By the watery light he saw a figure striding up the steps of a terrace beneath him, making for the house. It was tall and powerful and square-shouldered and unmistakable in spite of its shapeless coat and headgear.

He watched it until it was out of sight beneath him. He heard a door open and close.

He went over to the bed and sat on the edge of it and finished the cigarette. He pondered. He stubbed out the cigarette at last and got into bed. After all, if sculptresses liked to walk at night, why shouldn't they?

But he knew he would stop on his way home tomorrow and have a word with Hobday.

He went to sleep.

It was six o'clock on the next afternoon. He had been in London and at home since one. He sat in the library at Stukely Gardens with his wife and his son.

A violent storm had replaced yesterday's deluge. It had raged intermittently over London and the whole south of England since early morning, and still the hard, heavy rain drove against the windows, while thunder rumbled and great flashes of lightning kept tearing the half-darkness.

Master Alan Gethryn gave his approval to the weather. "It sort of makes it all small and comf'table in here." he said, looking up from the jigsaw puzzle strewn about the floor.

Anthony said, "I know exactly what you mean," and looked at his wife, who sat on the arm of his chair.

Master Alan Gethryn pored over the puzzle — an intricate forest-scene of which he had only one corner done. He sighed and scratched his head, and then suddenly laughed.

"It's like what Mr. Haslam's always saying," he said — and Lucia looked at Anthony and explained *sotto voce*, "Master at the new school." and then said to her son, "What d'you mean, old boy?"

He looked up at her, still smiling. "He's *always* saying, 'You chaps can't see the wood for the trees.' " He chuckled. "Like this puzzle." . . .

Sublimely unconscious of the effect his words had made upon his father, he returned to his labors.

But Lucia, watching her husband's face, was concerned, She had to wait until her son had left them and gone supperwards, but the moment the door had closed behind him, she stood over Anthony and looked down at him and said:

"What's the matter, darling? You've got that look. What did Alan say?"

Anthony reached up a long arm and pulled her down onto his knees. "He gave me an idea — unintentionally, of course." He kissed her. "A damned nasty, uncomfortable idea. I'd like to forget about it."

Lucia said, "You know you won't. So you'd better tell me."

Anthony said, "Suppose I wanted to kill someone — let's say, your Uncle Perceval. And suppose his demise would benefit me to such an extent that I was afraid a nice straight murder would inevitably point at me. And suppose I were that most dangerous of madmen, the secret megalomaniac, and utterly ruthless to boot. So suppose I started a wave of apparently insane slaying, and got well going with three murders of middle-aged clubmen I didn't know at all — and then killed Uncle Perceval in exactly the same way — and then killed three more middle-aged clubmen! The police would be chasing a madman with an extraordinary quirk. They wouldn't dream of chasing me!"

"What loathsome thoughts you do have!" Lucia turned her head to look at his face. "Oh, Anthony — is that just an idea? Or do you think it's what's happening in Downshire?"

"Oh, just an idea." said Anthony slowly. "It doesn't fit . . ."

She dropped a kiss on his forehead and stood up. She said, "I'll get you a drink. And after that, my lad, you've got to change — we're due at the Dufresne's by eight. White tie."

She started to cross the room, then checked. She said:

"What on earth did Alan say that gave you that dreadful notion?"

Anthony looked at her. "My dear girl!" he said, " 'You can't see the wood for the trees' . . ."

Lucia shivered, went out of the room, came back with his drink, and very soon herded him upstairs.

Forty-five minutes later she walked into his dressing-room. He was tying his tie, and he saw her in the mirror and said, "You know, Americans really develop the possibilities of our language. Baby, you look like a million dollars!"

She said, "I love you. But we're going to be late and then I won't."

He put the finishing touches to the bow. "Get my coat, beldame," he said, and started to distribute keys and money and cigarette case among his pockets.

Lucia crossed towards the big wardrobe. Beside it was Anthony's trunk, and on a nearby chair a neat pile of the clothing with which he had traveled. Something about the pile caught Lucia's eye, and she stopped and looked down at it. She said:

"Whatever happened to this dinner jacket?"

"Rain last night," Anthony said. "White'll see to it."

She smiled. Carefully she picked something from the shoulder of the black coat. She said, "He ought to've seen to this, oughtn't he? Before *I* saw it!"

She went towards him, carrying her hands in front of her, one above the other and a good two feet apart.

"Magnificent!" said Anthony. "Most impressive! But what's the role?"

She came close to him. She moved her hands and there was a glint of light between them.

He saw a long hair of glittering reddish-gold.

He said, "Not Guilty, M'lud," and looked at the hair again.

He said, "Nobody at LeFane's had that color. Or length . . ."

He said, "Good *God!*"

He jumped across the room and snatched at the telephone.

And two minutes later was being informed that, owing to storm-damage, all the trunk lines to Downshire were out of order . . .

He began to tear off the dress clothes.

He said," Get them to bring round the car! Quick!"

Little Mrs. Carmichael lay on the rather uncomfortable couch in the living-room of Dr. Carmichael's rather uncomfortable house. She was pretending to read but really she was listening to the thunder.

She wished Jim hadn't had to go out on a call, especially on a night like this. She thought about Jim and how wonderful he was. Although it was two years now since they'd been married, she was happier than she had been on her honeymoon. Happy — and proud. Proud of Jim, and proud of herself, too; proud that she didn't mind uncomfortable sofas and cups with chips in them and a gas fire in the bedroom. Proud of her cleverness — her really heaven-inspired cleverness — in realizing right at the start, even before they were married, that a man of Jim's caliber couldn't possibly bear living on his wife's money . . .

The thunder was far away now, and almost casual. Little Mrs. Carmichael dozed . . .

She was wakened by the sound of a key in the front door — Jim's key. She heard Jim's step in the hall and jumped up off the sofa and went to the door to meet him — and then was shocked by his appearance as he threw it open just before she reached it. He had his hat on still, and his raincoat. They were both dark and dripping with water. He was frowning, and his face was very white, there was a look in his eyes she'd never seen before.

She said, "Jim! What is it, dearest? What's *happened?*"

"Accident," he said. "I ran over someone . . ." He pulled the back of a hand across his forehead so that his hat was pushed back and she noticed, with utter irrelevance, the little red line which the brim had made across the skin.

He said, "Come and help me, will you? Put on a coat and run out to the car. He's in the back seat." He turned away and strode across the hall to the surgery door. "With you in a minute," he said.

She ran to the hall cupboard and dragged out a raincoat. She tugged open the front door and hurried down the path, the uneven brick slippery under her feet.

The gate was open and through the rain she could see the dark shape of Jim's car. She stumbled towards it and pulled open the door and the little light in the roof came on.

There was nothing in the back seat.

Bewildered, she turned — and there was Jim, close to her.

She started to say something — and then she saw Jim's face —

It *was* Jim's face — but she almost didn't recognize it. And there was something bright in his hand, something bright and sharp and terrifying.

She screamed — and suddenly everything went very fast in front of her eyes, the way things used to go fast in films when she was a child, and there was a shouting of men's voices, and something heavy like a stone swished through the air past her and hit Jim on the head, and he fell down and the bright steel thing dropped out of his hand, and two men ran up, and one of them was Colonel Gethryn and the other knelt over Jim, and Colonel Gethryn put his arm around her as she swayed on her feet, and the black wet world spun dizzily . . .

"But there isn't anything complex about it," said Anthony. "I started when my son gave me the 'can't-see-the-wood-for-the-trees' idea. And then Lucia found that long, magnificent, red-gold hair on my dinner-jacket. And that's all there was to it . . ."

The others said a lot of things, together and separately.

He waited for them to finish, and then shook his head sadly.

He said, "My dear people, that hair was tantamount to a confession by Dr. James Carmichael, duly signed, attested and registered at Somerset House. I might never have realized

it, of course, if Alan hadn't handed me 'wood-for-the-trees.' But as I'd evolved the notion of hiding one murder with a lot of other murders — well, it was completely obvious. Carmichael, whose wife was rich and plain and over-loving, fitted everything. He was a doctor. He could travel about. He —"

"But *why* did the hair necessarily point to him?"

"Because it must have come from the third body. Because no one at LeFane's had hair even remotely red. Of course, it was caked with mud and colorless when it got onto my coat, but by the time it dried—"

"Hold it! Hold it! I *still* don't see how it pointed to the doctor!"

"I'm surprised at you!" Anthony surveyed the speaker with real astonishment.

"After all, you were there at LeFane's. You heard Carmichael arguing with that horn-rimmed intellect from the Foreign Office. Don't you remember him talking about *titian hair on troglodytes?*"

"Why, yes . . . But —"

"Don't you realize he talked *too soon?* He said that nearly two hours *before* they found the third murderee. And the third murderee was a brute-faced redhead!"

ABOUT THE STORY: *Q. Patrick's "Love Comes to Miss Lucy" is an example of the detective short story in which characterization, mood, and background are the all-important ingredients, with plot incidental. Harry Kemelman's "The Nine Mile Walk" is the opposite type of detective story in which the originality of the basic idea is the paramount feature, supported by ingenuity of presentation and development, and with characterization and mood relatively incidental. Or, to put it another way, the Kemelman story represents the intellectual approach, and the Q. Patrick[1] represents the literary approach.*

As we have already pointed out, the significant trend of the past decade is the attempt on the part of more and more detective-story writers to fuse both techniques — to merge the intricacies of plot with the artistry of characterization and mood, to blend the tale of pure detection with the more active kind of story, the action ranging all the way from dramatic incident subtly understated to the explosive thrills of the sensational school.

Philip MacDonald's "The Wood-for-the-Trees," which you have just read, illustrates perfectly the double-fusion possible in the contemporary detective story. Let's check that statement and see how expertly Mr. MacDonald has combined all the major antitheses of the genre.

[1] The two stories referred to, by Q. Patrick and Harry Kemelman, appeared in the April 1947 issue of EQMM.

First: Is "The Wood-for-the-Trees" a story of characterization, mood, and background? Yes, indeed. Although the author set himself the extremely difficult task of dealing with more than a dozen characters in a single short story, they all emerge clearly in the reader's mind; disregarding the officials and servants, even considering the unexpectedly mild and calm Colonel Gethryn chiefly as the deus-ex-machina (or diabolus-ex-machina, if you prefer), such delineations as those of Marya Dax, Dr. Carmichael and his wife, Mr. Shelton-Jones, Carol Dunning, and Adrian LeFane, to mention only half the dramatis personae, stand out vividly and three-dimensionally. The mood? Can you readily forget the weather, the terror, and most of all, the smell of evil? The background? Do you know another detective short story which offers a fuller picture of an English village and countryside than that of Friars' Wick and its environs?

Second: Is "The Wood-for-the-Trees" a pure detective story, with emphasis on plot and deduction? It is, indeed. The plot is an excellent variation on the Jack-the-Ripper, mass-murder theme — it could easily have been expanded to a full-length novel. Yet, even within the space limitations of a short story, Mr. MacDonald spreads suspicion with a master's hand, shifting the finger from one character to another in subtle point-counter-point. And throughout Mr. MacDonald plays fair with the reader: the main clues are given with finesse and integrity. How deftly the motive is introduced! — and with such psychological daring, since we are told that Mrs. Carmichael is a wealthy woman by the murderer himself! How casually, yet effectively, the author informs us that Colonel Gethryn's raincoat had come undone while he was kneeling beside the body of the third victim — only five paragraphs after we had learned the color of the victim's hair! Why, even the title itself is an all-revealing clue dangled constantly before our eyes — the vital key to the truth, if only we had the wit to perceive its meaning and application!

Now, let's test the story the other way.

Is "The Wood-for-the-Trees" in the classic tradition of the intellectual technique? And conversely, is Mr. MacDonald's story also representative of the other main branch of the genre — the sensational attack? Surely it is clear beyond question that the author has combined the purest of detectival elements with the thrills and excitement of the more physical, more sensational, school of story-telling. And if Mr. MacDonald's first Colonel Gethryn tale isn't beautifully told — better written by strictly literary standards than most so-called "serious" short stories, especially those which appear in the slickest of the slick magazines — then we'll eat these words in public anywhere in the United States . . .

Michael Venning is one of the pseudonyms used by our old friend Craig Rice — but Craig Rice in a more serious mood. The truth is, even when she is writing about John J. Malone, or Jake Justus and Helene Brand, or Bingo and Handsome, Craig Rice always manages to project emotion. No matter how wild and woolly her plots, no matter how wacky and wisecracking her characters, Craig Rice never loses touch with people, not as mere word-silhouettes but as human beings. This warmth that Craig Rice instills into everything she writes, this sympathy and understanding she feels for guys and gals, shines all the more brightly in her work as Michael Venning. The wisecracks — well, to coin a phrase, the wisecracks are inconspicuous by their absence.

"How Now, Ophelia" is the very first short story written by Craig Rice under the pen-name of Michael Venning. It was written especially for EQMM and marks the début of Melville Fairr, the little man in gray, as a short-story sleuth. An important detective "first," we hope that Melville Fairr will return to our pages again and again and again.

HOW NOW, OPHELIA

by MICHAEL VENNING

LATE afternoon sunlight poured over the well-kept lawn like honey over a warm griddle-cake. The trees made a weary pretense of rustling in the faint breeze and relaxed again, their leaves drooping. One crisp brown leaf detached itself from its twig and fell, slowly, gracefully, carelessly, rattling against limb and branch with a small sound suddenly made loud by the surrounding silence.

On the terrace in front of the pleasant, sprawling farmhouse, a small man in a gray suit sat on the edge of a reclining chair. The chair was upholstered in lime-green and flame; against the colors the man seemed like a colorless little sparrow which had perched there for one moment only. His hair, his eyes, even his eyebrows were gray, and his friendly face had the grayish tinge that comes from too many years spent in sunless city streets. He was a private detective, and his name was Mr. Melville Fairr.

A tall, rangy, middle-aged man sprawled on the adjoining chair. His eyes were almost too bright a blue, his heavy dark hair was whitening a little at the temples. His handsome, sensitive face was deeply tanned. Every movement he made seemed calculated, planned in advance; even his relaxed pose on the reclining chair appeared to have been carefully studied.

"Mr. Cattermole," Mr. Melville Fairr said earnestly, "I tried to make it plain to you over the telephone. I'm not a psychiatrist. I'm only a private

detective. It's been very pleasant, coming out here, but —"

He paused. The great Jesse Cattermole was paying no attention to him. With a little sigh Mr. Melville Fairr leaned back in his chair.

It *had* been pleasant, coming out here. It was still pleasant, being here. Indian Summer had turned New York into a coppery furnace and for once Mr. Melville Fairr did not long for its streets and alleys. A clump of willows growing by a brook, a wide, sweet lawn, and a house —

A house of madness.

"I'm sorry," Mr. Melville Fairr said. "I'd like to help you, if I could. But —"

"Wait," Jesse Cattermole told him softly. He whispered, scarcely loud enough for Melville Fairr to hear, "How now, Ophelia —"

The girl who emerged from behind the willows seemed like a pale shadow against their dark green foliage. She wore a white tennis dress, and her arms were filled with wild flowers.

" 'There with fantastic garlands did she come,' " Jesse Cattermole quoted, half under his breath. He turned to Melville Fairr and said earnestly, "You'll understand. She's — oh, dash it, say she's — not herself. But she's my stepdaughter and —" His voice broke off.

Melville Fairr watched the slender girl as she crossed the wide lawn, her fantastic garland of wild flowers clutched to her. She was strangely lovely. Her hair was brown and smooth, left loose over her shoulders, and brushed till it shone. Her pointed face was delicately, almost luminously pale. Her dark eyes, set in an almost fixed stare, had a look of helpless desperation behind them. Her sweet pink lips wore a rather silly smile.

"You're afraid she may go violently mad — and murder her husband," Mr. Melville Fairr said in a very quiet voice.

"I know she will. I can see it coming." The great Shakespearean actor — now retired — stirred uneasily in his chair. "I'm not one of these psychologist fellows, but I know. And dammit, Fairr, I love the girl as if she were my own daughter. After all, she was a year old when I married her mother, and only three when her mother died. I brought her up myself. This marriage —" He paused. "Someone recommended you. And if *you* can't help —"

Little Mr. Melville Fairr kept his eyes on the girl who was coming, so slowly and gracefully, across the shadow-dappled lawn. He said, "So you called me in to prevent a murder."

"That's it. That's exactly it. Confound it, I don't care if the fellow is killed. Frankly, I'd like to see it happen. He's a drunken brute and he's driving her insane. But —" He paused to light a fresh cigarette.

"As I see it," Melville Fairr told him, "you have several courses of action open to you. Call in the police, and tell them what you've just told me. Or, better, call in a competent psychiatrist and let him take her

away for treatment. Or even,"— a frown crossed his friendly face — "why doesn't she divorce him?"

Jesse Cattermole stood up. "She hasn't any money, and neither have I. Just to pay your fee, I've had to sell some old books. Not that I begrudge them. Not for her. *He* has the money. Everything here belongs to him. The chair you're sitting on, the tea we've been drinking, the dress she's wearing, the pathetic armful of flowers she's gathered, even this cigarette I'm smoking." He took a last puff on it and flipped it away from him in a wide, graceful arc. His face went back to his normal pleasantness and he called, "Hello there, Lucia!"

She laughed, a lovely, silvery, almost tinkling little laugh that made a cold chill run down Melville Fairr's spine. She half-ran gracefully the last few feet across the lawn.

"I picked these because they were so lovely. But now I don't know what to do with them." Her voice was clear and childlike. "I thought they'd look beautiful on mother's grave. Then I remembered — she doesn't have a grave, does she, Jesse?"

"No, dear child," Jesse Cattermole said. "She was buried at sea."

"That's right. So I might as well throw them away." She tossed the armful of limp, wet flowers away from her, carelessly. They scattered on the grass.

"Lucia," Jesse Cattermole said, as she came up the steps, "This is Mr. Fairr. Mr. Melville Fairr."

"How do you do." Her big dark eyes were friendly. "So nice to see you again." A faint shadow of a frown crossed her brow. "Or *have* I met you before? I have a very bad memory. Bart keeps telling me that, and he must be right."

"A bad memory can be a good thing," Melville Fairr said, "just as a gift of prophecy can be a bad thing."

She smiled at him, that sweet, silly, limpid smile, and sat down on the terrace steps. "But I do remember mother being buried at sea. I can remember more than that, when I try. The gray glassy surface of the sea, and the birds flying overhead. And flowers, floating on the water."

"Lucia darling," Jesse Cattermole said affectionately, "you weren't even there. And it wasn't that way at all."

"You see?" She lifted her lovely, very pale shoulders. "I always remember the wrong things. And forget the important ones." This time her smile wasn't silly — as though she shared a delightful secret with Melville Fairr.

"That may be the secret of happiness," Melville Fairr murmured. "To forget all the important things."

The great Jesse Cattermole cleared his throat quietly. "Stay right there and rest, Lucia," he said. "I'll bring you your tea." He vanished into the house.

Little Mr. Melville Fairr sighed. This seemed too plotted, too planned, his being left alone with the girl. He suspected that Jesse Cattermole would not return with tea. He was right.

The girl looked up at him. "Jesse is always so good to me. I can't tell you how very fond of him I am. I was a baby when my mother died. She was an actress, you know. Jesse isn't my father, he's my stepfather, but he's done so much for me. I thought it would be — *nice* for him, my marrying Bart. But it hasn't turned out that way at all."

"What do you mean, for *him*?" Melville Fairr asked. "Why shouldn't your marriage just have been"— he hesitated at the word — "nice for you?"

"Jesse isn't young any more." She paused. Suddenly, in talking about Jesse Cattermole, she had ceased to be a sweet, silly, and quite possibly insane girl, and became a young woman, with warmth, affection, and even understanding. "I'd seen so many old actors — some of them who'd been famous —"

Melville Fairr nodded sympathetically. So had he. But he murmured something about other actors, even older than Jesse Cattermole, who'd gone on to new and greater successes. He was naming names and describing circumstances, when he heard her laugh.

It wasn't the silvery, cold, frightening laughter he'd heard before. It was pleasant, friendly laughter. She said, "Mr. Fairr, Jesse never was a great actor. He made a wonderful matinee idol, years ago, but just between us, he was a terrible ham."

Melville Fairr didn't answer that. He knew too well that it was true. He said gently, "And so you married Bartley Cannon who had a great deal of money, and it hasn't turned out successfully."

Her pale face twisted with worry. It wasn't, he observed, an adult kind of worry. It was childlike, and curiously frightened. When she spoke, it was again in that clear, limpid voice.

"It's my fault, really. Probably because I was too young to marry. When Jesse introduced Bart to me, I believe Bart thought I was a lot older than sixteen, because Jesse was so much older. Does that make sense? I hope so, because I know what I mean. I'd had one little part on the stage, you know, but I wasn't very good. It seemed like such a wise idea to marry Bart. Only I seem to do everything wrong. I forget things. Worse than that, I *remember* things."

Suddenly she rose and stood looking intently at him. Her white, nervous fingers picked a leaf from the nearby trellis and twisted it into tortured shapes

"Mr. Fairr, tell me the truth. Are you *another* doctor?"

Little Mr. Melville Fairr lifted his gray eyebrows just a fraction of an inch. "*Another?*"

She nodded. "Jesse brought one here. He was supposed to be a friend of the family, visiting. But I knew what he was. He asked me a lot of silly questions. He wanted to take me to a hospital. But I cried, and anyway Jesse couldn't let him because Bart didn't know, not even about his being here. If only it weren't for Bart —"

Melville Fairr steeled himself to ask her, very coolly and quietly, if she was afraid she might go mad and murder her husband, when there was a sudden and noisy interruption.

"Lucia! Lucia, where the hell are you?" It was a thick and angry voice, coming from the house.

She turned, walked a few feet nearer the wide front door and stood leaning against one of the pillars. Melville Fairr could see her small fingers closing into fists, then opening again.

The screen door burst open and banged shut. Bart Cannon, a big, red-faced, and at the moment, very drunken man, came out on the terrace and glared at his wife.

"What was the idea of breaking our date with the Forresters for tonight?"

Lucia stared at him, her eyes blank and frightened. "I didn't!"

"Yes you did! You called Milly Forrester and told her we couldn't go. What's the idea? Do you think I want to spend all my days and nights in this dreary rat's nest?"

Melville Fairr sighed again, and looked away in the direction of the sunlit lawn, the beautifully tended gardens, the tall and graceful trees.

"I'm sorry, Bart. I — don't remember."

"You never remember anything!" He noticed the little man in gray. "Who the hell's this?"

"He's — I don't know. A friend of father's."

The little man in gray rose and said pleasantly, "My name is Melville Fairr." He looked closely at his host. Bart Cannon was tall, wide-shouldered, and gone to flesh. His hair was a muddy brown, and his pale blue eyes bulged. He wore riding pants and a sweat shirt

"How d'ya do. I'm Bart Cannon. What are you doing here?"

Melville Fairr, who couldn't have been intimidated by the devil himself, sat down and said, rather primly, "I came to interview Mr. Cattermole."

"Then why in blazes don't you interview him instead of annoying my wife?"

He turned to her and said, "Lucia, come into the house. I want to talk to you."

She shook her head wildly. Her tiny fingernails seemed to be digging into the wooden pillar she was leaning against. Bart Cannon slapped her, not too hard.

Melville Fairr started to rise, then sank back into his chair. He watched while Bart Cannon half-led, half-dragged his wife into the house, his thick muscular fingers digging into her pale thin arms. He heard her faint whimper as she went into the hall, and the sound of another slap.

Little Melville Fairr sighed deeply. He liked people — good, bad, and all the stages in between; and he disliked seeing the many unkindnesses they did to each other. Down on the lawn below the terrace the flowers Lucia had carried from the fields were rapidly changing into ugly wisps of weeds, and Melville Fairr turned his

eyes away from them. He wished that he had never seen them. He wished that he were back in the hot, dirty, smelly streets of New York. He wished most of all that Jesse Cattermole would come back to the terrace so that he could tell him he had decided to stay until this ugly affair was straightened one way or another — either by murder or by madness.

The house had suddenly become still. Much too still, Melville Fairr thought. And as though the emotions of a house could be sensed by its surroundings, the trees and gardens and the very air itself had likewise become still. Melville Fairr sat uncomfortably on the edge of his chair and wished uneasily that just one leaf would fall or one blade of grass would stir.

In that tremendous stillness the little gray man heard footsteps meant to be silent ones, hardly more than whispers on the soft lawn. It seemed to him as he listened that his ears must be twitching like a cat's. The steps came closer, paused, sounded again, and paused again. With all his heart Melville Fairr longed to turn his head and see who was approaching so stealthily along the side of the house — not that it was any of his business, but he was, by nature, a curious man.

There was a very long silence while Melville Fairr waited breathlessly. And then a whisper, "Lucia ——?"

"She isn't here," Melville Fairr whispered back, "but I'm her friend. You can trust me." A full minute later he felt that it was safe to turn around.

He saw then that one reason for the softness of the footsteps was that the young man who made them was barefoot. He saw a tall young man with wiry muscles and a deep tan, dressed in nothing but a pair of faded dungarees. His short blond hair had been bleached pale by the sun; his eyes were a surprisingly bright blue. His browned face was at the same time friendly and wary, like a half-tamed woodland creature. It became more friendly as he stood surveying Melville Fairr with his quick bright eyes.

Melville Fairr had that effect on frightened people, children, dogs, cats, and the squirrels in Central Park. Perhaps it was because he was quiet and small, and gray as a shadow, because he was so soft-spoken and moved so very gently. He spoke very softly now, and moved with particular gentleness as he rose from his chair.

"Lucia's in the house." He paused and added, "with her husband." He stepped down from the terrace and said, "I should very much like to walk about the grounds. Perhaps you would be kind enough to guide me?"

The young man grinned at him and said, "Delighted." They took a few steps away from the terrace and he said, "Acting as your guide, perhaps I should point out to you that the yew trees beyond the formal garden were imported from England by Bartley Cannon's father. He bought them, I understand, at a steal. And the sundial in the center of the garden was a

little item he picked up cheaply in Rome. Frankly, I've always thought it was in rather bad taste — and now that we're beyond earshot of the house, would you mind telling me just who the devil you are and how you fit into this mess?"

"I'm Melville Fairr," the little man in gray told him. "I'm a private detective from New York and to be perfectly frank with you I don't know how I fit into 'this mess' as you call it."

They were walking in the direction of the woods. Melville Fairr waited a moment and then said, "I trust you won't mind if I ask you the same questions." He added, "And for the same reasons."

"My name is Tony Gay," the young man said, "and I'm a farmer. Nothing fancy, just an ordinary dirt farmer with one hired man, a small herd of Guernsey cows, a promising orchard, and a degree from the State Agricultural College. I fit in this mess because I lease my farm from Bart Cannon and he's threatening to cancel the lease."

"Why?" Melville Fairr asked.

"Because," Tony Gay said, "I'm in love with his wife and he knows it. And I think she's in love with me." He stopped suddenly, like a young deer startled motionless by some scent of unfamiliar danger. "Mr. Fairr, you're a guest at the house. You've talked to her. *What's* driving her crazy? If it's Bart Cannon, I'll kill him. I should have killed him long ago, anyway."

He turned around and looked back at the expanse of lawn and the architecturally perfect yet somehow incongruous house that Bart Cannon's father had had built for him.

"All that used to be part of our farm," Tony Gay went on. "Now, I rent my farm from him."

At exactly that moment there was a cry from the direction of the house. Melville Fairr recognized the voice as belonging to Lucia Cannon. Obviously, Tony Gay also recognized it. Melville Fairr reflected, as he watched the young man sprint across the lawn, that it had been many years since he himself could run so fast.

He reminded himself, as he walked across the lawn, that he was not, after all, a man of action. That reminder kept him from breaking into a sprint. Besides, it was Lucia who had screamed.

The house seemed very quiet and normal as he approached it. The scene on the terrace as he came around the corner was not quiet but he had a feeling that it was normal. Lucia was there, a bit more pale than she had been before, her eyes blank, her face bewildered. Bart Cannon was there, his broad face dark with anger, muttering something about his right to defend himself. Jesse Cattermole was there looking distressed, and somehow helpless.

Young Tony Gay stood at the foot of the terrace steps as though deciding what to do.

Catching sight of Melville Fairr, Jesse Cattermole said, with sudden

suavity, "Something alarmed Lucia." He turned to her. "What was it, my dear — a mouse?"

She looked at him blankly.

"That's what I thought," Jesse Cattermole said briskly and cheerfully, like a doctor speaking to a difficult patient. "Perhaps you'd better lie down a bit before dinner. Yes, that's the thing to do."

She frowned slightly, then her pink lips curled into that sweet silly smile. "Very well, Jesse, but I don't *remember* a mouse." She walked over to Melville Fairr and he saw that she had been concealing something in her hand, under the folds of her skirt. She handed it to him and said, "Will you keep this for me while I lie down and rest?" and vanished into the house.

It was a tiny letter-opener, not big enough to harm a newborn kitten, but its point was darkened by a small smear of blood.

Jesse Cattermole stared at it as it lay in Melville Fairr's hand. "Is this a dagger?" he began, almost automatically.

"That's from Macbeth," Melville Fairr snapped, almost irritably, "not Hamlet."

Jesse Cattermole turned abruptly and followed his stepdaughter into the house.

Bart Cannon stared at the little letter-knife with hurt bewilderment on his broad red face. "She tried to kill me," he said. There was a kind of comic surprise in his voice, "My wife tried to kill me."

He seemed dazed and confused, rather than angered. Then suddenly he caught sight of Tony Gay standing at the foot of the steps. "Damn it!" he roared, "how many times do I have to tell you to keep off my property? If you're caught trespassing here again, I'll have one of the gardeners chase you off with a load of buckshot."

Tony Gay stared at him for an instant with mockery in his bright blue eyes, a deliberately insulting reminder that he had once owned this land himself. Then he turned and walked across the lawn with slow dignity and a kind of faunlike grace.

Bert Cannon sat down heavily in the nearest chair, mopped at his steamy face with a crumpled handkerchief, dabbed ineffectually at a small, bright, and obviously new scratch on the back of his hand. He bellowed for someone to fetch him a fresh drink and finally said, wearily, to Melville Fairr, "Just who the hell *are* you and what do *you* make of this mess?"

"I don't know what to make of it," Melville Fairr said, not quite truthfully. "Do you?"

"I know I ought to run her off the premises," Bart Cannon said.

"Well," Melville Fairr said very quietly, "why don't you?"

"Because she married me for my money," Bart Cannon said. "Look, Mr. Whoever-you-are, I'm a rather simple guy. When I pay for something, I like to get what I pay for. Whether it's a block of stock, a parcel of land — or a wife. And when

I've paid for something, I don't like to lose it." He was gazing in the direction of Tony Gay's farm. "I may give away something I've paid for, as a gift, or I might sell it at a profit. But I hate to lose things or throw them away. In fact. I think I'd rather have something taken from me by force than to lose it through carelessness. Even my life."

He looked at Melville Fairr, laughed harshly, and said, "You think I'm a drunken fool, don't you? Only half of that is correct. He lurched toward the house and bellowed, "Where the hell is my drink? Have I got to get it myself?" Then he disappeared into the house.

Little Mr. Melville Fairr sat gazing at the lawn until the first shadows of twilight began to turn it into a mysterious pool. In the distance the trees framed a post-sunset sky of green, violet, and rose. But he was scarcely conscious of what he watched. He was wondering if anyone besides himself knew that Tony Gay had not left but had hidden himself behind the bushes beside the house.

It seemed to him that he waited there a long time. Actually, it was not much more than a quarter of an hour before the screen door opened softly and Jesse Cattermole came out.

"Mr. Fairr," Jesse Cattermole said, "I've made up my mind. I'm going to take Lucia away from here immediately. I'm not going to let anyone or anything stop me. I'll manage somehow as far as the money is concerned. There are still a few books I can sell, and I can surely find some kind of an engagement. Anything to get her away from here before something does happen. You saw — this afternoon."

Melville Fairr nodded. "You're quite right," he said, "if she can be persuaded to go."

At that moment they heard the shot.

Melville Fairr, sunk deep in the canvas deck chair, was at a disadvantage in getting to his feet. Jesse Cattermole reached the front door a good thirty seconds ahead of him. Melville had just reached the entrance to the big shadowy hall when he heard the second shot.

For just an instant he stood there confused. It was a strange house and its lights had not yet been turned on. Then he saw a rectangle of light at the end of the hall and ran toward it.

The room was evidently a kind of combination office and library. Melville Fairr's first quick glance took in a desk, an enormous fireplace, shelves of new-looking books and a pale beige rug. Lucia Cannon was crumpled on the rug in a faint, a revolver lying near her hand. Bart Cannon was sprawled in front of his desk. He looked dead.

Melville Fairr said, "Don't touch anything."

"Why not?" a voice said behind him. "Why not touch things? Because of germs? Is the germ of murder something one of us could take in merely by touching his filthy dead body? And would it infect us to go on to other murders?"

Melville Fairr turned around, saw Tony Gay's pale face, and said very quietly, "That will be enough from you, young man."

Jesse Cattermole sobbed "*Lucia* —"

"Don't touch anything," Melville Fairr repeated, "and I'll call the police."

By the time he'd called them and been assured that the sheriff's car would be speeding on its way through the twilight, Lucia was opening her eyes, and Jesse Cattermole, regardless of Melville Fairr's orders, had determined that the man *was* dead.

They lifted Lucia from the floor and carried her to a couch in the next room. They rubbed her hands and put a hot water bottle at her feet, and held a glass of brandy against her pale lips, until at last she stared at them, smiled that sweet and rather silly smile, and said, "Hello!"

"Lucia!" Jesse Cattermole said. Tears streamed down his cheeks.

Little Mr. Melville Fairr pulled a warm blanket over her and said, "Shock. She'll be all right." He rubbed her hands again and said, "Tell me, my dear. What happened?"

Her eyes were wide, childlike. "What happened — where?"

"Your husband is dead," Melville Fairr said. "He's been killed."

At that moment the police came, in time to see her lovely eyes widen with shocked surprise.

"Poor Bart," she said. "Who killed him?"

The young sheriff, Harry Olsen, gave Melville Fairr a questioning look. Melville Fairr nodded. There was sympathy and understanding in the young sheriff's eyes.

"My dear girl," Melville Fairr said gently, "don't you remember?"

It seemed for a moment that she was trying to remember. Then she shook her head.

"Did you shoot him?" Harry Olsen asked. He was blond, pleasant-faced, and obviously uneasy in this situation.

She stared at him for a moment and then said, "Don't be silly."

"For the love of Heaven," Jesse Cattermole said, "don't torture the child. Can't you see that she's ill?"

"Mr. Fairr," Tony Gay said, "can't you do *something?*"

Young Harry Olsen said, "Just what happened, Mrs. Cannon?"

"Bart was angry with me." She frowned slightly. "I don't remember what he was angry about. Something. I'm always forgetting things. Bart keeps scolding me because I forget things. But I do try to remember. I remembered about the new cleaning woman, but Bart didn't seem to care — he was angry anyway. He always seems to be angry."

"Not any more," Melville Fairr said softly. "He's dead."

"That's right," she whispered. "You told me. Poor Bart. It seems rather a shame. I think he really did enjoy living." Her eyes closed; she breathed slowly and regularly. She seemed to have fallen asleep.

Melville Fairr took the young sheriff by the arm and steered him in

the direction of the murdered man's library.

"That poor kid," Harry Olsen said. He took out a bright-bordered handkerchief and wiped his brow. "Everybody thought he'd drive her crazy, just like he did his first wife. *She* went clear off her head and jumped in the creek down yonder. Nobody thought so much of it at the time. She was one of the Gay family, and they always was a trifle flighty." He shook his blond head and sighed. "Oh, well, this poor kid, she's alive and she won't need to go to jail, and nut hospitals ain't such bad places these days. Well, I guess we better go look at the remains, Mr. Fairr."

"Just a minute," Melville Fairr said. "I'm debating a problem of ethics." He paused as he reached the library door. "*Are* there circumstances under which a murderer should be allowed to go free?"

"Mister," Harry Olsen said, "I'm the law. My business is to catch murderers, not to let 'em go. But just between us, if I'd seen someone shoot Bart Cannon down in cold blood, I'd have been inclined to give him a good running start before I started catching him. And so would anybody who ever knew Bart Cannon."

"Just the same," Melville Fairr said, almost as though to himself, "*she* said — 'he really did enjoy living.' And you *are* the law, and that implies — certain duties."

"I don't get this," Harry Olsen said, scowling.

"You will," Melville Fairr told him, pushing open the library door. "I'd like to draw your attention to a few things. One, that there were *two* shots. One bullet went through Mr. Cannon's brain. Very neatly, right between the eyes. The other went wild. You can see where it lodged in the plaster, about two feet from where Mr. Cannon must have been standing. The *second* of the two shots was the one that killed him. There wouldn't have been any point in firing again after he was dead."

The young man's eyes narrowed. "How close together were the two shots?"

"About half a minute," Melville Fairr told him. "And I'm a fairly good judge of time."

"I think I know what you're getting at," Harry Olsen said. "Go on."

"From where she fell, when she fainted," Melville Fairr went on, "she was standing only a few feet from him. Yet there's not a trace of a powder burn around the wound."

As though instinctively, Harry Olsen turned and looked at the open doorway into the hall, through the matching doorway into the room beyond, and at the wide-open French windows at the far side of the room.

"I suggest," Melville Fairr said quietly, "that we go back in the other room and take the revolver with us. And that you let me ask several questions."

"Mister," Harry Olsen said, admiration in his voice, "I'm the sheriff of this county and you're just a private dick from the big city, but I'll play

along with you." He whipped out his handkerchief and picked up the revolver as tenderly as though it were a sick child.

Lucia's eyes were still closed, her face as expressionless as that of a sleeping child. Melville Fairr sat down beside her and took her hand.

"My dear child," he said, "I must annoy you with one question. Near-sighted as you are, why don't you wear glasses?"

Her eyelids flew open and she stared at him. For a long moment her gaze and his carried on a silent but important conversation.

"Vanity, I guess," she whispered. "No woman ever really likes to wear glasses."

"And tell me," he said, "How many times in your life have you fired a gun?"

"Once." She gasped. "I mean —"

"Never mind," Melville Fairr said, "I know what you mean. You're near-sighted, you'd never fired a gun before, no wonder you had poor aim." He turned to Tony Gay. "You habitually carry a gun?"

"Yes. I thought that sometime I might have a chance to shoot him and get away with it. Here, take the damned thing." He drew the small revolver from his pocket and handed it to Harry Olsen.

The young sheriff looked at both guns. He looked at Jesse Cattermole and at Tony Gay. He turned to Melville Fairr and said, bewildered, "Which?"

"The *second* shot killed Bart Cannon," Melville Fairr said. "One of two things happened. But first, one thing we know happened. Mrs. Cannon fired a gun, once. Either from deliberate intent, or because she has poor eyesight and had never fired a gun before, she missed. And then —"

"Now just a minute, Mr. Fairr," Tony Gay said angrily.

"Shut up, you," the sheriff said.

"Then," the little man in gray continued, "someone watching through the French windows and seeing the tableau could have drawn his revolver and fired. If he happened to be a country-bred boy who probably had shot squirrels at the age of ten, he would undoubtedly have been able to bring down Mr. Cannon with a shot right between the eyes. Or —"

"Just a minute, Mr. Fairr," Jessie Cattermole began.

"And *you* shut up, too," the sheriff told him.

"Or," Melville Fairr continued, wishing with all his heart that people would not go around murdering each other, thereby creating problems for the next-of-kin, the authorities, and himself, "someone rushed into the room, saw that Lucia had fired, missed, and fainted, grabbed her gun, killed Bart Cannon, hastily wiped off the fingerprints from the gun, and dropped it on the floor near her hand."

Lucia opened her eyes and said, "Well?"

"I suggest," Melville Fairr said, "that a ballistics expert examine both bullets and both guns. I also suggest

that the gun found in the murder room be examined for fingerprints. If there *are* none, since Lucia was not wearing gloves ——"

"He *deserved* to be killed," Jesse Cattermole said. His voice was hoarse. There was a strange glitter in his eye.

"Why, Jesse!" Lucia said. She laughed, that tinkling little laugh like drops of water falling into a silver basin. "Why, Jesse, you're *crazy!* You've always been a little crazy, but now you're *really* crazy!"

He drew himself up proudly. "That's what *he* was always saying. It is not so. That's why I killed him." He struck a Shakespearean pose. "*I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offenses at my back than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and Heaven* ——"

"I kind of remember that speech," Harry Olsen said. "My folks used to take me to the theater when I was a kid. Saw Mr. Cattermole, too. Golly, he was good." He drew a long, sighing breath. "Glad this guy will never have to face a jury. Just a bunch of these psychiatrist Joes." He turned, smiled, and said, "Come along with us, Mr. Cattermole."

Jesse Cattermole struck another pose. He said, in the golden voice so many still remembered, "*It will be short: the interim is mine; And no man's life no more than to say, one.*"

"That's all, brother," Harry Olsen said. "Come along!"

"You'd better," Melville Fairr told him gently. "If you don't go with him you'll be late to the theater and you've got to put on a special show tonight."

"A benefit performance," Jesse Cattermole said, grinning foolishly. He walked away quietly with Harry Olsen.

"He *is* a ham," Melville Fairr said at last. "But I think he'll be able to get through this one role."

Lucia stared at him. Her lips parted, formed one word silently, "Jesse —"

"Don't worry about him," Melville Fairr said. "He'll have a wonderful time acting. And he'll have a good audience. No audience can be much better than one composed of doctors." He smiled down at her. "That was what he wanted, you know. An audience. That's why he encouraged you to marry Bartley Cannon, because he thought Cannon would back a Shakespearean tour for his father-in-law."

Melville Fairr turned, walked to the window and stared across the broad lawn, white-blue with moonlight. "He knew he had to murder Bartley Cannon," he said very softly, "for two reasons. One, he needed his money. The other, Cannon was cruel to you."

"He *would* have driven her crazy," Tony Gay cried out. "Gloria — his first wife — my cousin — it wasn't insanity he drove her to, it was despair. There never was any insanity in the Gay family."

"There would have been insanity in the Cannon family," Melville Fairr said, "if Jesse Cattermole's plan had succeeded. It was necessary for him to kill Bart Cannon. It was just as necessary for him to provide the police with a murderer, and at the same time make sure that *he* would handle the Cannon fortune — as he would have done with Bart Cannon dead and Bart Cannon's wife declared insane."

"Wouldn't it have been simpler," Tony Gay asked harshly, "to have murdered Cannon, framed Lucia, and let her hang? Then he'd have had the money and no questions asked."

"You forget," Melville Fairr said, "he loved Lucia. That's why he was planning her defense even while he was planning Bart Cannon's murder."

Tony Gay looked down at Lucia with a warm tenderness in his face that made Melville Fairr turn his eyes away. "He — Jesse — damn near talked you into insanity, at that. If this chap hadn't come along —" He turned to Melville Fairr. "I still don't understand, though," he said, "about the shots —"

"She'll explain that to you some day," Melville Fairr said, smiling.

There was nothing more for him to do. He found his hat and topcoat and walked to the untended door, pausing there for a moment to gaze at the broad lawn and the trees beyond. Everything was all right now. Jesse Cattermole would be happy and well cared for. In time Lucia would marry Tony Gay and they would live happily on what had once been Tony's father's farm. The moonlight seemed brighter now, and somehow warmer. Then he heard soft whispering footsteps in the hall behind him and he turned.

She stood in the doorway, a small silvery smiling shadow. Melville Fairr picked up her cool, pale hand and kissed it. "Congratulations on a magnificent performance. Your mother was a great actress, too. I remember her as Juliet."

Her eyes shone at him. "You *knew* then?" she whispered.

"It's my business to know things," Melville Fairr told her. "Such as — that *you* knew what Jesse Cattermole was planning, and because you were so fond of him, and so grateful, were trying to help. That you were pretending a kind of madness. That you were making unsuccessful attempts at murdering Cannon, so that when the actual murder did come —" He paused. "I think, though, it turned out better this way."

"Wait a minute," she whispered. "You said I was a good actress. *How* did you know?"

"Because of a quotation," Melville Fairr said. "Shakespeare, I think, though I can't be sure. I can't quote it and I've no idea what it's from. In fact, it may not be from Shakespeare at all —"

He heard Tony Gay call her name, saw her go back into the house. He turned and walked away across the moonlit lawn that now seemed, somehow, to be as bright as day.

"The Red Signal" is another "new" story by Agatha Christie: it has never been included in any of Agatha Christie's books published in America. Strange indeed that a story so typical of Agatha Christie's remarkable ingenuity should never have found its way into any volume (including anthologies) ever printed in the United States.

Yes, the coined word "agathachristie" might safely be added to the Queen's English as a synonym for "ingenuity." Instead of referring to so-and-so's "ingenuity of plot" or commenting that such-and-such a story has "an ingenious twist," we could simply phrase it "agathachristie of plot" or "an agathachristiean twist." Weird in appearance, no doubt, but you get the point: for it is an established truth that the creator of Hercule Poirot is a magician at creating illusion — she can slip in a clue here, a clue there, and make you think one thing when all the time, staring you in the face with invisible obviousness, the clues mean something else altogether. And only at the end do you understand that her subtle direction is really subtle misdirection. Take the very case of "The Red Signal" in which — but wait! not another word! We've already said too much . . .

THE RED SIGNAL

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

No, but how too thrilling," said pretty Mrs. Eversleigh, opening her lovely, but slightly vacant, blue eyes very wide. "They always say women have a sixth sense; do you think it's true, Sir Alington?"

The famous alienist smiled sardonically. He had an unbounded contempt for the foolish pretty type, such as his fellow guest. Alington West was the supreme authority on mental disease, and he was fully alive to his own position and importance. A slightly pompous man of full figure.

"A great deal of nonsense is talked, I know that, Mrs. Eversleigh. What does the term mean — a sixth sense?"

"You scientific men are always so severe. And it really is extraordinary the way one seems to positively know things sometimes — just know them, feel them, I mean — quite uncanny — it really is. Claire knows what I mean, don't you, Claire?"

She appealed to her hostess with a slight pout, and a tilted shoulder.

Claire Trent did not reply at once. It was a small dinner party — she and her husband, Violet Eversleigh, Sir Alington West, and his nephew Dermot West, who was an old friend of Jack Trent's. Jack Trent himself, a somewhat heavy florid man, with a good-humored smile, and a pleasant lazy laugh, took up the thread.

"Bunkum, Violet! Your best friend

is killed in a railway accident. Straight away you remember that you dreamed of a black cat last Tuesday — marvellous, you felt all along that something was going to happen!"

"Oh, no, Jack, you're mixing up premonitions with intuition now. Come, now, Sir Alington, you must admit that premonitions are real?"

"To a certain extent, perhaps," admitted the physician cautiously. "But coincidence accounts for a good deal, and then there is the invariable tendency to make the most of a story afterwards."

"I don't think there is any such thing as premonition," said Claire Trent, rather abruptly. "Or intuition, or a sixth sense, or any of the things we talk about so glibly. We go through life like a train rushing through the darkness to an unknown destination."

"That's hardly a good simile, Mrs. Trent," said Dermot West, lifting his head for the first time and taking part in the discussion. There was a curious glitter in the clear grey eyes that shone out rather oddly from the deeply tanned face. "You've forgotten the signals, you see."

"The signals?"

"Yes, green if it's all right, and red — for danger!"

"Red — for danger — how thrilling!" breathed Violet Eversleigh.

Dermot turned from her rather impatiently.

"That's just a way of describing it, of course."

Trent stared at him curiously.

"You speak as though it were an actual experience, Dermot, old boy."

"So it is — has been, I mean."

"Give us the yarn."

"I can give you one instance. Out in Mesopotamia — just after the Armistice, I came into my tent one evening with the feeling strong upon me. Danger! Look out! Hadn't the ghost of a notion what it was all about. I made a round of the camp, fussed unnecesssarily, took all precautions against an attack by hostile Arabs. Then I went back to my tent. As soon as I got inside, the feeling popped up again stronger than ever. Danger! In the end I took a blanket outside, rolled myself up in it and slept there."

"Well?"

"The next morning, when I went inside the tent, first thing I saw was a great knife arrangement — about half a yard long — struck down through my bunk, just where I would have lain. I soon found out about it — one of the Arab servants. His son had been shot as a spy. What have you got to say to that, Uncle Alington, as an example of what I call the red signal?"

The specialist smiled noncommittally.

"A very interesting story, my dear Dermot."

"But not one that you accept unreservedly?"

"Yes, yes, I have no doubt but that you had the premonition of danger, just as you state. But it is the origin of the premonition I dispute. According to you, it came from without, impressed by some outside source

upon your mentality. But nowadays we find that nearly everything comes from within — from our subconscious self.

"I suggest that by some glance or look this Arab had betrayed himself. Your conscious self did not notice or remember, but with your subconscious self it was otherwise. The subconscious never forgets. We believe, too, that it can reason and deduce quite independently of the higher or conscious will. Your subconscious self, then, believed that an attempt might be made to assassinate you, and succeeded in forcing its fear upon your conscious realization."

"That sounds very convincing, I admit," said Dermot, smiling.

"But not nearly so exciting," pouted Mrs. Eversleigh.

"It is also possible that you may have been subconsciously aware of the hate felt by the man towards you. What in old days used to be called telepathy certainly exists, though the conditions governing it are very little understood."

"Have there been any other instances?" asked Claire of Dermot.

"Oh! yes, but nothing very pictorial — and I suppose they could all be explained under the heading of coincidence. I refused an invitation to a country house once, for no other reason than the 'red signal.' The place was burned out during the week. By the way, Uncle Alington, where does the subconscious come in there?"

"I'm afraid it doesn't," said Sir Alington, smiling.

"But you've got an equally good explanation. Come, now. No need to be tactful with near relatives."

"Well, then, nephew, I venture to suggest that you refused the invitation for the ordinary reason that you didn't much want to go, and that after the fire, you suggested to yourself that you had had a warning of danger, which explanation you now believe implicitly."

"It's hopeless," laughed Dermot. "It's heads you win, tails I lose."

"Never mind, Mr. West," cried Violet Eversleigh. "I believe in your Red Signal. Is the time in Mesopotamia the last time you had it?"

"Yes — until ——"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing."

Dermot sat silent. The words which had nearly left his lips were: "Yes, *until tonight.*" They had come quite unbidden to his lips, voicing a thought which had as yet not been consciously realized, but he was aware at once that they were true. The Red Signal was looming up out of the darkness. Danger! Danger close at hand!

But why? What conceivable danger could there be here? Here in the house of his friends? At least — well, yes, there was that kind of danger. He looked at Claire Trent — her whiteness, her slenderness, the exquisite droop of her golden head. But that danger had been there for some time — it was never likely to get acute. For Jack Trent was his best friend, and more than his best friend, the man who had saved his life in Flanders

and been recommended for the V.C. for doing so. A good fellow, Jack, one of the best. Damned bad luck that he should have fallen in love with Jack's wife. He'd get over it some day, he supposed. A thing couldn't go on hurting like this forever. One could starve it out — that was it, starve it out. It was not as though she would ever guess — and if she did guess, there was no danger of her caring. A statue, a beautiful statue, a thing of gold and ivory and pale pink coral . . . a toy for a king, not a real woman. . . .

Claire . . . the very thought of her name, uttered silently, hurt him. . . . He must get over it. He'd cared for women before. . . . "But not like this!" said something. "Not like this." Well, there it was. No danger there — heartache, yes, but not danger. Not the danger of the Red Signal. That was for something else.

He looked round the table and it struck him for the first time that it was rather an unusual little gathering. His uncle, for instance, seldom dined out in this small, informal way. It was not as though the Trents were old friends; until this evening Dermot had not been aware that he knew them at all.

To be sure, there was an excuse. A rather notorious medium was coming after dinner to give a *séance.* Sir Alington professed to be mildly interested in spiritualism. Yes, that was an excuse, certainly.

The word forced itself on his notice. An *excuse.* Was the *séance* just an excuse to make the specialist's presence at dinner natural? If so, what was the real object of his being here? A host of details came rushing into Dermot's mind, trifles unnoticed at the time, or, as his uncle would have said, unnoticed by the conscious mind.

The great physician had looked oddly, very oddly, at Claire more than once. He seemed to be watching her. She was uneasy under his scrutiny. She made little twitching motions with her hands. She was nervous, horribly nervous, and was it, could it be, *frightened?* Why was she frightened?

With a jerk he came back to the conversation round the table. Mrs. Eversleigh had got the great man talking upon his own subject.

"My dear lady," he was saying, "what *is* madness? I can assure you that the more we study the subject, the more difficult we find it to pronounce. We all practise a certain amount of self-deception, and when we carry it so far as to believe we are the Czar of Russia, we are shut up or restrained. But there is a long road before we reach that point. At what particular spot on it shall we erect a post and say, 'On this side sanity, on the other madness'? It can't be done, you know. And I will tell you this: if the man suffering from a delusion happened to hold his tongue about it, in all probability we should never be able to distinguish him from a normal individual. The extraordinary sanity of the insane is an interesting subject."

Sir Alington sipped his wine with

appreciation and beamed upon the company.

"I've always heard they are very cunning," remarked Mrs. Eversleigh. "Loonies, I mean."

"Remarkably so. And suppression of one's particular delusion has a disastrous effect very often. All suppressions are dangerous, as psychoanalysis has taught us. The man who has a harmless eccentricity, and can indulge it as such, seldom goes over the border-line. But the man" — he paused — "or woman who is to all appearance perfectly normal, may be in reality a poignant source of danger to the community."

His gaze traveled gently down the table to Claire, and then back again.

A horrible fear shook Dermot. Was *that* what he meant? Was *that* what he was driving at? Impossible, but ——

"And all from suppressing oneself," sighed Mrs. Eversleigh. "I quite see that one should be very careful always to — to express one's personality. The dangers of the other are frightful."

"My dear Mrs. Eversleigh," expostulated the physician. "You have quite misunderstood me. The cause of the mischief is in the physical matter of the brain — sometimes arising from some outward agency such as a blow; sometimes, alas, congenital."

"Heredity is so sad," sighed the lady vaguely. "Consumption and all that."

"Tuberculosis is not hereditary," said Sir Alington drily.

"Isn't it! I always thought it was. But madness is! How dreadful. What else?"

"Gout," said Sir Alington, smiling. "And color blindness — the latter is rather interesting. It is transmitted direct to males, but is latent in females. So, while there are many color blind men, for a woman to be color blind, it must have been latent in her mother as well as present in her father — rather an unusual state of things to occur. That is what is called sex limited heredity."

"How interesting. But madness is not like that, is it?"

"Madness can be handed down to men or women equally," said the physician gravely.

Claire rose suddenly, pushing back her chair so abruptly that it overturned and fell to the ground. She was very pale and the nervous motions of her fingers were very apparent.

"You — you will not be long, will you?" she begged. "Mrs. Thompson will be here in a few minutes now."

"One glass of port, and I will be with you," declared Sir Alington. "To see this wonderful Mrs. Thompson's performance is what I have come for, is it not? Ha, ha! Not that I needed any inducement." He bowed.

Claire gave a faint smile of acknowledgment and passed out of the room with Mrs. Eversleigh.

"Afraid I've been talking shop," remarked the physician as he resumed his seat. "Forgive me, my dear fellow."

"Not at all," said Trent perfunctorily.

He looked strained and worried. For the first time Dermot felt an outsider in the company of his friend. Between these two was a secret that even an old friend might not share. And yet the whole thing was fantastic and incredible. What had he to go upon? Nothing but a couple of glances and a woman's nervousness.

They lingered over their wine but a very short time, and arrived up in the drawing-room just as Mrs. Thompson was announced.

The medium was a plump middle-aged woman, atrociously dressed in magenta velvet, with a loud, rather common voice.

"Hope I'm not late, Mrs. Trent," she said cheerily. "You did say nine o'clock, didn't you?"

"You are quite punctual, Mrs. Thompson," said Claire in her sweet, slightly husky voice. "This is our little circle."

No further introductions were made, as was evidently the custom. The medium swept them all with a shrewd, penetrating eye.

"I hope we shall get some good results," she remarked briskly. "I can't tell you how I hate it when I go out and I can't give satisfaction, so to speak. It just makes me mad. But I think Shiromako (my Japanese control, you know) will be able to get through all right tonight. I'm feeling ever so fit, and I refused the welsh rarebit, fond of cheese though I am."

Dermot listened, half-amused, half-disgusted. How prosaic the whole thing was! And yet, was he not judging foolishly? Everything, after all, was natural — the powers claimed by mediums were natural powers, as yet imperfectly understood. A great surgeon might be wary of indigestion on the eve of a delicate operation. Why not Mrs. Thompson?

Chairs were arranged in a circle, lights so that they could conveniently be raised or lowered. Dermot noticed that there was no question of *tests*, or of Sir Alington satisfying himself as to the conditions of the *séance*. No, this business of Mrs. Thompson was only a blind. Sir Alington was here for quite another purpose. Claire's mother, Dermot remembered, had died abroad. There had been some mystery about her. . . . Hereditary. . . .

With a jerk he forced his mind back to the surroundings of the moment.

Everyone took their places, and the lights were turned out, all but a small red-shaded one on a far table.

For a while nothing was heard but the low even breathing of the medium. Gradually it grew more and more stertorous. Then, with a suddenness that made Dermot jump, a loud rap came from the far end of the room. It was repeated from the other side. Then a perfect crescendo of raps was heard. They died away, and a sudden high peal of mocking laughter rang through the room.

Then silence, broken by a voice utterly unlike that of Mrs. Thompson, a

high-pitched, quaintly inflected voice.

"I am here, gentlemen," it said. "Yess, I am here. You wish ask me things?"

"Who are you? Shiromako?"

"Yess. I Shiromako. I pass over long ago. I work. I very happy."

Further details of Shiromako's life followed. It was all very flat and uninteresting, and Dermot had heard it often before. Everyone was happy, very happy. Messages were given from vaguely described relatives, the description being so loosely worded as to fit almost any contingency. An elderly lady, the mother of someone present, held the floor for some time, imparting copy book maxims with an air of refreshing novelty hardly borne out by her subject matter.

"Someone else want to get through now," announced Shiromako. "Got a very important message for one of the gentlemen."

There was a pause, and then a new voice spoke, prefacing its remarks with an evil demoniacal chuckle.

"Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! Better not go home. Take my advice."

"Who are you speaking to?" asked Trent.

"One of you three. I shouldn't go home if I were him. Danger! Blood! Not very much blood — quite enough. No, don't go home." The voice grew fainter. "*Don't go home!*"

It died away completely. Dermot felt his blood tingling. He was convinced that the warning was meant for him. Somehow or other, there was danger abroad tonight.

There was a sigh from the medium, and then a groan. She was coming round. The lights were turned on, and presently she sat upright, her eyes blinking a little.

"Go off well, my dear? I hope so."

"Very good indeed, thank you, Mrs. Thompson."

"Shiromako, I suppose?"

"Yes, and others."

Mrs. Thompson yawned.

"I'm dead beat. Absolutely down and out. Does fairly take it out of you. Well, I'm glad it was a success. I was a bit afraid something disagreeable might happen. There's a queer feel about this room tonight."

She glanced over each ample shoulder in turn, and then shrugged them uncomfortably.

"I don't like it," she said. "Any sudden deaths among any of you people lately?"

"What do you mean — among us?"

"Near relatives — dear friends? No? Well, if I wanted to be melodramatic, I'd say that there was death in the air tonight. There, it's only my nonsense. Good-bye, Mrs. Trent. I'm glad you've been satisfied."

Mrs. Thompson in her magenta velvet gown went out.

"I hope you've been interested, Sir Alington," murmured Claire.

"A most interesting evening, my dear lady. Many thanks for the opportunity. Let me wish you goodnight. You are all going on to a dance, are you not?"

"Won't you come with us?"

"No, no. I make it a rule to be in

bed by half-past eleven. Good-night. Good-night, Mrs. Eversleigh. Ah! Dermot, I rather want to have a word with you. Can you come with me now? You can rejoin the others at the Grafton Galleries."

"Certainly, Uncle. I'll meet you there then, Trent."

Very few words were exchanged between uncle and nephew during the short drive to Harley Street. Sir Alington made a semi-apology for dragging Dermot away, and assured him that he would only detain him a few minutes.

"Shall I keep the car for you, my boy?" he asked, as they alighted.

"Oh, don't bother, uncle. I'll pick up a taxi."

"Very good. I don't like to keep Charlson up later than I can help. Good-night, Charlson. Now where the devil did I put my key?"

The car glided away as Sir Alington stood on the steps searching his pockets.

"Must have left it in my other coat," he said at length. "Ring the bell, will you? Johnson is still up, I dare say."

The imperturbable Johnson did indeed open the door within sixty seconds.

"Mislaid my key, Johnson," explained Sir Alington. "Bring a couple of whiskies and sodas into the library."

"Very good, Sir Alington."

The physician strode on into the library and turned on the lights. He motioned to Dermot to close the door.

"I won't keep you long, Dermot, but there's just something I want to say to you. Is it my fancy, or have you a certain — *tendresse*, shall we say, for Mrs. Jack Trent?"

The blood rushed to Dermot's face.

"Jack Trent is my best friend."

"Pardon me, but that is hardly answering my question. I dare say that you consider my views on divorce and such matters highly puritanical, but I must remind you that you are my only near relative and my heir."

"There is no question of a divorce," said Dermot angrily.

"There certainly is not, for a reason which I understand perhaps better than you do. That particular reason I cannot give you now, but I do wish to warn you. She is not for you."

The young man faced his uncle's gaze steadily.

"I do understand — and permit me to say, perhaps better than you think. I know the reason for your presence at dinner tonight."

"Eh?" The physician was clearly startled. "How did you know that?"

"Call it a guess, sir. I am right, am I not, when I say that you were there in your — professional capacity."

Sir Alington strode up and down.

"You are quite right, Dermot. I could not, of course, have told you so myself, though I am afraid it will soon be common property."

Dermot's heart contracted.

"You mean that you have — made up your mind?"

"Yes, there is insanity in the family — on the mother's side. A sad case — a very sad case."

"I can't believe it, sir."

"I dare say not. To the layman there are few if any signs apparent."

"And to the expert?"

"The evidence is conclusive. In such a case the patient must be placed under restraint as soon as possible."

"My God!" breathed Dermot. "But you can't shut anyone up for nothing at all."

"My dear Dermot! Cases are only placed under restraint when their being at large would result in danger to the community."

"Danger?"

"Very grave danger. In all probability a peculiar form of homicidal mania. It was so in the mother's case."

Dermot turned away with a groan, burying his face in his hands. Claire — white and golden Claire!

"In the circumstances," continued the physician comfortably, "I felt it incumbent on me to warn you."

"Claire," murmured Dermot. "My poor Claire."

"Yes, indeed, we must all pity her."

Suddenly Dermot raised his head.

"I say I don't believe it. Doctors make mistakes. Everyone knows that. And they're always keen on their own speciality."

"My dear Dermot," cried Sir Alington angrily.

"I tell you I don't believe it — and anyway, even if it is so, I don't care. I love Claire. If she will come with me, I shall take her away — far away — out of the reach of meddling physicians. I shall guard her, care for her, shelter her with my love."

"You will do nothing of the sort. Are you mad?" Dermot laughed scornfully.

"*You* would say so."

"Understand me, Dermot." Sir Alington's face was red with suppressed passion. "If you do this thing — this shameful thing — I shall withdraw the allowance I am now making you, and I shall make a new will leaving all I possess to various hospitals."

"Do as you please with your damned money," said Dermot in a low voice. "I shall have the woman I love."

"A woman who ——"

"Say a word against her and, by God, I'll kill you!" cried Dermot.

A slight chink of glasses made them both swing round. Unheard by them in the heat of their argument, Johnson had entered with a tray of glasses. His face was the imperturbable one of the good servant, but Dermot wondered just exactly how much he had overheard.

"That'll do, Johnson," said Sir Alington curtly. "You can go to bed."

"Thank you, sir. Good-night, sir."

Johnson withdrew.

The two men looked at each other. The momentary interruption had calmed the storm.

"Uncle" said Dermot. "I shouldn't have spoken to you as I did. I can quite see that from your point of view you are perfectly right. But I have loved Claire Trent for a long time. The fact that Jack Trent is my

best friend has hitherto stood in the way of my ever speaking of love to Claire herself. But in these circumstances that fact no longer counts. The idea that any monetary conditions can deter me is absurd. I think we've both said all there is to be said. Good-night."

"Dermot ——"

"It is really no good arguing further. Good-night, Uncle Alington."

He went out quickly, shutting the door behind him. The hall was in darkness. He passed through it, opened the front door and emerged into the street, banging the door behind him.

A taxi had just deposited a fare at a house farther along the street and Dermot hailed it, and drove to the Grafton Galleries.

In the door of the ballroom he stood for a minute bewildered, his head spinning. The raucous jazz music, the smiling women — it was as though he had stepped into another world.

Had he dreamed it all? Impossible that that grim conversation with his uncle should have really taken place. There was Claire floating past, like a lily in her white and silver gown that fitted sheathlike to her slenderness. She smiled at him, her face calm and serene. Surely it was all a dream.

The dance had stopped. Presently she was near him, smiling up into his face. As in a dream he asked her to dance. She was in his arms now, the raucous melodies had begun again.

He felt her flag a little.

"Tired? Do you want to stop?"

"If you don't mind. Can we go somewhere where we can talk. There is something I want to say to you."

Not a dream. He came back to earth with a bump. Could he ever have thought her face calm and serene? It was haunted with anxiety, with dread. How much did she know?

He found a quiet corner, and they sat down side by side.

"Well," he said, assuming a lightness he did not feel. "You said you had something you wanted to say to me?"

"Yes." Her eyes were cast down. She was playing nervously with the tassel of her gown. "It's difficult —"

"Tell me, Claire."

"It's just this. I want you to — to go away for a time."

He was astonished. Whatever he had expected, it was not this.

"You want me to go away? Why?"

"It's best to be honest, isn't it? I know that you are a — a gentleman and my friend. I want you to go away because I — I have let myself get fond of you."

"Claire."

Her words left him dumb — tongue-tied.

"Please do not think that I am conceited enough to fancy that you — would ever be likely to fall in love with me. It is only that — I am not very happy — and — oh! I would rather you went away."

"Claire, don't you know that I have cared — cared damnably — ever since I met you?"

She lifted startled eyes to his face.

"You cared? You have cared a long time?"

"Since the beginning."

"Oh!" she cried. "Why didn't you tell me? Then? When I could have come to you! Why tell me now when it's too late. No, I'm mad — I don't know what I'm saying. I could never have come to you."

"Claire, what did you mean when you said 'now that it's too late?' Is it — is it because of my uncle? What he knows?"

She nodded, the tears running down her face.

"Listen, Claire, you're not to believe all that. You're not to think about it. Instead, you will come away with me. I will look after you — keep you safe always."

His arms went round her. He drew her to him, felt her tremble at his touch. Then suddenly she wrenched herself free.

"Oh, no, please. Can't you see? I couldn't now. It would be ugly — ugly — ugly. All along I've wanted to be good — and now — it would be ugly as well."

He hesitated, baffled by her words. She looked at him appealingly.

"Please," she said. "I want to be good. . . ."

Without a word, Dermot got up and left her. For the moment he was touched and racked by her words beyond argument. He went for his hat and coat, running into Trent as he did so.

"Hallo, Dermot, you're off early."

"Yes, I'm not in the mood for dancing tonight."

"It's a rotten night," said Trent gloomily. "But you haven't got my worries."

Dermot had a sudden panic that Trent might be going to confide in him. Not that — anything but that!

"Well, so long," he said hurriedly. "I'm off home."

"Home, eh? What about the warning of the spirits?"

"I'll risk that. Good-night, Jack."

Dermot's flat was not far away. He walked there, feeling the need of the cool night air to calm his fevered brain. He let himself in with his key and switched on the light in the bedroom.

And all at once, for the second time that night, the feeling of the Red Signal surged over him. So overpowering was it that for the moment it swept even Claire from his mind.

Danger! He was in danger. At this very moment, in this very room!

He tried in vain to ridicule himself free of the fear. Perhaps his efforts were secretly half-hearted. So far, the Red Signal had given him timely warning which had enabled him to avoid disaster. Smiling a little at his own superstition, he made a careful tour of the flat. It was possible that some malefactor had got in and was lying concealed there. But his search revealed nothing. His man, Milson, was away, and the flat was absolutely empty.

He returned to his bedroom and undressed slowly, frowning to himself.

The sense of danger was acute as ever. He went to a drawer to get out a handkerchief, and suddenly stood stock still. There was an unfamiliar lump in the middle of the drawer.

His quick nervous fingers tore aside the handkerchiefs and took out the object concealed beneath them.

It was a revolver.

With the utmost astonishment Dermot examined it keenly. It was of a somewhat unfamiliar pattern, and one shot had been fired from it lately. Beyond that he could make nothing of it. Someone had placed it in that drawer that very evening. It had not been there when he dressed for dinner — he was sure of that.

He was about to replace it in the drawer, when he was startled by a bell ringing. It rang again and again, sounding unusually loud in the quietness of the empty flat.

Who could be coming to the front door at this hour? And only one answer came to the question — an answer instinctive and persistent.

Danger — danger — danger.

Led by some instinct for which he did not account, Dermot switched off his light, slipped on an overcoat that lay across a chair, and opened the hall door.

Two men stood outside. Beyond them Dermot caught sight of a blue uniform. A policeman!

"Mr. West?" asked one of the two men.

It seemed to Dermot that ages elapsed before he answered. In reality it was only a few seconds before he replied in a very fair imitation of his servant's expressionless voice:

"Mr. West hasn't come in yet."

"Hasn't come in yet, eh? Very well, then, I think we'd better come in and wait for him."

"No, you don't."

"See here, my man, I'm Inspector Verall of Scotland Yard, and I've got a warrant for the arrest of your master. You can see it if you like."

Dermot perused the proffered paper, or pretended to do so, asking in a dazed voice:

"What for? What's he done?"

"Murder. Sir Alington West of Harley Street."

His brain in a whirl, Dermot fell back before his redoubtable visitors. He went into the sitting-room and switched on the light. The inspector followed him.

"Have a search round," he directed the other man. Then he turned to Dermot.

"You stay here, my man. No slipping off to warn your master. What's your name, by the way?"

"Milson, sir."

"What time do you expect your master in, Milson?"

"I don't know, sir, he was going to a dance, I believe. At the Grafton Galleries."

"He left there just under an hour ago. Sure he's not been back here?"

"I don't think so, sir. I fancy I should have heard him come in."

At this moment the second man came in from the adjoining room. In his hand he carried the revolver.

He took it across to the inspector in some excitement. An expression of satisfaction flitted across the latter's face.

"That settles it," he remarked. "Must have slipped in and out without your hearing him. He's hooked it by now. I'd better be off. Cawley, you stay here, in case he should come back again, and you can keep an eye on this fellow. He may know more about his master than he pretends."

The inspector bustled off. Dermot endeavored to get the details of the affair from Cawley, who was quite ready to be talkative.

"Pretty clear case," he vouchsafed. "The murder was discovered almost immediately. Johnson, the man-servant, had only just gone up to bed when he fancied he heard a shot, and came down again. Found Sir Alington dead, shot through the heart. He rang us up at once and we came along and heard his story."

"Which made it a pretty clear case?" ventured Dermot.

"Absolutely. This young West came in with his uncle and they were quarrelling when Johnson brought in the drinks. The old boy was threatening to make a new will, and your master was talking about shooting him. Not five minutes later the shot was heard. Oh! yes, clear enough."

Clear enough indeed. Dermot's heart sank as he realized the overwhelming evidence against him. And no way out save flight. He set his wits to work. Presently he suggested making a cup of tea. Cawley assented readily enough. He had already searched the flat and knew there was no back entrance.

Dermot was permitted to depart to the kitchen. Once there he put the kettle on, and chinked cups and saucers industriously. Then he stole swiftly to the window and lifted the sash. The flat was on the second floor, and outside the window was the small wire lift used by tradesmen which ran up and down on its steel cable.

Like a flash Dermot was outside the window and swinging himself down the wire rope. It cut into his hands, making them bleed, but he went on desperately.

A few minutes later he was emerging cautiously from the back of the block. Turning the corner, he cannoned into a figure standing by the sidewalk. To his utter amazement he recognized Jack Trent. Trent was fully alive to the perils of the situation.

"My God! Dermot! Quick, don't hang about here."

Taking him by the arm, he led him down a by-street, then down another. A lonely taxi was sighted and hailed and they jumped in, Trent giving the man his own address.

"Safest place for the moment. There we can decide what to do next to put those fools off the track. I came round here, hoping to be able to warn you before the police got here."

"I didn't even know that you had heard of it. Jack, you don't believe ——"

"Of course not, old fellow, not for

one minute. I know you far too well. All the same, it's a nasty business for you. They came round asking questions — what time you got to the Grafton Galleries, when you left, and so on. Dermot, who could have done the old boy in?"

"I can't imagine. Whoever did it put the revolver in my drawer, I suppose. Must have been watching us pretty closely."

"That *séance* business was damned funny. '*Don't go home.*' Meant for poor old West. He did go home, and got shot."

"It applies to me too," said Dermot. "I went home and found a planted revolver and a police inspector."

"Well, I hope it doesn't get me too," said Trent. "Here we are."

He paid the taxi, opened the door with his latch-key, and guided Dermot up the dark stairs to his den, a small room on the first floor.

He threw open the door and Dermot walked in, while Trent switched on the light, and came to join him.

"Pretty safe here for the time being," he remarked. "Now we can get our heads together and decide what is best to be done."

"I've made a fool of myself," said Dermot suddenly. "I ought to have faced it out. I see more clearly now. The whole thing's a plot. What the devil are you laughing at?"

For Trent was leaning back in his chair, shaking with unrestrained mirth. There was something horrible in the sound — something horrible, too, about the man altogether.

There was a curious light in his eyes.

"A damned clever plot," he gasped out. "Dermot, you're done for."

He drew the telephone towards him.

"What are you going to do?" asked Dermot.

"Ring up Scotland Yard. Tell 'em their bird's here — safe under lock and key. Yes, I locked the door when I came in and the key's in my pocket. No good looking at that other door behind me. That leads into Claire's room, and she always locks it on her side. She's afraid of me, you know. Been afraid of me a long time. She always knows when I'm thinking about that knife — a long sharp knife. No, you don't ——"

Dermot had been about to make a rush at him, but the other had suddenly produced a revolver.

"That's the second of them," chuckled Trent. "I put the first in your drawer — after shooting old West with it —— What are you looking at over my head? That door? It's no use, even if Claire was to open it — and she might to *you* — I'd shoot you before you got there. Not in the heart — not to kill, just wing you, so that you couldn't get away. I'm a jolly good shot, you know. I saved your life once. More fool I. No, no, I want you hanged — yes, hanged. It isn't you I want the knife for. It's Claire — pretty Claire, so white and soft. Old West knew. That's what he was here for tonight, to see if I was mad or not. He wanted to shut me up — so that I shouldn't get at Claire

with the knife. I was very cunning. I took his latch-key and yours too. I slipped away from the dance as soon as I got there. I saw you come out of his house, and I went in. I shot him and came away at once. Then I went to your place and left the revolver. I was at the Grafton Galleries again almost as soon as you were, and I put the latch-key back in your coat pocket when I was saying goodnight to you. I don't mind telling you all this. There's no one else to hear, and when you're being hanged I'd like you to know I did it. . . . There's not a loophole of escape. It makes me laugh . . . God, how it makes me laugh! What are you thinking of? What the devil are you looking at?"

"I'm thinking of some words you quoted just now. You'd have done better, Trent, not to come home."

"What do you mean?"

"Look behind you?"

Trent spun round. In the doorway of the communicating room stood Claire — and Inspector Verall. . . .

Trent was quick. The revolver spoke just once — and found its mark. He fell forward across the table. The inspector sprang to his side, as Dermot stared at Claire in a dream. Thoughts flashed through his brain disjointedly. His uncle — their quarrel — the colossal misunderstanding — the divorce laws of England which would never free Claire from an insane husband — "we must all pity her" — the plot between her and Sir Alington which the cunning of Trent had seen through — her cry to him, "Ugly — ugly — ugly!" Yes, but now ——

The inspector straightened up.

"Dead," he said vexedly.

"Yes," Dermot heard himself saying, "he was always a good shot. . . ."

GANGSTER — 20th CENTURY, 3rd DECADE

Ernest Hemingway's "The Killers," which appeared originally in "Scribner's Magazine," March 1927, and W. R. Burnett's "Dressing-Up," which was first published in "Harper's Magazine," November 1929, are a pair of short stories that cry out to be read together — that is why we have coupled them as a sort of double entry in the bookkeeping of butchery, in the ledger of larceny. Both were inspired by the same type of criminal — the ruthless killer of our toughest gangster era; both are written in unforgettable prose; and both are landmarks in the contemporary American short story. . . . Let's consider the Hemingway classic first. "The Killers" won second prize in the O. HENRY MEMORIAL AWARD PRIZE STORIES OF 1927. *In her introduction to that book Blanche Colton Williams made this comment on the Hemingway tale: "In its seeming incompleteness is its superb completeness." This was a prophetic statement: last year "The Killers" was produced by Mark Hellinger as a full-length motion picture. The short story itself served merely as a springboard. Mr. Hellinger and his screenplay writer, Anthony Veiller, used the Hemingway characters, situation, and dialogue as the opening sequence of the picture, following the original Hemingway material with surprising fidelity; to this they added entirely new plot development, presenting it as a series of flashbacks which explained the events leading up to the tragedy. The finished product was an outstanding success, artistically and commercially, proving that Hollywood has the imagination and know-how to transform even an "incomplete" short story into a gripping and cohesive motion picture.*

It is revealing nothing new about Hemingway to point out that essentially he is preoccupied with doom — more specifically, with death. It has been said that the very basis of all his work is the death-cult. Wyndham Lewis put it this way: "the 'I' in Hemingway's stories is the man that things are done to" — and the final thing that is done to him, as to us all, is death. No story of Hemingway's illustrates this fundamental thesis more than "The Killers"; nor does any story of Hemingway's illustrate more clearly why he is a legend in his own lifetime. Here, in a few pages, is the justly famous "Hemingway dialogue" — terse, clipped, the very quintessence of realistic speech; here, in a few pages, are more than the foreshadowings of the great literary qualities to be found in A FAREWELL TO ARMS *and* FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS.

THE KILLERS

by ERNEST HEMINGWAY

THE door of Henry's lunch-room opened and two men came in. They sat down at the counter.

"What's yours?" George asked them.

"I don't know," one of the men said. "What do you want to eat, Al?"

"I don't know," said Al. "I don't know what I want to eat."

Outside it was getting dark. The street-light came on outside the window. The two men at the counter read the menu. From the other end of the counter Nick Adams watched them. He had been talking to George when they came in.

"I'll have a roast pork tenderloin with apple sauce and mashed potato," the first man said.

"It isn't ready yet."

"What the hell do you put it on the card for?"

"That's the dinner," George explained. "You can get that at six o'clock."

George looked at the clock on the wall behind the counter.

"It's five o'clock."

"The clock says twenty minutes past five," the second man said.

"It's twenty minutes fast."

"Oh, to hell with the clock," the first man said. "What have you got to eat?"

"I can give you any kind of sandwiches," George said. "You can have ham and eggs, bacon and eggs, liver and bacon, or a steak."

"Give me chicken croquettes with green peas and cream sauce and mashed potatoes."

"That's the dinner."

"Everything we want's the dinner, eh? That's the way you work it."

"I can give you ham and eggs, bacon and eggs, liver — "

"I'll take ham and eggs," the man called Al said. He wore a derby hat and a black overcoat buttoned across the chest. His face was small and white and he had tight lips. He wore a silk muffler and gloves.

"Give me bacon and eggs," said the other man. He was about the same size as Al. Their faces were different, but they were dressed like twins. Both wore overcoats too tight for them. They sat leaning forward, their elbows on the counter.

"Got anything to drink?" Al asked.

"Silver beer, bevo, ginger ale," George said.

"I mean you got anything to drink?"

"Just those I said."

"This is a hot town," said the other. "What do they call it?"

"Summit."

"Ever hear of it?" Al asked his friend.

"No," said the friend.

"What do you do here nights?" Al asked.

"They eat the dinner," his friend said. "They all come here and eat the big dinner."

"That's right," George said.

"So you think that's right?" Al asked George.

"Sure."

"You're a pretty bright boy, aren't you?"

"Sure," said George.

"Well, you're not," said the other little man. "Is he, Al?"

"He's dumb," said Al. He turned to Nick. "What's your name?"

"Adams."

"Another bright boy," Al said. "Ain't he a bright boy, Max?"

"The town's full of bright boys," Max said.

George put the two platters, one of ham and eggs, the other of bacon and eggs, on the counter. He set down two side-dishes of fried potatoes and closed the wicket into the kitchen.

"Which is yours?" he asked Al.

"Don't you remember?"

"Ham and eggs."

"Just a bright boy," Max said. He leaned forward and took the ham and eggs. Both men ate with their gloves on. George watched them eat.

"What are *you* looking at?" Max looked at George.

"Nothing."

"The hell you were. You were looking at me."

"Maybe the boy meant it for a joke, Max," Al said.

George laughed.

"*You* don't have to laugh," Max said to him. "*You* don't have to laugh at all, see?"

"All right," said George.

"So he thinks it's all right." Max turned to Al. "He thinks it's all right. That's a good one."

"Oh, he's a thinker," Al said. They went on eating.

"What's the bright boy's name down the counter?" Al asked Max.

"Hey, bright boy," Max said to Nick. "You go around on the other side of the counter with your oy friend."

"What's the idea?" Nick asked.

"There isn't any idea."

"You better go around, bright boy," Al said. Nick went around behind the counter.

"What's the idea?" George asked.

"None of your damn business," Al said. "Who's out in the kitchen?"

"The nigger."

"What do you mean the nigger?"

"The nigger that cooks."

"Tell him to come in."

"What's the idea?"

"Tell him to come in."

"Where do you think you are?"

"We know damn well where we are," the man called Max said. "Do we look silly?"

"You talk silly," Al said to him. "What the hell do you argue with this kid for? Listen," he said to George, "tell the nigger to come out here."

"What are you going to do to him?"

"Nothing. Use your head, bright boy. What would we do to a nigger?"

George opened the slit that opened back into the kitchen. "Sam," he called. "Come in here a minute."

The door to the kitchen opened and the nigger came in. "What was it?" he asked. The two men at the counter took a look at him.

"All right, nigger. You stand right there," Al said.

Sam, the nigger, standing in his apron, looked at the two men sitting at the counter. "Yes, sir," he said. Al got down from his stool.

"I'm going back to the kitchen with the nigger and bright boy," he said. "Go on back to the kitchen, nigger. You go with him, bright boy." The little man walked after Nick and Sam, the cook, back into the kitchen. The door shut after them. The man called Max sat at the counter opposite George. He didn't look at George but looked in the mirror that ran along back of the counter. Henry's had been made over from a saloon into a lunch-counter.

"Well, bright boy," Max said, looking into the mirror, "why don't you say something?"

"What's it all about?"

"Hey, Al," Max called, "bright boy wants to know what it's all about."

"Why don't you tell him?" Al's voice came from the kitchen.

"What do you think it's all about?"

"I don't know."

"What do you think?"

Max looked into the mirror all the time he was talking.

"I wouldn't say."

"Hey, Al, bright boy says he wouldn't say what he thinks it's all about."

"I can hear you, all right," Al said from the kitchen. He had propped open the slit that dishes passed through into the kitchen with a catsup bottle. "Listen, bright boy," he said from the kitchen to George. "Stand a little further along the bar. You move a little to the left, Max." He was like a photographer arranging for a group picture.

"Talk to me, bright boy," Max said. "What do you think's going to happen?"

George did not say anything.

"I'll tell you," Max said. "We're going to kill a Swede. Do you know a big Swede named Ole Andreson?"

"Yes."

"He comes here to eat every night, don't he?"

"Sometimes he comes here."

"He comes here at six o'clock, don't he?"

"If he comes."

"We know all that, bright boy." Max said. "Talk about something else. Ever go to the movies?"

"Once in a while."

"You ought to go to the movies more. The movies are fine for a bright boy like you."

"What are you going to kill Ole Andreson for? What did he ever do to you?"

"He never had a chance to do anything to us. He never even seen us."

"And he's only going to see us

once," Al said from the kitchen.

"What are you going to kill him for, then?" George asked.

"We're killing him for a friend. Just to oblige a friend, bright boy."

"Shut up," said Al from the kitchen. "You talk too goddam much."

"Well, I got to keep bright boy amused. Don't I, bright boy?"

"You talk too damn much," Al said. "The nigger and my bright boy are amused by themselves. I got them tied up like a couple of girl friends in the convent."

"I suppose you were in a convent."

"You never know."

"You were in a kosher convent. That's where you were."

George looked up at the clock.

"If anybody comes in you tell them the cook is off, and if they keep after it, you tell them you'll go back and cook yourself. Do you get that, bright boy?"

"All right," George said. "What you going to do with us afterward?"

"That'll depend," Max said. "That's one of those things you never know at the time."

George looked up at the clock. It was a quarter past six. The door from the street opened. A street-car motorman came in.

"Hello, George," he said. "Can I get supper?"

"Sam's gone out," George said. "He'll be back in about half an hour."

"I'd better go up the street," the motorman said. George looked at the clock. It was twenty minutes past six.

"That was nice, bright boy," Max said. "You're a regular little gentleman."

"He knew I'd blow his head off," Al said from the kitchen.

"No," said Max. "It ain't that. Bright boy is nice. He's a nice boy. I like him."

At six-fifty-five George said: "He's not coming."

Two other people had been in the lunch-room. Once George had gone out to the kitchen and made a ham-and-egg sandwich "to go" that a man wanted to take with him. Inside the kitchen he saw Al, his derby hat tipped back, sitting on a stool beside the wicket with the muzzle of a sawed-off shotgun resting on the ledge. Nick and the cook were back to back in the corner, a towel tied in each of their mouths. George had cooked the sandwich, wrapped it up in oiled paper, put it in a bag, brought it in, and the man had paid for it and gone out.

"Bright boy can do everything," Max said. "He can cook and everything. You'd make some girl a nice wife, bright boy."

"Yes?" George said. "Your friend, Ole Andreson, isn't going to come."

"We'll give him ten minutes," Max said.

Max watched the mirror and the clock. The hands of the clock marked seven o'clock, and then five minutes past seven.

"Come on, Al," said Max. "We better go. He's not coming."

"Better give him five minutes,"

Al said from the kitchen.

In the five minutes a man came in, and George explained that the cook was sick. "Why the hell don't you get another cook?" the man asked. "Aren't you running a lunch-counter?" He went out.

"Come on, Al," Max said.

"What about the two bright boys and the nigger?"

"They're all right."

"You think so?"

"Sure. We're through with it."

"I don't like it," said Al. "It's sloppy. You talk too much."

"Oh, what the hell," said Max. "We got to keep amused, haven't we?"

"You talk too much, all the same," Al said. He came out from the kitchen. The cut-off barrels of the shotgun made a slight bulge under the waist of his too tight-fitting overcoat. He straightened his coat with his gloved hands.

"So long, bright boy," he said to George. "You got a lot of luck."

"That's the truth," Max said. "You ought to play the races, bright boy."

The two of them went out the door. George watched them through the window pass under the arc-light and cross the street. In their tight overcoats and derby hats they looked like a vaudeville team. George went back through the swinging door into the kitchen and untied Nick and the cook.

"I don't want any more of that," said Sam, the cook. "I don't want any more of that."

Nick stood up. He had never had a towel in his mouth before.

"Say," he said. "What the hell?" He was trying to swagger it off.

"They were going to kill Ole Andreson," George said. "They were going to shoot him when he came in to eat."

"Ole Andreson?"

"Sure."

The cook felt the corners of his mouth with his thumbs.

"They all gone?" he asked.

"Yeah," said George. "They're gone now."

"I don't like it," said the cook. "I don't like any of it at all."

"Listen," George said to Nick. "You better go see Ole Andreson."

"All right."

"You better not have anything to do with it at all," Sam, the cook, said. "You better stay way out of it."

"Don't go if you don't want to," George said.

"Mixing up in this ain't going to get you anywhere," the cook said. "You stay out of it."

"I'll go see him," Nick said to George. "Where does he live?"

The cook turned away.

"Little boys always know what they want to do," he said.

"He lives up at Hirsch's rooming-house," George said to Nick.

"I'll go up there."

Outside the arc-light shone through the bare branches of a tree. Nick walked up the street beside the car-tracks and turned at the next arc-

light down a side street. Three houses up the street was Hirsch's rooming-house. Nick walked up the two steps and pushed the bell. A woman came to the door.

"Is Ole Andreson here?"

"Do you want to see him?"

"Yes, if he's in."

Nick followed the woman up a flight of stairs and back to the end of a corridor. She knocked on the door.

"Who is it?"

"It's somebody to see you, Mr. Andreson," the woman said.

"It's Nick Adams."

"Come in."

Nick opened the door and went into the room. Ole Andreson was lying on the bed with all his clothes on. He had been a heavyweight prize-fighter and he was too long for the bed. He lay with his head on two pillows. He did not look at Nick.

"What was it?" he asked.

"I was up at Henry's," Nick said, "and two fellows came in and tied up me and the cook, and they said they were going to kill you."

It sounded silly when he said it. Ole Andreson said nothing.

"They put us out in the kitchen," Nick went on. "They were going to shoot you when you came in to supper."

Ole Andreson looked at the wall and did not say anything.

"George thought I better come and tell you about it."

"There isn't anything I can do about it," Ole Andreson said.

"I'll tell you what they were like."

"I don't want to know what they were like," Ole Andreson said. He looked at the wall. "Thanks for coming to tell me about it."

"That's all right."

Nick looked at the big man lying on the bed.

"Don't you want me to go and see the police?"

"No," Ole Andreson said. "That wouldn't do any good."

"Isn't there something I could do?"

"No. There ain't anything to do."

"Maybe it was just a bluff."

"No. It ain't just a bluff."

Ole Andreson rolled over toward the wall.

"The only thing is," he said, talking toward the wall, "I just can't make up my mind to go out. I been in here all day."

"Couldn't you get out of town?"

"No," Ole Andreson said. "I'm through with all that running around."

He looked at the wall.

"There ain't anything to do now."

"Couldn't you fix it up some way?"

"No. I got in wrong." He talked in the same flat voice. "There ain't anything to do. After a while I'll make up my mind to go out."

"I better go back and see George," Nick said.

"So long," said Ole Andreson. He did not look toward Nick. "Thanks for coming around."

Nick went out. As he shut the door he saw Ole Andreson with all his clothes on, lying on the bed, looking at the wall.

"He's been in his room all day," the landlady said down-stairs. "I guess he don't feel well. I said to him: 'Mr. Andreson, you ought to go out and take a walk on a nice fall day like this,' but he didn't feel like it."

"He doesn't want to go out."

"I'm sorry he don't feel well," the woman said. "He's an awfully nice man. He was in the ring, you know."

"I know it."

"You'd never know it except from the way his face is," the woman said. They stood talking just inside the street door. "He's just as gentle."

"Well, good night, Mrs. Hirsch," Nick said.

"I'm not Mrs. Hirsch," the woman said. "She owns the place. I just look after it for her. I'm Mrs. Bell."

"Well, good night, Mrs. Bell," Nick said.

"Good night," the woman said.

Nick walked up the dark street to the corner under the arc-light, and then along the car-tracks to Henry's eating-house. George was inside, back of the counter.

"Did you see Ole?"

"Yes," said Nick. "He's in his room and he won't go out."

The cook opened the door from the kitchen when he heard Nick's voice.

"I don't even listen to it," he said, and shut the door.

"Did you tell him about it?" George asked.

"Sure. I told him but he knows what it's all about."

"What's he going to do?"

"Nothing."

"They'll kill him."

"I guess they will."

"He must have got mixed up in something in Chicago."

"I guess so," said Nick.

"It's a hell of a thing."

"It's an awful thing," Nick said.

They did not say anything. George reached down for a towel and wiped the counter.

"I wonder what he did?" Nick said.

"Double-crossed somebody. That's what they kill them for."

"I'm going to get out of this town," Nick said.

"Yes," said George. "That's a good thing to do."

"I can't stand to think about him waiting in the room and knowing he's going to get it. It's too damned awful."

"Well," said George, "you better not think about it."

"Dressing-Up" won first prize in the O. HENRY MEMORIAL AWARD PRIZE STORIES OF 1930. *It tells the story of the last day in the life of a successful gunman — again that preoccupation with the ultimate finality, death — violent and sudden death. Just as "The Killers" is so completely characteristic of Ernest Hemingway's work, "Dressing-Up" epitomizes, again in a few pages, the qualities that made W. R. Burnett famous. "The*

Killers" and "Dressing-Up" are totally different in plot, yet their impact and power stem from similar sources.

Like Byron, Hemingway awoke to find himself famous; like both of them, Burnett awoke to find himself famous. But that's just a glib and witty expression — the truth is, the road to literary fame is always hard, if not always long. In Burnett's case he wrote for eight solid years without the slightest recognition. In those eight years he produced five novels, several plays, and a hundred short stories — and never sold a line! Then, disgusted but not discouraged, he went to Chicago. The Windy City proved a catalyst — it animated, unified his talent. The result: LITTLE CAESAR *— and overnight W. R. Burnett was famous. Adapted to the screen,* LITTLE CAESAR *projected Edward G. Robinson into stardom and started a new trend in the picture business. The enormous success of* LITTLE CAESAR *as a movie made it possible, more than a decade later, for "The Killers" to become a smash hit as a movie — just as the success of "The Killers," completing the circle, may now make it possible for "Dressing-Up" to blossom on the screen.*

Many critics have bracketed Hemingway and Burnett. Actually, Burnett was little influenced by Hemingway. Burnett's style, as the author himself admits, owes more to his reading of European literature — Merimée, Flaubert, and de Maupassant among the French writers, Pió Baroja among the Spanish, and Giovanni Verga among the Italian. But there is nothing remotely Continental in Burnett's work — it is authentically American, in every phrase and accent.

You won't easily forget the juxtapositional contrast of Hemingway and Burnett — a study in "killers dressing up" . . .

DRESSING-UP

by W. R. BURNETT

WHEN the store manager saw Blue and his girl, Birdy, coming in the front door, he turned to Al, one of the clerks, and said:

"Look at this, Al. The stockyards're moving downtown."

Al laughed, then he put on his best professional manner, clasped his hands in front of his stomach, inclined his head slightly, and walked up to Blue.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

Blue was short and stocky. His legs were thin, his waist small, but his shoulders were wide enough for a man six feet tall. His face was red and beefy, and his cheekbones were so

prominent that they stuck out of his face. He looked up at Al.

"I'm buying an outfit, see," he said. "I'm gonna shed these rags and climb into something slick."

"Yes, sir," said Al. "How about one of our new spring models?"

"He wants a gray suit," said Birdy, adjusting her new fur neckpiece.

"Double-breasted," said Blue.

"Yes, sir," said Al.

"But first I want some silk underwear," said Blue. "I'm dressing from the hide out."

The store manager came over and smiled.

"Take good care of this young man, won't you, Mr. Johnson?"

"Yes, sir," said Al.

"Warm, isn't it?" the store manager said to Birdy.

"Yeah, ain't it?" said Birdy, taking off her neckpiece and dangling it over her arm like the women in the advertisements.

The store manager walked to the back of the shop and talked to the cashier:

"There's a boy that's got a big hunk of money all of a sudden," he said, "and he's gonna lose it the same way."

"Yeah?" said the cashier. "Well, I wish my rich uncle that I haven't got would die. Take a look at that neckpiece his girl's wearing. He didn't get that for five dollars."

Al spread out the silk underwear on the counter, and Blue looked through it. Birdy held up a lavender shirt.

"Here you are, Blue. Here's what you ought to get."

"Say . . . !" said Blue.

"Yes, sir," said Al; "we're selling lots of that. Just had an order for a dozen suits from Mr. Hibschmann out in Lake Forest."

"That's where the swells come from," said Birdy.

Blue looked at the lavender shirt and the lavender shorts and said:

"All right. I'll take a dozen."

Al glanced up from his order book, caught the manager's eye, and winked. The manager came up to Blue, put his hand on his shoulder and said:

"My dear sir, since you seem to know real stuff when you see it, I'll let you in on something. We got a new shipment of cravats that we have only just begun to unpack. But if you'd like to look at them, I'll send down to the stockroom for them."

"Sure," said Blue.

"Thanks awfully," said Birdy.

"It's our very best stock. Handmade cravats of the best material obtainable."

"We want the best, don't we, Blue?" said Birdy.

"Sure," said Blue.

While the manager sent for the cravats, Blue bought a dozen silk shirts, some collars, a solid gold collar pin, some onyx cuff links, a set of military brushes, and two dozen pairs of socks. Al bent over his order book and wrote in the items swiftly, computing the possible amount of this windfall. In a few minutes a stock boy brought up the neckties and

stood with his mouth open while Blue selected a dozen of the most expensive ties. The manager noticed him.

"Just leave the rest of the stock, please," he said, then he turned his back to Blue and whispered, "Get out of here!"

The stock boy went back to the basement, and the manager turned back to Blue, smiling.

"Those cravats retail at four dollars apiece," he said, "but because you're giving us such a nice order, I'll let you have them for three fifty."

"O.K.," said Blue.

"Them sure are swell ties, Blue," said Birdy, putting her arm through his. "Won't we be lit up though?"

"Sure," said Blue.

When the accessories had been selected, Blue began to try on the suits Al brought him. Blue strode up and down in front of the big triple mirror, puffed out his chest, struck attitudes, and studied his profile, which he had never seen before except in one Bertillon picture. Al stayed at his elbow, offering suggestions, helping him with the set of a coat, telling him how wonderful he looked; and the manager stayed in the background occasionally making a remark to Birdy whom he addressed as "Madam."

Blue, after a long consultation with Birdy, selected two of the most expensive suits: a blue serge single-breasted and a gray double-breasted. Then he bought a gray felt hat at twelve dollars, a small sailor at eight, and a panama at eighteen.

"Well," said Blue, "I guess you guys got about as much of my jack as you're gonna get."

"How about shoes?" Al put in.

"By God, I forgot," said Blue. "Hey, Birdy, I forgot shoes. Ain't that good? Look at this suitcase!"

He held up his foot. He was wearing big tan brogans, and there was a hole in the sole which went clear through the sock to the skin.

"Put your foot down, Blue," said Birdy. "Where you think you're at?"

Blue bought a pair of tan oxfords, a pair of black oxfords, and a pair of white and tan sport shoes.

"Now we're done," said Blue. "I guess I ought to look pretty Boul' Mich' now."

Al totaled up the bill. Birdy and the manager had a long conversation about the weather; and Blue stood before the triple mirror studying his profile.

Al hesitated before he told Blue the amount of the bill. He called for the manager to O.K. it, then he said:

"Cash or charge, sir?"

Blue took out his billfold which was stuffed with big bills.

"Cash," he said, "how much?"

"Four hundred and sixty-five dollars," said Al.

Blue gave him five one-hundred-dollar bills.

"Now," said Blue, "I want you to get that gray suit fixed up right away so's I can put it on. I'm gonna dress from the hide out, and you guys can throw my old duds in the sewer."

"Yes, sir," said Al. "I'll get our

tailor right away. We got a dressing-room on the second floor."

The cashier rang up the sale and gave the change to the manager.

"Are you going away for the summer?" asked the manager as he handed Blue his change.

"Yeah," said Blue; "me and the girl friend are gonna see New York. It'll be our first trip."

"That'll be nice," said the manager. "Are you in business for yourself?"

Blue glanced at Birdy, and she shook her head slightly.

"I'm in the oil business," said Blue. "I got some wells. I'm from Oklahoma."

"That's interesting," said the manager.

When they were leaving the café Blue took out his billfold and gave the doorman a five-dollar bill. The doorman's eyes popped but he managed to bow and smile.

"Yes, sir, yes, sir," he said. "Do you want a cab?"

"Yeah," said Blue, hanging on to Birdy who was drunker than he was.

"Yeah, you're damn right we want a cab," said Birdy. "Do we look like the kind of people that walk?"

"That's right," said Blue.

"Yes, sir," said the doorman, and he went out into the middle of the street and blew his whistle.

Before the taxi came a small sedan drew up at the curb across the street, and two men got out.

"There he is," said one of them, pointing at Blue.

"Hello, Guido," shouted Blue. "Look at me. Ain't I Boul' Mich'?"

Guido ran across the street, took Blue by the arm, shook him several times and said:

"You got to sober up, keed! Get it! You got to sober up. Somebody spilled something, see? Me and Bud's taking it on the lam. Saint Louie won't look bad to us."

"Yellow," said Blue.

"Sure," said Guido; "but I got a stake and I'm gonna spend some of it before I get bumped. Somebody wised Mike's boys up. They're looking for Pascal right now."

"What the hell!" said Blue, laughing. "Look at me, Guido. Ain't I Boul' Mich'? I got silk underwear under this suit. Look at Birdy."

"Look at me," said Birdy; "ain't I Boul' Mich'?"

"Say," said Guido, "you better ditch that tommy and put in with us. We got room in the heap."

"Not me," said Blue. "I ain't scairt of Mike Bova. I'll bump him next."

"All right," said Guido; "you'll have a swell funeral."

"Guido," called the other man, "let that bum go."

"So long, Blue," said Guido.

"So long," said Blue.

"Bye, bye, Guido," said Birdy.

Guido crossed the street, got into the driver's seat, slammed the door, and the sedan moved off. The taxi was waiting, and the doorman helped Birdy and Blue into it.

"Good-night, sir," said the doorman.

Birdy was lying on the lounge flat on her back with her hands under her head and an empty drinking glass sitting upright on her stomach. Blue, in his shirtsleeves, his collar wilted and his tie untied, was sitting at the table reading a crumpled newspaper. There were three-inch headlines.

BOVA'S LIEUTENANT KILLED
SHOT DOWN AS HE LEFT
HIS OFFICE BY GUNMEN

"You hear me!" said Blue. "Funniest thing ever pulled. There I was waiting in a room across the street trying to read a magazine, and Pascal was sitting with his head against the wall sleeping. 'Christ,' I says, 'there's Pete now.' He was coming out of his office. We wasn't looking for him for two hours yet. So I jist set there. Hell, I couldn't move, see, 'cause he come sudden, see, and I was figuring he wouldn't be out for two hours yet. 'Pascal,' I says, 'there's Pete now.' But Pascal he jist opens his eyes like a fish and don't say nothing. Pete he stops and looks right up at the window where I'm sitting, see, and I wonder does this guy know something. Hell, I couldn't move. I wasn't ready, see? Well, so Pascal he slips and falls over and hits his head. This makes me laugh but still I couldn't move my trigger finger. Pete he holds out his hand like he's looking for rain, then I let him have it. I don't know. It was funny. I jist let him have it without knowing it, see, and before, I couldn't pull that trigger when I wanted to. When the old Thompson starts to bark, Pascal gets up and yells, 'What you smoking for, you bum? It ain't time yet.' Then he looks out the window and there's Pete on the sidewalk dead as yesterday's newspaper and an old woman is pointing up at us. We ditch the gun and beat it down the back stairs. That's all there was to it. There wasn't nobody in the alley, see, so we jist walked along slow, and pretty soon we come to a drugstore and went in to get some cigs 'cause we smoked all ours waiting for that guy to come out."

"Pour me a little drink, honey," said Birdy.

Blue got up, took a big flask out of his hip pocket, and poured Birdy another drink. Then he sat down, took out his billfold and extracted a couple of railroad tickets.

"Look at them, old kid," he said. "When we ride, we ride. Twentieth Century to New York. That's us, kid; and won't we give 'em a treat over in Brooklyn! Say, them Easterners think we're still shooting Indians. Hell, Chi makes that place look like a Y. M. C. A. Yeah, I used to know Ruby Welch, and he was big stuff from Brooklyn; but what did he do when Guido started gunning for him? He got himself put in the can as a vag. Yeah, we ought to go big over in New York, kid. What they need over there is guts. We can give 'em that, kid. When somebody needs somebody for the No. 1 caper, Blue's the guy for the job. I was born with a rod in my cradle and I'm the best there is. Yeah, when the Big Boy

wanted Pete bumped who did he call on first? Old Blue, yes, sir, old Blue."

Blue got up, turned on the gramophone, and started to dance with a chair.

"Hey," he said, "come on, let's dance, Birdy. We're big shots now, Birdy; let's dance. Look at me! If I had my coat on I'd look like the Prince of Wales. Boul' Mich', kid; that's us; Boul' Mich'. We'll knock their eyes out on Fifth Avenue, kid; yes, sir. Let's dance."

"I'm getting sick," said Birdy.

Blue went over and looked down at her. Her face was pale and drawn; there were blue circles under her eyes.

"Getting sick, Birdy?"

"Yeah. I can't stand it like I used to when I was with The Madam. Put me to bed, honey."

Blue picked Birdy up and carried her into the bedroom. Birdy began to hiccough.

"Gimme glass of water," she said.

"You don't want water," Blue said; "you want a nice big slug."

"No, gimme glass of water."

She lay down on the bed and, before Blue could bring her a glass of water, she was asleep. He stood looking down at her, then he went back into the living room, took a long pull at his flask, and picked up the crumpled newspaper. But he had read the account of the killing of Big Pete so many times that he knew it by heart. He sat staring at the paper, then he threw it on the floor and sat rolling a cigarette between his palms.

It had begun to get light. He heard a milk wagon passing the house. He got up and went over to the window. The houses were still dark, and far off down the street a string of lighted elevated cars ran along the horizon, but the sky was gray and in the east some of the clouds were turning yellow. It was quiet. Blue began to notice how quiet it was.

"Birdy," he called.

But he heard her snoring, and turned back to the table.

The telephone rang, but when he answered it there was nobody on the line.

"What's the idea?" he said.

He sat down at the table, took out his billfold and counted his money; then he took out the railroad tickets and read everything printed on them. Again he noticed how quiet it was. He got up, put away his billfold, and went into the bedroom. Birdy was sleeping with her mouth open, flat on her back, with her arms spread out. Blue lay down beside her and tried to sleep, but he turned from side to side, and finally gave it up.

"I don't feel like sleeping," he thought. "I'm all het up about going East on The Century. Here I am, old Blue, riding The Century dressed up like John Barrymore and with a swell frail. Yeah, that's me. Boul' Mich' Blue."

He got up, put on his coat, and began to pose in front of the living-room mirror.

"Boul' Mich' Blue," he said.

Finally he sat down at the table and laid out a game of solitaire; but he had so many bad breaks with the cards that he began to cheat and then lost interest in the game.

"I know," he said, "what I need is food."

He got up and went to the refrigerator, but there wasn't anything in it except a few pieces of cold meat.

"Hell!" he said, "I guess I'll have to go down to Charley's."

He put on his new soft hat, but hesitated. If they was looking for Pascal, they was looking for him, too. Right now there wasn't nobody on the streets and it was a good time to bump a guy.

"Hell!" he said, buttoning his coat, "I got a streak of luck. It'll hold. Boul' Mich' Blue'll be on The Century tomorrow. Yeah bo! I ain't scairt of no Mike Bova."

When Blue came out of the apartment house the sun was just coming up. The alleys and areaways were still dark, but there was a pale yellow radiance in the streets. There was no one about; no sign of life. Not even a parked car.

"Hell!" said Blue; "safe as a tank-town."

A window across the street was raised, and Blue ducked without meaning to; but a fat woman put her head out of the window and stared into the street.

There was nobody in Charley's, not even a waiter. Behind the counter the big nickel coffee urns were sending up steam. Blue took out a fifty-cent piece and flung it on the counter. Wing, the counterman, looked in from the kitchen.

"Come on, Wing," said Blue, "snap it up."

"Didn't know you, kid," said Wing. "Ain't you dressed up, though? Must've struck it."

"I sure did," said Blue. "Give me a combination and some of that muddy water."

"Muddy water, hell," said Wing. "I jist made that Java."

Blue leaned on the counter and stared at himself in the mirror, while Wing went back to make his sandwich.

"Hey, Wing," Blue shouted, "did you know I was going East on The Century?"

"Are, hunh?" Wing shouted back. "You're on the big time now, ain't you, kid?"

"That's the word," said Blue.

Blue turned to look out into the street. He saw a man passing, and stared at him. The man was small and had a slouch hat pulled down over his face. Blue thought he recognized him and slid his gun out of the holster under his armpit and put it in his coat pocket. The man passed without looking in.

"I got the jumps," said Blue. "It's that rotten gin."

Wing came in with the sandwich, drew Blue a cup of coffee, then leaned his elbows on the counter and watched Blue eat.

"Well," said Wing, "I see where they got Big Pete."

"Yeah," said Blue.

"I knew they was gonna," said Wing. "I got inside dope."

"Yeah?" said Blue.

"It was coming to him."

"Yeah."

Blue finished his sandwich, lighted a cigarette, and sipped his coffee. It was broad daylight now, and trucks had begun to pass the restaurant.

"Going East, are you, kid?" said Wing.

"Yeah," said Blue. "I got in on a big cut and I don't have to worry none for some time. I jist took my dame down and dressed her up this afternoon. Is she hot? Me, I got silk underwear on."

He unbuttoned his shirt and showed Wing his lavender underwear.

"You're sure a dressed-up boy," said Wing. "I bet you paid ten bucks for that hat you got on."

"Twelve," said Blue. "It was the best they had. I paid eighteen for a panama. You like this suit?"

"It's red hot," said Wing; then with a twinge of envy, "If I wasn't going straight maybe I could wear rags like that."

"How long's your parole got to run?"

"Plenty long. And I got the dicks down on me. They thought I'd stool for 'em in this ward. But that ain't my way."

"Why don't you make a break for Canada?"

"Yeah," said Wing, "and get jerked back to stir."

Blue finished his coffee, paid his check, and gave Wing a dollar bill. Wing turned the bill over and over.

"Say," he said, "give me another buck and I'll put you on to something hot at Arlington."

Blue laughed and tossed Wing a silver dollar.

"Never mind the tip," he said. "I know lots of better ways to lose my dough. Why don't you lay off the ponies, Wing? You can't beat that racket."

"I got the itch," said Wing.

Blue looked into the mirror and adjusted his hat to the proper angle.

"Well," he said, "I'm leaving you. I'll send you a postcard from the Big Burg, Wing."

But Blue noticed that Wing had begun to get nervous; his face was twitching.

"Blue," said Wing, "for Christ's sake watch your step. I'm telling you straight, kid. One of Mike's boys was in here buzzing me about you jist 'fore she began to get light. I'm telling you straight, kid. It ain't my fight and I wasn't gonna peep. But you're a right guy, Blue."

Blue rubbed his hand over his face, then he said:

"It was The Wolf. I seen him go past."

"Yeah," said Wing.

"Jesus!" said Blue, "which way'd I better go?"

"I'd put you upstairs . . ." Wing began.

"No use," said Blue. "The Wolf seen me."

Wing drew himself a cup of coffee and drank it at a gulp.

"If they knew I'd peeped they'd bump me sure," said Wing.

Blue stood staring at the counter, then he pulled his hat down over his eyes, and slipped his right hand into the pocket where the gun was.

"Well," he said, "the alley's no good. It's blind my way. The side street won't get me no place. So all I got's the front way. Hell!" he went on, puffing out his chest, "I got a streak of luck, Wing. It'll hold."

Wing drew himself another coffee.

"Here's hoping," he said.

Blue went to the door and, putting his head out a little way, looked up and down. The street was deserted except for a truck which was coming toward him slowly. It was a Standard Oil truck.

"Wing," he said, "has any of Mike's boys got a hide-out anywhere around here?"

"Don't know of none."

"Well," said Blue, "here I go."

"So long," said Wing.

Blue stepped out of the restaurant, threw his shoulders back, and began to walk slowly toward Birdy's apartment. The Standard Oil truck passed him and went on. The street was quiet. At the end of the street he saw an elevated on its way toward the Loop.

"I wish I was on that baby," he said.

But the nearer he got to the apartment the surer he became that his luck would hold. Hell! it was the first break he'd had since he and Guido hijacked that big Detroit shipment. He had tickets on The Century. When a guy has tickets on The Century he uses them. And that wasn't all. He was a big shot now; the Big Boy had promised him a bonus; he had on silk underwear.

"Hell!" said Blue, "it ain't in the cards."

Across from Birdy's apartment he saw the same fat woman leaning out of the window. When he looked up she drew her head in hastily. Blue made a dash for the door, but across the street a Thompson gun began to spit. Blue stumbled, dropped his gun, and ran blindly out into the middle of the street; then he turned and ran blindly back toward the house. An iron fence caught him just below the belt and he doubled over it. Across the street a window was slammed.

Every once in a while we have "title trouble" — and we bring these periodic attacks on ourselves. . . . For example: the new Department of Dead Ends story you are about to read came to us bearing the author's own title, "The Case of the Social Climber." Now, what in the world is wrong with that title? In all honesty, not a blessed thing. Yet we were not satisfied. We read the story, we paused and we pondered, we cerebrated and we mentalized, and finally we changed the title to "The Murder Near Buckingham Palace." At first flush that sounded unusually attractive. Then we reconsidered: the word "near" — it was a typically Queenish quibble; the words "Buckingham Palace" — they were snobbish subterfuge to achieve a grand effect, and the more we thought about it, the wrong effect. So we crossed out the new title and ruminated and cogitated some more. And then we got a staggering inspiration! Why not call the story "The Declaration-of-Independence Murder Case"? Now, that was something! It had scope, it had significance, it had sensationalism. It hit one smack between the eyes. It was — oh, well, in the end we came right back to Roy Vickers's original title. And now we have the uneasy feeling that there's a moral in all this — if we only had the perspicacity to see it.

THE CASE OF THE SOCIAL CLIMBER

by ROY VICKERS

In England, on the rare occasions when the present Lord Haddenham figures in the social news — and often when he does not — people will hash up the murder of the young man's father in 1935. Some will tell you that Stentoller, the wealthy banker, was really innocent — that the gold snuff-box, inscribed with the Royal Arms, was planted on an already dead body. They would have you believe that Stentoller's confession and subsequent execution were part of a plot to deceive the public.

The objective facts were few and simple. On a Spring evening, Lord Haddenham was crossing the Green Park on foot. He was on a tree-lined path, some three hundred yards from Buckingham Palace, when he was stabbed in the throat. There was no robbery from the person. After a few false scents, the trail petered out.

A year later, the Department of Dead Ends stumbled on evidence which convicted Stentoller, the head of a century-old financial house of unblemished reputation. Add that Haddenham's son had become engaged to Stentoller's daughter, to the satisfaction of both parents, whose friendship dated from their school-

days — and you will see why the public was puzzled.

The talk outlasted the First World War. Over drinks, the locale of the murder tended to shift ever nearer to Buckingham Palace. "Practically in the Palace Yard and almost under the very nose of the sentry who, you can bet, had been told to see nothing!" Names of various foreign royalties were whispered. If Stentoller had defended himself in court, the war would have started in 1936 — for reasons, however, that would have astonished Hitler.

And so on.

The fact that the Prosecution put forward no motive for the murder made the public suspect that there was something behind it. And so there was, of course. Something fundamental. But there was no mystery that could have made the front page — no foreign royalties or secret women or this-that-and-the-other. Indeed, the clue to the mystery — if such it can be called — might be sought in the American Declaration of Independence — in the passage touching the equality of man. Or in the quaint ceremony by which, at the boundary of the original City of London, the Sovereign surrenders his sword to the Lord Mayor as a reminder that the King may not enter the City under arms save at the invitation of the citizens.

But at the tragic moment of the murder, Stentoller was thinking of a check for a thousand pounds which he had given Haddenham thirty years previously when they were undergraduates at Oxford.

Oxford, preceded by four important years at Charchester School, represented a revolutionary change in the Stentoller tradition. Stentoller I was a trusted agent of the Rothschilds at the time of the Napoleonic wars. When Rothschild accepted ennoblement the friendship terminated, because Stentoller felt that the old City families, being a kind of aristocracy in their own right, should hold aloof from the nobility. In the eighteen fifties, Stentoller III became Lord Mayor of London and was deeply offended when Queen Victoria offered him a baronetcy. Stentoller IV decided that this attitude was no longer tenable. In the late nineties, therefore, young Cuthbert Stentoller was sent to Charchester with instructions to fit himself to occupy a prominent place in Society.

In the City family tradition, in so far as it still survived, the children "lived soft." At thirteen, that highly intelligent but inexperienced boy left the stately eighteenth-century mansion, left his home tutors and his personal servant, for the bear-pit of a public school — which in England means a special kind of private school.

In his first year he learned — like the other younger sons of the nobility and gentry — the rudiments of cookery, how to clean out somebody else's study, how to whiten somebody else's buckskin cricket boots, how to endure injustice without making a song about

it. He was comparatively ill-fed and ill-housed. He discovered that quite a number of elder boys had authority to beat him publicly for slackness at games and whatnot. In short, though he suffered no individual bullying, the system subjected his person to an indignity which, if it had been authoritatively applied to the son of a laborer, would have provoked something akin to civil war.

He made a personal friend of Charles Hendon, his "avunculus" — that is, a boy senior by one year, appointed to guide a new boy through his maze of duties.

"I say, Stentoller! My mater's coming down on Saturday. You can come along if you like. She'll give us a blowout at the Angel."

"Thank you, Hendon." Stentoller had not yet learned to keep formality in its proper place. "Shall I join you and Mrs. Hendon at the Angel?"

"No. We'll both meet her at the station. And I say, mind you don't call her 'Mrs. Hendon'. My guvnor's called Lord Haddenham and she's called Lady Haddenham. Come on. We've got to help roll Lower Green."

Lady Haddenham perceived that Cuthbert Stentoller was more intelligent and more sensitive than the normal young public school tough. When Stentoller temporarily absented himself she asked her son:

"I like Stentoller. Who is he?"

"I dunno, Mother. I'll ask him when he comes back."

"Don't be silly, Charles. That would be an abominable thing to do."

Stentoller had overheard. When the boys were returning together he asked: "What did your Mater mean when she asked you who I was. She got my name right."

"You're not supposed to ask questions like that," said Hendon, then relented. "She meant who was your mother before she married your father. Women are always totting up people's relations."

Stentoller was puzzled. His mother never totted up people's relations. He was an undergraduate before he understood what Lady Haddenham had really wanted to know, and he acquired the understanding with literal tears of humiliation.

In the intervening years he had learned a good deal — notably that the fashion papers wrote of a world that anyone could enter who had conventional manners, a respectable record, and a sufficiency of money — that the power and influence of this crowd was virtually limited to the racecourse and to the tradesmen of the West End. True that it was besprinkled with high sounding titles — but he had discovered, even in Charchester days, that a title was no index of a man's position. Through his friend, Charles Hendon, he had glimpsed the existence of an inner core, and was surprised to learn that his own father knew much about it.

"Winning the Derby and that sort of thing wouldn't get you anywhere with the real people. We have been doing business with them for generations and know something about

them. Now and again they enter the political Government — the Cecils, the Churchills, and a few others. But mostly they confine themselves to the Administration. Their influence is paramount in the Navy, the Army, the Civil Service and the Diplomatic Corps. They trust our firm, in their own way, which is not the way of the City. That is why I think they might admit you to their circle."

His father had told him too much or too little. Possibly his father had never heard of the Radlington Club — the small social club of "the real people" — the inner core — at Oxford. Hendon, of course, was a member. Stentoller at first hoped and then intended to become one. His first academic year went by without result, then his second. He was personally popular, and was well-known through his rendering of the part of Laertes in the Dramatic Society. For the dueling scene he had studied fencing seriously, thereby acquiring a skill which was to be the means of destroying two valuable lives.

The Radlington incident occurred in his second year, which was Hendon's third. Lord Haddenham had recently died. The eldest son had gone straight from Eton into the Army and had been killed in the South African War, so Charles Hendon inherited the earldom and estate, heavily encumbered by death duties.

Hendon had contrived that they should have the same tutor. One afternoon, when Stentoller entered the tutor's room, Hendon was saying:

"It's the death duties, of course. The Bank doesn't seem eager to let me have another thousand before things are straightened out, so I've decided I shall have to 'go down' at the end of this term. Hullo, here's Stentoller. Don't go, old man. We've finished."

That night Stentoller went to Hendon's rooms and found him alone.

"I heard what you said to Wallingham about your 'going down.'"

"That's all right. I don't mind in the least. Only, it's not for immediate publication. There's a Radlington dinner next Saturday, and I shall explain then that I'm going down for family reasons. It'll mean the Army for me instead of the Diplomatic — that's about all, really!"

"Hendon, let me lend you the thousand."

"I say, Stentoller!"

Stentoller was not certain how the other was taking it, felt his own heart thumping, and lurched on:

"If you're offended, you've got the wrong end of the stick. If you were to 'go down' because I hadn't the nerve to ask you to let me help —"

"I'm not *offended*, you dear old nanny-goat! You took my breath away. But I'll tell you what's sticking in my gizzard. If the Bank is shy, it probably means they know the estate won't be able to pay it back for the devil of a time."

"I don't want it paid back for the devil of a time."

"Don't you! Oh, well, then it's all right, and thanks most awfully! And

I needn't say anything at the Radder dinner."

Stentoller took out his check book. *Pay* — he nearly wrote "Charles Hendon" — *Pay Lord Haddenham One Thousand Pounds. Cuthbert Stentoller.*

He handed the check to his friend.

"Thanks! The Bank'll throw a fit tomorrow and serve 'em right!"

"I say, Hendon." In those days, young men rarely used first names unless they were related. "How does one get into the Radlington?"

"Oh, I dunno! When you come 'up,' somebody you know asks you if you'd like to be a member, and the other members know you, or your relations have told 'em to look out for you, and the secretary sends you a chit."

Stentoller waited. But there was no more about the Radlington Club. *Pay Lord Haddenham One Thousand Pounds* — for nothing at all! Relations again. Back six years. "Women are always totting up people's relations."

Not only women, apparently.

Back in his own rooms, Stentoller wrote to his father, asking him to instruct the Bank to honor the check, giving his reason. Almost as soon as he had posted the letter, a messenger brought him a note in Haddenham's handwriting:

Dear Stentoller. It was wonderfully kind of you to give me that check, and it is impossible to tell you how deeply this act of yours has affected me. All the same, I feel on reflection that I must let events take their own course. So I am returning your check herewith. Yours ever, Charles Hendon.

"God, what a fool I am!" Stentoller buried his face in his hands.

In that first ghastly year at Charchester his courage had been sustained, his path smoothed, by Hendon. Hendon had been waiting with a welcome at Oxford and had opened many doors. He had given and accepted favors. The friendship was genuine beyond doubt.

I like Stentoller. Who is he?

Hendon was his friend. Yet sooner than propose him for membership of the Radlington, Hendon had thrown up his career.

The next morning, he went to London to tell his father why he no longer wanted the thousand.

"That's where their strength lies," said his father. "The individual is always ready to efface himself to avoid imperiling the others."

"The peril to the others being my membership in the club?"

They were in the study, a room that could seat thirty without discomfort. On a vast chimney piece stood an ormolu clock under a glass dome, a Chippendale writing table, chairs, cabinets — selections of Stentoller I.

"Not your membership in the club, but his perception that you wanted something in return for your loan, which touched his relationship with the others. But, my dear boy, it's a storm in a teacup. It won't even affect your friend's career. The Bank have approached us on his behalf. We have dealt with the family before, and we

shall give the Bank a guarantee."

"I don't understand, Father. We aren't literal moneylenders, are we? And if the Bank won't touch it —"

"Come here, Cuthbert." He opened a showcase and took out a gold snuff-box inscribed with the Royal Arms on one side and the Haddenham Arms on the other.

"A gift, of that profligate buffoon who was unfortunately George IV of England, to your friend's great grandfather. Haddenham had been commanded to borrow ten thousand pounds for one of George's disreputable little troubles. 'I will not lend the King a penny, because I don't trust him,' said *your* great grandfather, 'but I will gladly lend your Lordship that amount.' 'Your words touch the edge of treason, Mr. Stentoller,' said Haddenham. But I gather there was a twinkle in his eye, because he pulled out this snuff-box and added: 'I pledge the King's honor with the King's gift.'

"Well, the King had no honor, which meant that we paid ten thousand for this snuff-box. But we had helped Haddenham out of a difficulty, and he told his crowd all about it. A year later we were commissioned to underwrite a Colonial loan of ten millions — and made a hundred thousand out of it in a few days. Ever since then, business of that kind tended to drift to us without effort on our part. We have probably made a couple of millions out of that snuff-box."

At Oxford the following evening, Haddenham burst into Stentoller's room.

"I say, Stentoller! Perfectly splendid news! I know you'll be pleased! I needn't say anything at the Radder dinner after all. Apparently, that bank manager was getting over a thick night when he was so gloomy about those death duties. . . ."

There was a joyous fantasy on the habits of bank managers. But, again, there was nothing more about the Radlington Club.

Cuthbert Stentoller's marriage to the daughter of one of the youngest High Court judges neither advanced nor retarded his progress to the inner core, which did not concern itself with the judiciary. For the next ten years he absorbed himself in business and family life, while keeping his eyes open. One year, to please his wife, he was seen in the Royal enclosure at the Ascot races.

As his father had warned him, this was a waste of energy. The inner core would attend Levees, Drawing Rooms, and State ceremonies, but had no interest in the fashion paper aspect of Royalty, which to them was purely an Office of State. Without leaders, without tangible organization, without policy except the preservation of Britain, they held aloof from domestic politics, ignored elections but subtly coiled themselves round Governments in being.

He discovered that the equivalent of the Radlington was the Terracotta Club, housed in a rather dingy building off Whitehall. The fashionable world of spenders had scarcely heard

of it and none had ever entered it, for it admitted no guests. But the Chancelleries of Europe knew all about it.

Stentoller intended to become a member. This time he would make no mistakes. He reckoned that it might take him twenty years to procure an invitation to join. Actually, it took twenty-three years of strenuous and successful living, unobtrusively observed and as unobtrusively approved by the inner core.

On the death of his father, he had sold the family mansion on the fringe of the City, and transferred the furniture to a modern house, with a hundred acres of land, in the Surrey Hills. He sold a corner of this to Weslake, a young baronet, who was a member of the Terracotta. He also arranged for the building of a house for him. But he did not ask how one became a member of the Terracotta Club, because he knew.

Haddenham, who had gone into the Diplomatic Service and was nearly always abroad, kept the friendship in being and never missed seeing him when on leave. He had married about the same time. His wife had enough money for them to live without anxiety, but not enough to keep up Haddenham Castle, which was let on long lease.

"It would be an odd twist," remarked Stentoller at one of their reunion dinners, "if your youngster and mine were to take a fancy to each other later on."

"Yes, rather! Nothing I should like better!" returned Haddenham, but Stentoller knew that he did not mean it.

Yet it happened ten years later, after the youngsters had been thrown together during a fortnight's holiday on the Riviera. Stentoller had remained at home. His wife had barely told him her suspicions before Derek Hendon himself turned up.

"I say, sir! I want to marry Gwen. She said I must ask you. Is it okay?"

"For a budding diplomat, young man, your approach is somewhat direct," smiled Stentoller. "Adverting to your question, I have pleasure in announcing on behalf of her mother and myself that it is eminently — er — okay by us." A moment later he asked: "I take it you have consulted your father?"

"Consult him, sir? He won't need consulting. He'll whoop, when he gets my cable tomorrow."

Events in the life of Cuthbert Stentoller began to gallop. After dinner, his neighbor, Weslake, turned up on his way home. When Derek Hendon had been congratulated, the two elders drifted to the study.

"They've dipped in the lucky bag and pulled me out for a Foreign Office job in Turkey," said Weslake. "That means a year out there, beginning on the twelfth. There's a Levee on the tenth, so I shall go by air. Had a sort of farewell lunch at the Terracotta. A lot of fellers you know were present." He named them and became so discursive that Stentoller's pulse quickened. Twenty-three years

he had awaited just this moment.

"I wonder, Stentoller, if you'd care to join the Terracotta? I'd be glad to put you up, and Thame would second you." Presently Weslake was explaining: "There's a committee meeting after the Levee on the tenth. I'm not on the committee, but Thame is. They'll probably write you the same day."

So it was a foregone conclusion! They had talked it over and agreed to accept him. Weslake was chattering about Turkey, in no hurry to go. The Terracotta at last! His marriage had staled after five years, and he was aware that his wife had hoped for a divorce; but she knew about the Terracotta, though he had never mentioned it. God, she was a good woman! Weslake was gaping at the showcase.

"A lot of interesting things you've got here, Stentoller. I suppose they all have a history."

"I'll show you something," said Stentoller, to break his own absorption in the Terracotta. He opened the case and took out the gold snuff-box.

"Is that the Haddenham snuff-box mentioned in Kyle's Life of George IV? — 'I pledge the King's honor on the King's gift?' But, of course, I see it is!"

"I shall celebrate Gwen's engagement by solemnly handing that to Haddenham next time I see him," said Stentoller — a flourish which, indirectly, hanged him.

Gwen was a willowy blonde, springy and vital, with her share of the Stentoller sternness behind a mask of modernity — nearly everything he had wanted her to be. He meant to say something impressive to her but funked it at the last moment.

"Rushing away from your aging parents at the first opportunity? Nasty bit o' work, darling."

"It's not the first opportunity! Daddy, you do like him, don't you!"

"Very much! But d'you think you're going to like stooging around one Embassy after another?"

"I shall love it. But I'm weak in Italian and German — get me a couple of good crammers, please. And when we're in England I wonder whether you'd let us have the cottage. Mother said the other day she wished you'd get rid of it."

Here was the chance to say something impressive.

"When you're in England I'll let you have Haddenham Castle."

"But you can't! There's a tenant there for years yet."

"I know. But I'm going to make friends with the tenant."

"But we shan't really need the castle till he's an ambassador." She looked up at him gravely. "Daddy, you aren't going berserk, are you?"

"I've been waiting all my life to go berserk. Now run off to bed, miss. I want to talk to your mother."

His wife had expected him and was pottering about her severe room.

"It's what you wanted, Cuthbert, isn't it!" Her smile was ambiguous. "I don't think he has said a word to his father. If Lady Haddenham

were alive she might have made difficulties. She was very old-fashioned."

They exchanged platitudes about the engagement. A stiff and pointless talk — irritating, too, because he had not come to talk about Gwen.

"Did you know, Hilda, that I — had a sort of idea once that I might join the Terracotta?"

"I've known for years." She caught her breath. "Weslake — in the study tonight? Did he —?"

"Yes. He's proposing, and Lord Thame is seconding. Thame is on the committee."

"Oh, Cuthbert, I am glad!" He had not guessed that she would take it like that. She was holding him, and he could tell from her voice that she was crying. "Then our marriage hasn't been — such an awful failure, after all — has it!"

If Haddenham did not whoop, he did send a cordial cable, followed by a letter saying he would be in London for the Levee on the tenth, and that they must dine at the Varsity, to which they both belonged, as did Weslake. In those days it had massive premises in a *cul-de-sac* off Piccadilly giving on to a slip-gate into the Green Park.

Haddenham had aged more than Stentoller. He had become a tubby little man, bald, with a long stringy throat. He had held ambassadorial rank for five years without being affected with pomposity, for he was as unimpressed with his own position as he was with that of any man. He had the air, typical of his caste, of amiable omnipotence, the air that could make kings and communists feel self-conscious and apologetic.

"I say, Stentoller!" He shook hands with something approaching genius. "D'you realize that, all being well, we're within measurable distance of being grandfathers! I still think of you as a rather grubby little fag trying to clean out Ellerson's study."

That was the keynote of their conversation during dinner. Stentoller steered from reminiscence to the dynamic present.

"I say, Hendon! Have you ever heard of your great-grandfather's snuff-box?"

"Rather! Brought up on the legend. 'Your words, Mr. Stentoller, touch the edge of treason' — By George, it never occurred to me that must mean you!"

"I have the snuff-box here," said Stentoller. "As our families are to be linked, I want you to take it back. I — dammit, I've left it in my overcoat! I'll go and get it."

"Thanks most awfully! But don't bother now, old man. When we go down will do. We've got to talk about the youngsters. I can't give Derek more than five hundred a year."

"Don't worry. I shall make a settlement on Gwen. In the meantime, I've bought the lease of Haddenham Castle and I shall give it to Derek for a wedding present."

"My dear old boy, you take my breath away! I never expected we'd be back in my lifetime. The young-

sters'll probably let me have the Chichester Wing when I retire."

"It'll make a foothold for them when they're in England."

"Ah, I was coming to that! I think that, in view of the very happy change in Derek's circumstances, he would be well advised to transfer to the Foreign Office — and be employed permanently at home — drop the Diplomatic branch altogether."

Stentoller felt himself bristling, for reasons he did not yet understand.

"Gwen will be disappointed, Hendon. She's looking forward to doing a round of the embassies. Means to make him an ambassador, like his father, eh!"

A minute twitch of the other's eyebrow reminded Stentoller that members of the inner core never acknowledge personal ambition. He had said the wrong thing.

"If she's looking forward to being the wife of a diplomat, it's because the dear girl doesn't know what she's letting herself in for. Nor does Derek, yet. The romance of it is pure nonsense. It's deadly dull for the first twenty years. And very parochial. You dovetail work and play inside a very small circle, who are nearly all your relations, or your wife's relations, or relations of relations."

So that was it! Relations again! But he was no longer an undergraduate to be frightened by the implications of that word. Anger was slowly mounting — checked by the chief steward approaching Haddenham.

"Telephone message from Colonel Wallingburn, my lord. Can you spare him half an hour?"

"Thanks. Don't call me a taxi — it's quicker to slip through the Park."

Stentoller knew, as well as the chief steward, that this was a summons to report at the Palace.

"I expect They want a first-hand account of that Bulgarian hullabaloo," said Haddenham, rising. "But Their half-an-hour means just thirty minutes. I'm coming back here to collect that snuff-box from you, if you're still here. Lord, what a day! Arrived by air at breakfast time. Reported to the Cabinet at ten; a Levee at eleven, followed by a stand-up lunch. And then a committee meeting at the Terracotta!"

Stentoller felt as if an ice block were pressing on his chest. But he managed to speak before the other had moved out of earshot.

"Did you sit at a committee meeting of the Terracotta this afternoon?"

Haddenham turned back. His face looked drawn — and sad — and he was groping for words.

"Stentoller, old man, I'm sorry — very sorry, indeed — that you did not consult me before letting Weslake and Thame propose you."

"Why, Hendon?"

"I must go — They mustn't be kept waiting. We'll talk when I come back."

Blackballed, obviously!

Control was in danger of slipping. He tried to will himself back to the moment before this moment of disaster — which his imagination was refusing

to accept. He told himself that the ambition of twenty years had been shattered. But he was actually thinking of Hilda clinging to him, crying with happiness because her faithfulness had been rewarded with his success. He did not see how he could live that down. For the first time he experienced the suicide impulse.

Suddenly all emotion left him. He felt cool, clear-headed, and determined in the pursuit of some purpose which was unknown to him.

He was certain that it was Haddenham himself who had blackballed him. Because long ago at Oxford he had tried to lever himself into the Radlington, thereby proving that he lacked the self-effacement required of the inner core.

"I must keep faith with Haddenham. Give him his snuff-box before I demand a showdown." He had always thought it a little ungentlemanly of his own great-grandfather to retain that snuff-box.

That dangerous mood would have passed without doing any material harm, had not the malignant fates chosen to thrust a sword into his hand — a sword, in all preposterous literality!

He could not breathe easily in the club. He could wait for Haddenham by the slip-gate into the Park. As he approached the cloakroom he heard the voice of Weslake protesting to the attendant.

"But what the dickens am I to do with it? I'm leaving the country by air at seven tomorrow. Oh, hullo, Stentoller! Look here — I changed here for the Levee and my man packed the sword under the straps of the Gladstone because it wouldn't go inside. And the railway people have sent it back because in law it's a lethal weapon. A dress sword a lethal weapon! It couldn't cut a loaf of bread, and the point is about as sharp as the point of an umbrella."

"Give it to me!" Stentoller spoke automatically out of the cold white haze. "I'll take it, and give it to Lady Weslake in the morning."

While Weslake was gratefully accepting, Stentoller reclaimed his coat. In the hall, he took the sword from Weslake. The belt, in girdle form, dangled awkwardly.

"I can slip that off and roll it up," said Weslake. "I don't know whether you've room for it in your overcoat?"

There was a book in one pocket and the gold snuff-box in the other. Stentoller transferred the snuff-box to the breast pocket.

"Oh! That's the Haddenham one, isn't it?"

"Yes. But Haddenham slipped off before I could give it to him."

Farewells and good wishes, while Stentoller wondered why Gwen's relations should prevent Derek from being a diplomat. But he knew the answer.

Gripping in mid-scabbard the sword of the Order of St. Severell at Antioch, supplied by the tailor who made the robes, he left the club, entered the Park by the slip-gate that gave on to the narrow tree-lined path.

What a lot of nonsense his father had talked about the inner core! They hadn't been able to stop the South African war. They had failed to handle the Kaiser in 1914, and now they were cold-shouldering Churchill and letting the Premier grovel to Hitler and Mussolini, to say nothing of the Japanese. The "real people" indeed! As if they were some special kind of human being! The Americans had taped them a hundred and fifty years ago. *We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal* — Nothing there about a man's relations —

"I say, Stentoller!" Haddenham's voice broke the interlude of reverie. "Aren't you cold waiting out here?"

"I've got your snuff-box. You said you would accept it."

" — thanks most awfully!" Haddenham put it in his pocket. "Shall we go back to the Club?"

"Charles, did you blackball me at the Terracotta?"

"You're not supposed to ask that sort of question. The voting is secret."

The moonlight illumined a scowl on Haddenham's face, illumined his long, stringy throat.

The point of the sword might be little sharper than that of an umbrella: indeed, the police thought at first that an umbrella had been used — one of the thin, expensive kind, having a steel shaft — by a man who had been taught how to put weight behind a lunge.

When Haddenham was dead, Stentoller wiped the blade on the bordering grass and returned it to its scabbard. He strode back through the slip-gate to the car park on the other side of Piccadilly.

When he arrived home, shortly after midnight, his wife and daughter had gone to bed. He took the sword to his room. He drew the blade, noticed that it was stiff in the scabbard. He held it to the light at arm's length. It was slightly bent. Better not try to correct it — it was a wonder the blade had not snapped. These tailor's blades were made of some inferior alloy, plated over. Although it appeared to be clean, he rinsed and dried it.

"If anyone saw me, there is nothing to be done. If no one saw me there is no reason why I should be suspected."

As is characteristic of murderers who are not of the criminal classes, he took an individual view of the morality of his act. He did not pretend that the murder could be justified. But he seemed to himself more sinned against than sinning. For thirty years Haddenham had amused himself by pretending friendship with a man he despised — and despised for no ethical reason. He blamed Haddenham for the murder as a man will blame a too attractive wanton for his own debauchery.

While he was dressing on the following morning, Gwen came to his room. She thrust a paper at him — the *Record* — not trusting herself to speak. He was not taken by surprise. There was skillful restraint in his re-

ception of the news. But the sympathy he expressed was genuine. It would mean that the wedding must be postponed. He hated Haddenham afresh for making Gwen so miserable.

When she had gone, he skimmed the account in the *Record.*

It can be stated that robbery was not the motive. In deceased's pockets were some thirty pounds — to say nothing of a gold watch and chain and a valuable gold snuff-box.

That snuff-box! Stentoller had forgotten all about it.

"That's all right. I shall say I gave it to him over dinner," ran his thoughts.

His eye fell on the sword of the Order of St. Severell of Antioch, standing in the corner, the coiled girdle on the floor beside it.

"Weslake saw me take the snuff-box out of my pocket. He remarked on it, and I told him that Haddenham had left the Club. Weslake will prove that I saw Haddenham after he left the Palace. And that means I shall be hanged."

Weslake was at that moment in the air. But copies of *The Times* were probably in the aircraft with him, on their way, like himself, to the Embassy.

Over breakfast he looked at *The Times.* It gave headlines but did not indulge in speculations nor wallow in the details, like the *Record.* It stated merely that there had been no robbery from the person. Papers like the *Record* did not penetrate to Embassies. That meant there was a reasonable possibility that Weslake's attention would never be directed to the snuff-box.

After breakfast, he took the sword to Lady Weslake, as he had promised.

"Yes, it's terrible about Haddenham." he agreed. "I was dining with him at the Varsity. He was called away only a few minutes before I ran into your husband."

When he reached his office, he found waiting for him a junior detective from Scotland Yard.

"We understand, sir, that you had dinner with Lord Haddenham last night at the Varsity Club. Was anything said which you think might help us in our investigation?"

"Nothing at all, I'm afraid. Our conversation was purely personal. We had been friends since boyhood. Lord Haddenham's son and my daughter had just become engaged, and we were discussing family plans."

The young detective glanced at the list of questions he had been instructed to ask. The next was the time at which they parted company.

"Somewhere about ten-thirty — I'm not sure of the exact time," answered Stentoller. "But you can check that. He was with me until he received a telephone message from the Palace. The Palace officials will tell you what time they telephoned the club. The chief steward delivered the message himself. I left the club shortly afterwards."

Everything he said was carefully written down.

"There's only one more question,

Mr. Stentoller. Can you tell us definitely whether Lord Haddenham was in the habit of taking snuff?"

"I can tell you that he was not." Stentoller smiled benignly. "Then why that enormous gold snuff-box, eh? I can clear up that mystery for you. I gave it to him myself over dinner, although it was already in a sense his — you'll find it has his crest on it as well as the Royal crest." He told the story of the snuff-box in full — gave the reference to Kyle's Life of George IV — so that the Yard should mark it as accounted for.

Then came the newspapermen. He gave them the same account, except that he made no reference to the snuff-box, which thereafter received no publicity, as the Yard had made clear that there was nothing pinned on to it.

At home a letter was waiting for him from Lord Thame:

Dear Stentoller, I am very sorry. I have resigned from the Terracotta — I may say, in a state of deep mystification. Yours sincerely, Thame.

Four days later came an air mail letter from Weslake.

Dear Stentoller, I can't think what the devil happened at the Terracotta. Nor can Thame. I have, of course, resigned. Haddenham's death is a shock. I read it in The Times, going over. It must have happened almost while you and I were talking — and within a couple of hundred yards of us. I was very sorry for Gwen and Derek, as it will mean postponement. Yours ever, Reginald Weslake.

That meant that Weslake had no suspicion. The chance of the snuff-box being mentioned at the inquest or anywhere else was practically non-existent.

He received another visit from the police, who were checking on all members of the Varsity Club. Stentoller confirmed that he had left the Club about half-past ten, gone straight to the car park and driven home.

The doorkeeper at the Palace had recorded that Lord Haddenham had left at ten-forty. As Haddenham had mentioned to Colonel Wallingburn that he was going back to the Varsity Club, the murder could be timed at approximately a quarter to eleven. If Stentoller had not in fact gone straight to the car park he might have committed the murder. But so might a dozen other members who left the club about that time. As no shadow of a motive could be found against anybody, nor any clue pointing anywhere, the Yard had to advance the theory of a foreign political fanatic. In six months the log of the case drifted to the Department of Dead Ends.

The wedding was postponed for a year, actually for fourteen months, as Derek, now Lord Haddenham, remained in the Diplomatic Service and had to fit it in with his leaves. Gwen became virtually bi-lingual in German and Italian, and Stentoller resumed his normal life.

He avoided the ordeal of telling Hilda that he had been blackballed.

There was never any publicity or chatter about the Terracotta, so he decided that she need never know. Moreover, his orientation was now somewhat different. Under his guidance the firm had gained even greater strength. He was no longer concerned to be numbered among the inner core. When the youngsters were settled he intended to sell out and retire. The traditions of the house of Stentoller now seemed as hollow as the traditions of the inner core.

Weslake had returned from Turkey. He had called at the first opportunity, had been very friendly but had not mentioned the Terracotta incident, nor anything else of an inconvenient nature.

Hilda took over the entire arrangements for the wedding. On the following day they were going for a quiet fortnight together. "A silver honeymoon," she had called it, with generous courage.

On a bright day in June the youngsters were married from Stentoller's house, which looked over the wooded hills and green valleys of Surrey. The reception flowed from the house to the garden. The inner core was sufficiently represented, and somehow or other there was a cross-section of the fashion-paper world. Had he been a mere snob, Stentoller would have regarded that reception as the seal of a successful social career.

Gwen and her husband were receiving their congratulations in the hall at the foot of the double staircase, with Hilda and himself in support. In the dining-room, behind him on his right, the presents were laid out. He must remember to go and look at them.

"Reggie doubts whether he'll be able to make it," Lady Weslake was saying. "He simply had to go to a conference this morning. But he'll come if he can."

A pity if he didn't turn up. Gwen had made him an unofficial uncle and liked teasing him. She would miss him on her wedding day. His thoughts roved. Children, even Gwen, had no tact with their parents. If she had any regrets at leaving him she hadn't shown them. Now and again fragments of conversation in the dining-room reached his ears.

"George IV gave it to Haddenham. And the original Stentoller had something to do with it. I know the King's honor comes into it somehow — look, there's the Royal crest."

That snuff-box! Stentoller blinked. What on earth was it doing among the wedding presents? He slipped into the dining-room.

There it was on a little table set apart which had a card slipped in a menu holder saying: *Traditional Presents originated by the Second Earl of Haddenham, A.D. 1720.* There was a necklace, a jeweled dagger, a Bible — never mind those things! — the snuff-box had a ticket to itself: *Gift of George IV to Fifth Earl: Mortgaged to Albert Stentoller, 1825: Restored to Eighth Earl by Cuthbert Stentoller, 1935.*

Derek was the ninth Earl.

There was nothing to worry about. The police knew — and no doubt any other person — that he had given it to the "eighth earl" over dinner. Only Weslake knew that he could not possibly have given Haddenham the snuff-box over dinner. And Weslake might turn up later.

Obviously, Weslake had forgotten the snuff-box incident in the hall of the Varsity Club. But the sight of the box itself might awaken memory.

Better not risk it.

Covering his movements with a certain neatness, he removed both snuff-box and ticket. He scrunched up the ticket and put it in his trousers pocket. The snuff-box could just be concealed in his hand. He rejoined Hilda, and presently slipped the snuff-box into his tail pocket. Fresh arrivals were still queueing in the hall. Greeting them was automatic — one could make the same remarks to each.

Suddenly Hilda was speaking to him in an urgent undertone:

"Cuthbert! That man with his back to us in the dining-room doorway is a detective. Scotland Yard insisted on sending them to guard the presents, though I told them it was absurd. He says someone has stolen the Haddenham snuff-box. I said he mustn't make a fuss and that you'd speak to him. Shut them up at all costs."

Shut them up at all costs. Quite! But would they consent to be shut up? He signed to the detective to follow him into the little morning-room which was not in use.

"I tell you what I think has happened," said Stentoller. "Someone has picked it up to talk about it to someone else. It'll be back in its place again presently."

The detective was unresponsive.

"When you were at that table about ten minutes ago, Mr. Stentoller, was it there then? We can't keep our eye on every item all the time."

"I didn't notice. But I do suggest that you adopt my theory. Intrinsically, the thing is doubtfully worth a tenner. And besides, you can't very well strip everybody — and I don't see that anything short of that would be any good."

"We have ways of getting over that difficulty." To Stentoller the words sounded ominous. The detective added: "Funny thing — the thief has taken the ticket as well, saying what its history was."

When the detective had left the room, Stentoller concealed the snuff-box behind the radiator. Then he burnt the descriptive ticket, holding it so that the ashes would drop into a bowl of flowers.

When he rejoined Hilda, he had a fresh shock.

"One of those wretched detectives," she whispered, "has gone upstairs. They must mean to search the house."

"I'll keep a tab on them," he said. He went back to the morning-room and reclaimed the snuff-box. That snuff-box must not be found until the reception was over. He went into the garden, made his way to the lily pond,

stopping several times on the way to exchange pleasantries.

The lily pond, with fountain and gold fish, was part of a small Dutch garden, sunk out of sight of the house. Choosing his moment, he bent down and slithered the snuff-box under a water lily, carefully noting the position of the lily. When he returned to the house Gwen slipped her arm through his.

"In two hours, we shall be gone. I'm terribly sorry-glad — you know that, Daddy, don't you!" Bless her heart for saying that! She prattled on: "We've had a huge telegram from Sir Reginald, saying he can't turn up, and full of awfully good good-wishes."

So Weslake wasn't coming after all! Stentoller felt slightly indignant that circumstances had made a fool of him.

After dinner that night he went alone to the lily pond. He identified the lily, took off his dinner jacket and stripped to the waist. The pond was nearly two feet deep.

He groped and found nothing. In ten minutes he realized he was stirring up masses of mud to no purpose. The job would have to be tackled properly in daylight, with rakes and the rest of it. It could wait until after the "silver honeymoon." Derek, on his honeymoon, would not be worrying about his heirlooms.

While Stentoller was holidaying with his wife on a Swiss lake, his gardener, working on the lily pond, found the snuff-box which he promptly handed to the housekeeper, who locked it up, pending her employer's return. That night the gardener talked about it in the village saloon — which meant that the local constable got to hear about it. Two days later, by an obvious chain of events, Scotland Yard demanded temporary custody of the snuff-box.

It is characteristic of the Department of Dead Ends that Detective Rason received a carbon of the report solely because the name of Haddenham figured in it. Whenever some incident echoed on one of his filed cases Rason would produce some fantastic wild-goose theory, but this time he was stumped.

Someone had stolen a valuable snuff-box. Subsequently fearing detection, he had dumped it. No clear line to the murder of Lord Haddenham fourteen months previously! Annoyed with himself, he re-read the log of the murder, then re-read the report of the theft.

The ticket containing a historic note was also removed.

"Historic note! That must be the bit about the King being a crook. Wonder the old boy wasn't bow-and-arrowed at dawn! Now, there's some sense in stealing a gold snuff-box, if you're that sort. But there's no sense in stealing its ticket. Therefore the thief was crackers — which doesn't help.

"Turn it upside down, then. The thief was a wise guy. That means he stole the ticket because he didn't want people to read it. But a lot of the guests must have read it already. That

means he didn't want some particular person to read it. Someone who hadn't read it already. If that's right, he was stealing the box for the same reason. Box and ticket. He didn't want someone to see either of them."

Back to the log of the murder. The snuff-box, most exasperatingly, proved nothing either way. Mr. Stentoller had given it to the deceased over dinner. It wouldn't have affected the murder if he hadn't given it to him at all.

"Never mind the thief. Try the fellow the thief had in mind. Somebody is to come into the room — a fairly late arrival — see that snuff box, or the ticket without the box, and say: 'Ah, a snuff-box! And a gift of George IV too, by Gad! That settles it. *Now* we know who killed Haddenham.' " Rason stroked his hair. "That sort of thing always happens when I do a spot of deduction."

Halfway through lunch he made some sense of it.

"Somebody, seeing that snuff-box on that table, would say: 'Its presence here upsets some statement made at the time of the murder about the snuff-box'. The only person who made any statement about the snuff-box at the time of the murder was Stentoller.

"That makes Stentoller the murderer. He's one of the thirteen who might have done it, according to the times they left the Club. He stabs Haddenham with his umbrella — then stuffs the snuff-box in his pocket — so as I can catch him out telling a lie!"

Rason was following a formula he has often found useful. Test an absurdity and you may stumble on a truth.

He went to the Varsity Club and interviewed the cloakroom attendant, to whom he handed a list of the thirteen members who had left at relevant times.

"I want you to try to remember whether any of these gentlemen was carrying an umbrella — one of those very thin ones —"

"Them very thin umbrellas again!" groaned the attendant. "I had a bellyful o' them at the time. And I'll tell you the same as I told the others, that as far as I can remember not one of the lot of 'em an umbrella."

"In particular," pressed Rason, "was Mr. Stentoller carrying an umbrella?"

"No, he wasn't." The man sniggered. "He was carryin' a sword."

"Carrying a *what*!" gasped Rason.

"Carryin' a sword, I tell you! His friend, Sir Reginald Weslake, had been to a Levee in the morning." The details followed. "Nearly tripped over the belt as he was going out of here. I heard Sir Reginald say he'd take it off for him, as they went into the hall. About half-past ten that was, as near as makes no matter."

Rason temporarily forgot all about the snuff-box. A sword! A couple of hours later he was in Surrey, checking up with Weslake.

Rason asked if he might see the sword of the Order of St. Severell of Antioch.

"That is a very extraordinary request. What is your reason?"

"We suspect that that sword may have been used for a felonious purpose when it was not in your possession, Sir Reginald."

Weslake glanced again at Rason's official card, then left the room, to return with the sword.

As Rason drew the blade he noted that it was slightly bent. He examined the point — which was scarcely sharper than the point of one of those very thin umbrellas.

"Sir Reginald, at about ten-thirty on the night Lord Haddenham was murdered, did you hand this sword to Mr. Stentoller?"

"I believe I did." Weslake had obviously forgotten the incident, but now remembered. "Yes, definitely."

Then Stentoller *could* have killed Haddenham with that sword. But *did* he?

Rason decided to go away now. He had got confirmation of the cloakroom attendant's statement about the sword, but, he reflected gloomily, this in itself proved nothing.

"Well, thanks very much, Sir Reginald. I'd better give you back this sword." Rason took a couple of steps forward, fouled the sword belt. That reminded him of something else the attendant had said. No harm in checking up.

"Did Mr. Stentoller carry it like this," he asked, "with the — er — all this — dangling?"

"Oh, no, not at all. I took it off and rolled it. He carried it in his pocket."

"Hm! Good pocketful, wasn't it!" remarked Rason, intending only to be amiable.

"No doubt it was troublesome," said Weslake, with labored patience. "I happen to remember he had to make room for it, to take — something — out of his side pocket and put it into his breast pocket."

Weslake's hesitation had been due to a desire to avoid opening another field for tedious questioning. Rason jumped blindly on the hesitation.

"What did he take out of his pocket?"

"He took from his side pocket, Mr. Rason, a gold snuff-box. He had intended to present it to Lord Haddenham, but something prevented him from doing so. And if you want further information about the snuff-box —"

"I'll find it in Kyle's Life of George IV!" snapped Rason. Weslake glared at him. Rason had sized up his man and deemed it prudent to break the rules.

"You saw that snuff-box in Stentoller's hand at ten-thirty. It was found on Haddenham's dead body. I am afraid I must take that sword away with me. We shall want it for evidence."

"My God!" gasped Weslake. "Then Stentoller must have found out that Haddenham —"

But he did not finish the sentence. Though no longer a member of the Terracotta, he would not drag the club's name into the newspapers.

SPEAKING OF CRIME

A Department of Comment and Criticism

by HOWARD HAYCRAFT

AMERICAN mystery lovers are smiling superior little smiles these days over the outcome of a transatlantic skirmish which seems destined to go down in 'tec history as "The Innocence of Father Knox."

It all began when Msgr. Ronald A. Knox, who used to be a detective story writer himself when he was plain Father Knox, averred in a recent issue of the *Tablet* (London): "The detective story is in danger of being played out. Stories are getting cleverer and cleverer, but the readers are getting cleverer and cleverer, too. It is almost impossible at the moment to think up any form of bluff which the really seasoned reader will not see through."

No seasoned whodunit hand needs to be told what a storm of refutation so uncautious a statement was bound to provoke on both sides of the water. Numerous able and pertinent replies went back and forth over the cables. But it remained for veteran American critic Bill Weber (known to thousands as "Judge Lynch" of the *Saturday Review of Literature*) to deliver the ultimate haymaker, by quoting passages from Msgr. Knox's 18-year old introduction to THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF 1928, to wit: "The game is getting played out. . . . The stories become cleverer and cleverer, but the readers are becoming cleverer and cleverer, too; it is almost impossible nowadays to think up any system of bluff which the seasoned reader will not see through."

Certainly, I can find little evidence in the flood of titles which has crossed my desk in recent months to support Msgr. Knox's prophecy of doom — today any more than when he first uttered it. To be sure, the detective story has changed substantially since 1928, and continues (praise be!) to change; and to the extent that the monsignor may have had in mind the old mechanical, chess-puzzle type of whodunit, he may be conceded a point.

But that, in my opinion, is good, not bad. The best and most stimulating detective stories being written today are those that stress the puzzle of "why" at least co-equally with "who" and "how." I do not mean by this that all present-day mystery and crime novels are masterpieces, nor am I advocating indiscriminate iconoclasm. I do mean there's a lot of vitality in the old dog yet.

Getting down to contemporary cases, my notebooks indicate that upward of one hundred mystery and crime novels have poured from American presses in the brief months since this record last appeared — in itself a rather imposing (if to a reviewer

dismaying) statistic for a supposedly dying type. Lacking, obviously, the space to discuss all of these, I have chosen a baker's dozen which seem to me the most interesting and representative received up to press-time.

Easily topping the early 1947 list, in my opinion, is DEATH OF A DOLL (S. & S.) wherein Hilda Lawrence — far and away the most exciting new talent in the American mystery field today — poses the infinitely moving problem of why someone should brutally murder a drab little shop clerk at a masquerade in a Manhattan girls' club. The grim answer is supplied by detective Mark East, he of the memorable BLOOD UPON THE SNOW. Dragging in those ghoulish rural humorists, Beulah and Bessie, from the earlier novel was a mistake. Otherwise, chalk up another triumph for Miss Lawrence's remarkable talent for understated terror, the more impressive because it is accomplished within the conventional whodunit framework.

In the less rigid precincts of that current catch-all, the suspense novel, three offerings impressed me by their avoidance of the phony theatrics that mar so many efforts in this bracket. Telling of a slum-born golddigger's evolution into a murderess, Roger Bax's DISPOSING OF HENRY (Harper) recalls Francis Iles in subject matter and ironic detachment. Bax was favorably known in his native England before the war. This is his first American appearance, but it should not be his last. Stressing power rather than polish, Henry Edward Helseth's episodic THE CHAIR FOR MARTIN ROME (Dodd) concerns the last days of a confessed cop-killer in an American city. There's mystery, of a sort, but Rome's own character is the real link that holds this absorbing novel together. Strong situation is the keynote of Marjorie Carleton's THE SWAN SANG ONCE (Morrow) in which young retired Colonel Tay Harrison suspects his wife, Iris, of being the notorious Yokohama Lily, who betrayed her countrymen to the Japs. The accelerating pace of their cat-and-mouse duel will repay your attention, apart from a few ill-advised passages of women's magazine dialogue.

Whether Henry Kane is quite the white hope of the hardboiled whodunit his publishers profess, I leave for you to decide after reading his first Pete Chambers novel, HALO FOR NOBODY (S. & S.). At any rate, you'll have a good time finding out. Kane has pace and enthusiasm, crisp characters and talk, and his situations sidestep the worst clichés of the mode. If nothing else, he merits a cheer for taking the h.b. novel away from Hollywood and Vine. Nice going, chum buddy.

Handsomely refuting the canard that the espionage story has outlived its time, Allan MacKinnon's HOUSE OF DARKNESS (Crime Club) — about a post-war chase from Cairo to craggiest Scotland — will revive fond memories of Buchan and Hannay. It's all preposterous, of course, but handled with the authentic light

touch by the author of last year's MONEY ON THE BLACK.

A telling blow to Msgr. Knox's theorizing, because it comes from his own figurative and geographical backyard, is Freeman Wills Crofts' DEATH OF A TRAIN (Dodd) which carries that grand old Yarder, Inspector French, through his most fascinating inquest — the demise of a train in wartime Britain by enemy action. Wonderful descriptions of railroading in England's finest hour and sleuthing in the painstaking Yard tradition make for more excitement than the rather melodramatic postscript the author provides.

I doubt that John Dickson Carr could write a thoroughly bad detective novel if he tried. Nevertheless, you probably won't rate THE SLEEPING SPHINX (Harper) among Dr. Gideon Fell's top achievements. Chiefly, I think, because for the first time in memory Carr perpetrates an out-and-out red herring — an elaborate business about displaced coffins which occupies a major part of the plot without any bearing I could discover on the real puzzle. The motivation, too, leaves inordinately much to the imagination.

More satisfying, if the well-bred English school is your dish, is Ngaio Marsh's FINAL CURTAIN (Little, Brown) in which Troy Alleyn for the first time shares the sleuthing with her husband Roderick, in a typical Marsh-milieu of theatre and art. Secondary theme is Troy's adjustment, at long last, to her spouse's profession: more than a little reminiscent of Lord Peter and his Harriet.

If your 'tec appetite is a trifle jaded, let me prescribe two off-trail numbers from opposite ends of the earth. Far from being the hardboiled stereotype the publisher's adman would have you believe, Fredric Brown's THE FABULOUS CLIPJOINT (Dutton) is an original, wryly humorous, and oddly haunting first novel about the impact of back-alley murder on a family in a half-tough neighborhood in South Side Chicago. Underrather than over-written, I think you will like its natural characters and imaginative plot twists. From Down Under comes THE BONE IS POINTED (Crime Club), another but different Inspector Bonaparte novel by antipodean A. W. Upfield. Some of Bony's previous adventures have been conventional enough, but in this one he returns to the authentic bush and is all but done in by aboriginal magic. Reason tells you not to believe a word of it — but you do. The background is Upfield's best, but the novel as a whole would have benefited by judicious editorial cutting.

In the women's wear department, Mignon Eberhart's glossy ANOTHER WOMAN'S HOUSE (Random) begins with a curious plot resemblance to REBECCA. But this story's Rebecca returns from prison to complicate several emotional lives, while the carnage goes merrily on. Ultimately, justice triumphs and all ends happily for such characters as remain extant.

Best of the humorous entries, Jack

Iams' THE BODY MISSED THE BOAT (Morrow) is more successful as comedy than mystery, but reasonably hilarious withal. When he acquires a little more plot experience the whodunit outfield can make good use of this recruit from the ranks of nonmurderous fiction.

In addition, I suggest for your enjoyment this picked handful of dependable offerings by authors you know and like: WITH INTENT TO DECEIVE by Manning Coles (Crime Club); THE SILVER LEOPARD by Helen Reilly (Random); THINK OF DEATH by Frances & Richard Lockridge, but *sans* Mr. and Mrs. North (Lippincott); THE FIFTH KEY by George Harmon Coxe (Knopf); APPOINTMENT AT NINE by Doris Miles Disney (Crime Club); COLD BED IN THE CLAY by Ruth Sawtell Wallis (Dodd); P. MORAN, OPERATIVE by Percival Wilde, of special interest to readers of this magazine (Random); THE TWIN KILLING by George Bagby (Crime Club); MY TRUE LOVE LIES by Lenore Glen Offord (Duell).

Awards & Honors: Attended by considerable fanfare and ceremony, Mystery Writers of America, Inc. recently conferred their second annual "Edgars" upon the following for special excellence in the mystery field during the year 1946:

Best First Novel: THE HORIZONTAL MAN by Helen Eustis (Harper).

Best Moving Picture: THE KILLERS (Universal).

Best Radio Program: THE ADVENTURES OF SAM SPADE (CBS).

Best Criticism: William C. Weber ("Judge Lynch") of the *Saturday Review of Literature* (see above).

Winners for 1945 (in case you're interested in comparisons) were: WATCHFUL AT NIGHT by Julius Fast (first novel); MURDER MY SWEET (moving picture); THE ADVENTURES OF ELLERY QUEEN and MR. AND MRS. NORTH (joint-award for radio); Anthony Boucher (criticism).

Last year's "Edgars" were specially bound copies of THE PORTABLE POE (Viking). This year the winners received copies of the critical anthology THE ART OF THE MYSTERY STORY (S. & S.).

Mail-Bag: My thanks to more correspondents than I have room to list for settling not only the pronunciation of "shamus" (it's definitely *shah-mus*) but also the derivation of its acquired meaning as private detective. By general agreement of the communicants, a shamus (spelled variously) was originally the factotum-custodian of a synagogue; hence, one who watches over or takes care of other people's property or affairs. One correspondent suggests that in its transitional stage the term applied to bankruptcy conservators and plainclothes policemen as well as private inquiry agents. At any rate, it seems clear that the term in its present connotation was known to colloquial speech *before* its fictional adoption — unlike "private eye" which, I'm told, had a purely literary origin.

HOW TO HAVE YOUR PIE AND EAT IT

Lester Dent wrote only two stories about his character named Oscar Sail. Both appeared in "Black Mask" magazine. Both are unusually fine tales of the tough school, but one is more than that — one is a knockout! A curious anecdote can now be told of how EQMM finally secured permission to reprint one of the Sail yarns . . . Shortly after we put through a request to buy both stories, we learned that Simon & Schuster were planning to publish an anthology of early stories from "Black Mask." The anthology — a long overdue and historically important collection — was to be edited by Captain Joseph T. Shaw, a former editor of "Black Mask," who naturally wanted to include one of the two Lester Dent tales. At this point in l'affaire Sail, we found ourselves in an awkward position. If we insisted on our prior purchase claim to both Sail stories, Captain Shaw would lose out and his anthology, finally titled THE HARD-BOILED OMNIBUS, *would not be as fully representative of the rough-tough, guts-gore-and-gals era as it could be.*

Well, we mulled and we mulled, and somehow we could not bring ourselves to exercise our priority. It seemed only fair and proper that Captain Shaw, as one of "Black Mask's" most celebrated editors and as one who exerted a strong influence on the ultimate development of the hardboiled species, be given the widest possible latitude in the selection of stories he himself had originally nurtured and published. By every ethical standard, we decided, Captain Shaw was entitled to "first choice."

So we suggested to Lester Dent's literary agent that he let Captain Shaw take his pick of the two Sail stories, and EQMM would then buy the leftover. Having cast the detectival die, we waited in fear and trembling. Remember that while we considered both Sail stories excellent, we rated one far above the other. If Captain Shaw selected the better of the two stories (as we had every right to expect), it meant that we would have to be content with our own "second choice."

Well, dear reader, there is a moral in this tale. For consider: Captain Shaw pitched for the first story called "Sail," leaving us the second story called "Angelfish." And "Angelfish" (which with the author's consent we have retitled "Tropical Disturbance") is the story we really wanted — the knockout of the two!

In dark and mysterious ways the Golden Rule pays off . . .

We think you will be interested too in Lester Dent's comment on his own story. "It is an example," he wrote to your Editor, "of the word savagery 'Black Mask' brought out of its writers."

"Word savagery" — that's a brilliantly accurate description of the

technique fostered by "Black Mask" and which has finally come to be recognized as the hallmark of the authentically American genre. Yes, savagery — savagery in style, sophistication, sex, and sleuthing. We envy your first reading (or first re-reading) of Lester Dent's exceptional object-lesson of what the hardboiled detective story can be at its best — with a Greek chorus-hurricane in the background that you will never forget . . .

TROPICAL DISTURBANCE

by LESTER DENT

She was a long, blue-eyed girl who lay squarely on her back with the sun shining in her mouth. Her teeth were small and her tongue was flat, not pointed, and there was about two whiskey glassfuls of scarlet liquid in her mouth.

As she turned her head slowly to the side, the scarlet emptied out on the black asphalt walk, splashing her tan columnar neck and the shoulder of her white frock.

Oscar Sail stood beside her and kept looking at the gun in his hand. It was a long, black gun. Sail was a long, brown man, dressed in black — black polo shirt, black trousers and black tennis shoes.

They were very alone, the two of them. The sky overhead was queer, with too much clarity in it. There was no air stirring. The palm fronds, the hibiscus leaves all around were as still as if painted on glass. Seagulls in the air were the only moving things. And they were not circling. They were flying silently inland, fleeing.

Sail ran thin fingers slowly through his hair and down hard over the back of his neck. Weather and salt water had not left much color in his hair.

The girl coughed, hackingly.

Sail's mouth looked as if he were holding his tongue with his teeth as he bent to get at her brown leather bag. A chain connected the bag to the girl's wrist. The bag was locked, and Sail opened his pocket knife, punctured the bag and made a slit. His long forefinger raked out loose greenbacks, a flat package and a letter of credit which bore the girl's name, Nan Moberly.

The package was not quite as large as a box of kitchen matches. Sail took it and left the other stuff.

Nan Moberly coughed once more.

"Darn it!" she said. "Some of that red stuff went down the wrong way."

Sail said darkly, "I still think this stunt takes the goofy prize."

"I didn't hire you for your advice. I hired you because you are an honest private detective."

"The advice is thrown in. Nobody in his right mind is going to think you've got a bullet in the lung."

"Put some of that red stuff on the bosom of my dress."

Sail did so. The hole was already in her dress. He pocketed the bottle.

She said, "O.K. I've got a doctor hired to swear I've been shot."

"Take some advice, lady. This —"

"Save it. On with the act."

Sail said, "I like to know what I'm mixing in."

"You know what you're getting paid to do. That's enough."

The girl ripped out a long terrible scream.

Sail fired the gun in the air. Its report made the passing gulls dodge wildly. Sail dropped the gun and galloped off, carrying the package.

When he had covered fifty yards, he ducked behind a clump of shrubbery and waited, making a small hole through the leaves so he could watch Nan Moberly.

The shrubbery was thick all around. It was planted shrubbery, but had not been getting much attention. The spot was not a park, but undeveloped real estate in the north end of Miami Beach. A few houses were scattered about. The sidewalk on which the girl lay led to one, the roof of which was visible.

A man came from the house. He was a dark man, not much more than half as tall as Sail, but very broad. He wore a checked sport coat, a white towel tucked in the collar, and black bathing shorts. His legs were almost black with suntan and built like the front legs of a draft horse.

He reached the girl, stared at her.

"Caesar!" he yelled. "Caesar!"

Another man came loping from the house. A young man in a red bathing suit, very blond, very fat and very blistered by the Florida sun.

Sail made a whistling mouth, but no sound, when he saw the two shiny revolvers the blond man carried.

The blond young man reached Nan Moberly.

"Yay, Sanders!" he boomed. "Nan Moberly!"

Sanders got down on his draft horse knees and jammed a hand into the brown leather bag. He groped in the bag for a moment.

"Somebody hijacked her!" he gritted.

Caesar screeched, "Yee!"

Sail backed away from his hiding place, keeping down. He covered another fifty yards, and by that time he was perspiring and had hold of his lower lip with his teeth. He set himself, but hung on his mark like a sprinter waiting for the gun. Finally, he muttered, "The things some guys do for money!" and launched himself into the open.

Caesar saw him, bawled. Sanders yelled, "He's got it in his hand!"

Caesar's guns scared the seagulls. Sail got behind more brush. And bullets swatted through the leaves.

Sail's lips were off his teeth. He breathed hard, although he was not yet winded. With long-legged, desperate haste, he went over everything

that was not too high. He came to a long white wall around a house and vaulted into a yard and pounded across it. Two men were nailing boards over the windows of the house and a woman was handing them nails. They stopped work and gaped.

Sail took the other wall, turned his right ankle on one of several cocoanuts under a palm tree, favored the leg for a few yards, and got speed again. There was a street on the right, and when he saw a taxicab cruising along it, he veered over.

Sail overhauled the cab, opened the door and got in with a radio that was saying, "— *has requested that citizens fasten securely or place in a sheltered spot all loose objects. Another bulletin from this station will follow shortly.*" Music started.

The taxi driver had been listening to that with a rapt grin.

"Swab my deck, mate!" he chortled gleefully. "We're gonna get it!"

Sail, leaning forward to tell him where to go, saw a clumsy looking wooden peg leg lying on the seat beside the driver.

Sail said, "Sail her hard, John Silver. Miami, the nearest way."

The driver said, "John Silver *is* the name, believe it or not."

All the way, houses were being shuttered and boards nailed over windows, and an attendant was taking down a swinging sign on a filling station on Biscayne Boulevard. Trucks were peddling lumber from house to house; passenger cars traveling the streets had planks tied on the fenders or sticking out of the windows. Radios in almost every house poured out static noise as if it were broken glass.

"Aye, aye, mate," John Silver chuckled. "I can nearly smell it."

At Biscayne and Miami Avenue, Sail paid off John Silver and went into the nearest hotel.

Sail consulted the lobby clock, appeared surprised that it was only ten-thirty, and lost his haste. He bought Irish pipe tobacco from the girl at the stand.

The girl said, "I'll bet you have trouble buying your clothes."

Sail gave her a stock grin. People didn't say it was a nice day or a bad day. It was, "My God, you're tall!" or, "You're about two men high and half a man wide, aren't you?"

He tamped tobacco into a pipe that was as black as his clothing and pulled long, bubbling drags of smoke out of it. A knot of people stood at the end of the lobby and Sail went over, to stand, a foot taller than any man in the group, with them. Over their heads, he could see the barometer they were watching.

"It's pumping," a man said, pointing at the barometer.

Sail smoked, consulted the clock from time to time. He was stared at.

When the clock said eleven, he looked up the *Ocean Blue Hotel* in the telephone book. Getting into a pay booth to call the number, he had to stoop.

"Miss Nan Moberly," he said.

The hotel operator rang three times before the receiver came off.

Then there was a long pause.

Nan Moberly's voice said, "Yes?" strangely.

Sail put the pipe on the small shelf under the telephone, used the hand which had been holding it to keep sound out of his other ear.

Then he asked, "It go off all right?"

Nan Moberly cleared her throat. "Yes."

"Sure?"

"Yes." She cleared her throat again, hesitated. "I got to my car. The doctor I had hired was waiting in it. He brought me to my hotel. Told them I had been hurt. Yes, we put it across."

Sail did not speak. He had been straining to get every inflection of her voice.

Nan Moberly said, "Everything is fine."

Sail said, "Somehow you don't sound that way."

The telephone wire was unnaturally quiet for a moment, as if she had put her hand over the mouthpiece. Then she began speaking.

"It's fine. Absolutely fine. Sanders telephoned, and I told him I got to my car while he and Caesar were chasing you. I told him I was not badly hurt. I put Doctor Smith on the telephone — Doctor Smith is the one I hired to help me fake this — and he told Sanders I would pull through. Sanders said he was very sorry I had been robbed, and that he would call on me tomorrow, if Florida was still on the map."

"Then the fake robbery went over?"

"Perfectly."

She was speaking faster than Sail had heard her speak during the four hours he had known her.

He asked, "What about the package?"

"Oh," she said queerly. It was a full minute before she added, "Where can I have someone pick it up?"

"I can deliver it to you."

"No. Someone might see you. I'll have a boy get it."

Sail made a thoughtful mouth. "I'll be aboard my bugeye, *Sail*, for the next hour."

"I'll send a boy."

Sail took his hand off his ear, hesitated, put it back again.

He said, "I'd still like to know why you went to all of that trouble. You wanted someone to think you had been robbed. Moreover, you wanted them to think you were too badly injured to leave town."

"Forget it," the girl said tightly. "You've been paid for what you did."

She hung up.

A police traffic car equipped with a radio was parked in front of the City Yacht Basin. The speaker was bellowing:

"*A tropical disturbance is reported to be approaching this section. All boats are advised to seek adequate shelter afforded by the Miami River and adjacent canals. Drawbridges over the river are electrically operated and cannot open if the power supply fails. Please move your boats at once.*"

Sail made for his boat with long-legged speed.

The bugeye, *Sail*, was a Chesapeake Bay five-log, thirty-four feet waterline. With the look of having been built last week, she was sixty-eight years old. Her beam was twelve feet, she drew two feet with the centerboard up. She was black — hull, stays, sails, sail covers. All black.

Sail swung aboard by the stays, stood looking at the pile of old auto and truck tires on the cabin.

John Silver sat on the tires, stuffing a cob pipe. He did not look up until he had struck a match on his wooden leg and set the tobacco afire.

He said, "I like her, Cap'n."

Sail said, "You'll like the dock better."

"Look, now, mate, I put my hack in a nice stone garage until this is over. I haven't anything to occupy myself with as the saying is. Having seen this sweet ship around here and having seen you aboard her and having seen and heard things —"

"What things?" Sail asked harshly.

John Silver squirmed uneasily. "Gee, mate, don't get the idea I —"

Sail said, "A woman may push me around, but no man —" and started forward.

John Silver scrambled wildly on to the dock.

Sail said, "And take your tires with you!" and began throwing the old auto tires on to the dock.

"You'll need them things for fenders, mate," John Silver said mournfully.

Sail kept on heaving the tires.

The little wooden-legged man said lugubriously, "John Silver has been misunderstood, mate." He hobbled off. His peg leg had a rubber tip and his departure was surprisingly silent.

Sail slung the last of the tires on the dock, dry-washed his palms and went below. The cabin was neat and contained a great deal of gear cleverly stowed. A sailor's knife with a long blade stood in a leather sheath fastened to the side of a locker where it could be reached from the cockpit. Sail used the knife to cut the cord around the package he had taken from the girl's leather bag.

Long, tightly rolled photographs were inside the package. Six of them. They were not pictures of persons, but of scenery, flat country taken from the air. Approximately in the center of each picture, running the full length of it, was a regular line of rocks. By placing the pictures together, Sail saw he had an area some fifteen miles long by ten wide, the line of white rock forming a perfect ellipse in the center of it.

After he had looked at the pictures for a while, Sail took them into one of the bugeye's two small cabins. Stowage space here was given over almost exclusively to books. He got out a volume of the encyclopedia and looked under, "Geology."

There was a page of pictures showing an oil field from the air. Sail compared the pictures with those from the package. The same sort of stuff, probably, though he was not geologist enough to be sure.

He replaced the pictures in the

package and tied it with a string exactly like the one he had cut. He put the packet in his pocket, then turned on the radio in the cabin.

The cover of the motor-box in the cabin served as a table. He lifted it and began getting the small Diesel motor ready to run. The jets needed cleaning. He removed them, got a jet tool and worked with the concentration of a man pulling snake teeth.

The radio warmed up and said, "— *edge of the disturbance now reported passing Bimini, where the wind has attained the velocity of ninety miles an hour.*

Feet landed on the bugeye cabin top. They landed hard, the way landlubbers somehow always land when they jump on to a boat. The feet shuffled aft, knocking against cleats, fairleads, handrails, and got into the cockpit with a careful slowness that showed the owner either wasn't accustomed to boats or was an old man.

He was about old enough to vote.

He peered at Sail and said, "You're sure a tall booger."

He had brown eyes and the plumpness of a duck. His shirt and breast pocket handkerchief were ox-blood red. His socks were ox-blood red. The rest of his garments were very white.

He scaled a white envelope down to Sail, not saying anything more. The envelope was unsealed and the enclosure read:

Please give the bearer the package. Thanks. Nan Moberly.

Sail read that.

He said, "Guess I'll have to get my glasses before I can read it."

He put aside the Diesel jet, the jet tool, an S-wrench, then stood. If the cabin headroom had been two feet more, he could have stood straight.

The messenger sounded like a pig squealing as Sail got him by the leg and hauled him down into the cabin. The plump boy loosened up and fell slackly, the way people fall who know how not to get hurt. He looked startled. Sail reached for his collar.

The kid got Sail's arm. He got it as a cat gets a mouse.

Sail said, "*Hooo!*" painfully.

White paint in the bugeye cabin was clean and shiny enough to show a shifting, spooky reflection of their fight. No sound they made was louder than the "*in the town . . . in the town*," from the radio.

Pain gave Sail's mouth the shape a rubber band takes when it lies loose on a desk. He perspired. He got down on the floor on top of the kid.

The plump boy worked on nothing but the arm. He hissed, "How — you — wise — beyond me!" and sounded like a small bulldog with a bone.

Sail finally got two forefingers of his free hand in the boy's nose. He pulled, got the kid's head back. The kid's mouth strained wide open and he sounded as if he were gargling water. Then he came loose. Sail hit him, then got away from him. The boy lay on the black battleship linoleum and trembled.

Sail's right hand, the one the boy had worked on, was out of shape,

thumb bent back unnaturally at the second joint.

He shuffled in agony to the companionway and put his head out and looked around. Two men were aloft on the spreaders of a schooner lying at a nearby pier, stripping her of everything — tops'ls, topmasts, halliards, even halliard blocks and chafing gear. Having seen no one around who did not look worried about a boat, Sail backed into the bugeye cabin.

He said, "You tried it alone, eh?"

The plump boy did not answer. He had stopped trembling and was feeling of his jaw where Sail's fist had hit.

Sail gripped his own right hand with his left hand, set himself and jerked hard. He said, "*Sh-h-h-h!*" windily as the thumb went back into joint.

He sidled around, put a foot on the small of the boy's back, mashed him out flat and searched him. He collected a dog track dope sheet, bet stubs from Hialeah, four dice — two of them loaded — over a hundred dollars in money and a letter which began, "*Sonny Dear:*" and said that Dad was out of a job again and couldn't send any money just now. The letter hoped Sonny Dear would soon make some money, although admitting it was hard for a new osteopath doctor to get started.

"What put you wise, tall stuff?" Sonny Dear snarled.

Sail said, "Nan Moberly didn't sound quite right over the telephone. But I wasn't sure until you cut up."

The plump boy showed his teeth fiercely. "You mean I gave it away?"

"You didn't do anything else." Sail looked at him darkly. "Nan Moberly was scared when she talked to me over the phone. What was wrong there?"

"You slay me, long fellow. Nothing was wrong."

Sail said, "Damned if I'm not going to take time off and find out."

He got a ball of Italian marlin, stripped off an ample length, doubled it several times and lashed the plump boy's wrists and ankles. He used cotton waste and friction tape for a gag. He dipped his fingers in some oil and made the marlin knots too slippery to be untied. His right arm was of little use and the thumb joint was beginning to puff.

He put the plump boy in the oilskin locker, which had air vents, and locked the door.

When he reached the shore end of the dock, John Silver hailed brightly, "Rent a shore cruising craft, Cap'n?"

Sail narrowed his eyes. "Thought your hack was in a stone garage?"

"I got it out, mate."

Sail said suspiciously, "What's the attraction around here, fellow?"

John Silver gulped, "You got me wrong, mate!" and backed away.

Sail stared after him indecisively, shrugged impatiently and lengthened his stride over to another cab, got in, said, "*Ocean Blue Hotel* at the Beach."

The steel shutters they were putting on the *Ocean Blue* windows were

new and modernistic like the hotel. A desk clerk with a gardenia looked up at Sail and said, "Miss Moberly says you can go right up. Six-O-Nine."

Nan Moberly's voice said, when Sail flipped finger-nails against the door of Six-O-Nine, "Come in."

The room was a delicate, lovely red, and all the furniture in it, of metal, was the same hue, except for judicious touches of chromium.

"Men," Nan Moberly said, "are so full of chivalry they make me itch."

She lay on the bed. All of her except her head was under the covers. There was no one else in the room.

Sail went over and drew up a chair and sat on it beside the bed. He did not say anything.

Nan Moberly asked, "What is eating you?"

Sail said, "Imagination."

Nan Moberly tried to swallow twice before she made it. She was keeping a small smile on the corners of her mouth.

"What do you mean — imagination?"

Sail said, "The trick you pulled. Faking that robbery. It was so melodramatic it was a laugh. It couldn't work."

"It did work."

"Sure?"

The smile on her lips slipped, but she jerked it back in place. "Of course. Admittedly, it was a bit wild. But I got what I wanted; that package stolen. And I wanted it to appear that I would be laid up for a few weeks."

"The idea being that someone would then lay off you?"

"Maybe."

Sail said, "Sanders and Caesar?"

She was too prompt with her, "No!"

Sail, by looking straight ahead, could gaze across the park, across the beach, and across a dozen miles of ocean to an unnatural looking horizon.

He said, "The name of the doctor you hired to help you out in this was —"

"Doctor Smith," she said shortly. "I told you that."

"Osteopath?"

"No," she said, and looked so puzzled at the question that he knew her answer was truth.

Sail got up and put his left hand on the edge of the bed and aimlessly moved his right hand the small amount it would move without hurting. Nan Moberly returned his gaze for a moment, then fixed her eyes on the ceiling. Her eyes were blue, not actually dull; the effect of dullness was lent by the almost drugged lifelessness of the flesh around her eyes.

Sail said, "You're a geologist, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"I looked at the pictures. That's how I knew. They're pictures of the rocks on the surface of as sweet an oil structure as I've seen in many a day. Why, if there is oil there the pool must be all of fifteen miles long. If I knew more about it, I could talk on and on."

She said barely audibly, "You're

doing well enough. But you don't have to broadcast."

Sail said, "At first, I thought it was screwy. But the answer has got to be oil. Air photos frequently locate dome structure favorable to the presence of oil. But they don't guarantee that oil is down there. That's where I'm stumped."

She whispered, "A lake of oil. My company has tapped one end. We don't know which way the lake runs. The pictures show that. They show us where to lease land that will have oil under it."

Sail's, "Hm-m-m," was understanding. "Knowledge that's worth a million — could be several million."

She nodded, went on whispering. "They're the only pictures that have been shot. It takes weeks of work. Before any other company can work the country, we'll have the land bought or leased. That is, if the wrong people don't get my pictures and make me tell exactly where they were taken. I'm the only one who knows that, because the pilot of the plane is dead."

"There's no oil around Miami."

"My boss is en route here from South America. I'm to meet him."

Sail leaned over her. "What's wrong with the setup?"

"Go away," came past her motionless lips in the faintest of whispers. "You can't help now."

Sail took in air, let it out and complained loudly, "It's things like this that women get when they try to wear pants. Women doctors! Women lawyers! Women this and women that! Scheme and connive and finagle, and they think because they don't get hurt that they're good. They don't stop and think that men don't like to push them around. By God, there's too much chivalry in this world!"

In his emphatic earnestness, his fingers clutched the bed cover and dragged it down a bit, as if by accident. The girl's wild look, her cry, "Don't!" would have tipped him off, even if his moving the covers a trifle had been an accident.

He whipped the covers back.

The girl was bound hand and foot with thin white rope.

Sail pivoted, lunged to the nearest door and gripped the knob. It was locked and he gave it two hard wrenches, then spun back to the bed. "What's in there?"

"It's another room," she said.

"It's a narrow door," Sail said. "So it's a closet door."

Her skin was the color of milk and her lips were an icy blue. Her small teeth, upper and lower, showed, and they were dry and her tongue was also dry. Her eyes began to fill and she blinked, forcing drops out on her lashes. She did not say anything.

Sail looked at the room's third door. His shoulders crawled up in his coat as if something heavy pressed down on the back of his neck, and his hands turned slowly until the palms were forward and the fingers curled slowly, the right ones not as much as the left.

He said violently, "We'll forget the whole thing!" and started for the cor-

ridor door, but lifted up silently on his toes, veered over to the room's third door, at the same time fishing a fat blue revolver out of his left trouser pocket.

He broke the gun open while in motion, looked at the cartridges. The cylinder held five shells. Two of them had red paint on their rumps. He set the cylinder so the hammer would fall on a red cartridge, closed the weapon and sat down on the floor.

It was a bathroom door, and there was about an inch of ventilating space between the bottom of the door and the floor. The door opened outward. Sail silently put both feet against it. He shoved the barrel of the gun under the door and pulled the trigger. The report sounded as if he had broken a very old egg.

He sat there, holding the door so it could not be opened. But no one tried to open it. Some of the tear gas he had fired under the door came out of the crack and smarted his eyes. He leaned back, turned his head away from it. He saw under the bed.

Sail straightened up slowly, went to the bed and got one of the covers which he made into a long hank and placed it against the bathroom door, nudging it snugly against the crack with a toe to keep less of the gas from coming out.

He went back, got the dead man by the hand and dragged him out from under the bed.

The corpse had gray hair, average height, neat clothing. There seemed to be nothing at all wrong with him, except that his neck was broken.

Sail said, "Who is it? The doctor you hired to help you fake your story over? Smith — or was that his name?"

Nan Moberly surged up violently on the bed, straining against the white rope until her arms and legs trembled.

She gasped, "Get out of here!"

Sail said, "They weren't fooled by your story. They came here to get you. The doctor put up a fight and the osteopath fixed his neck. They made you tell where the pictures were. Now, where are those men?"

She didn't hesitate. "Your boat. They went to see what had happened to the osteopath. He went for the pictures and didn't come back."

"Sure they're not around here? I thought they were in the bathroom, at first."

"I'm sure," she said levelly.

Sail used his sharp pocket knife on the white ropes which tied her, then said, "Go to the *Floridan* and register as — Mary Dallas will do. Stick there until you hear from me or decide you're not going to. O.K.?"

Her, "O.K." was with her lips alone.

Sail said loudly, "You know why I'm doing this?"

"No."

"I don't either," he growled.

He swung towards the door.

The closet door which had been locked clicked. It whipped open and two fat men tried to get out at once. They stuck. But they had their right arms out and their right hands held guns.

"Alley oop!" they said together.

Sail stopped. His gun was in his trouser pocket, and would probably stick on the cloth, and if it didn't, they could still shoot him before he got his hand in his pocket. He held his arms out straight.

Both fat men had nice suntans, healthy looking skins and good clothing. There was nothing else nice about them.

One said:

"Back up, Tom."

"Back yourself. You're the biggest."

They were almost exactly the same size. They got out of the door and Tom said, "You feel him, Doll."

Doll walked over, his hip movement that of a goose, and felt of Sail's clothing. He collected the gun, the pocket knife and the packet of films. Backing away, he began opening the package.

Sail looked at the girl. "Your stock goes up, Nan."

Tom smirked. "She told you that one about us going to your boat to get you clear of the room. She was trying to do you a favor."

Doll said, "But you walking around loose ain't no favor to us."

Then Doll got the package open, held the pictures up to the light and smacked his lips. "This is them."

Tom looked at Sail and said, "If Sonny Dear was here, it'd make it real simple. He ain't a hell of a good osteopath, but he sure twists a mean neck when somebody knows too much."

Through the window Sail could see something coming out in the east, far over the Atlantic Ocean. It was not nice. The sea as far as the eye could see was greasy smooth, but heaving up in great swells which marched up to the beach and climbed the sand for a hundred feet and more, turning into acres of slavering foam.

There was not enough breeze to stir the most fragile palm frond.

Sail said, "Who are you working for?"

"For us," Doll said.

"Probably for Sanders, the guy with the pony legs," Sail corrected.

Tom and Doll looked at Nan Moberly. "Who's Sanders?"

The girl wet her lips. "Someone I know."

"He interested in this in any way?" Doll demanded with sudden suspicion.

"No," the girl said.

Tom said heartily, "Now that we've got a man named Sanders all settled, what say we matriculate from this place, as it were."

Knuckles tapped the door twice.

Tom and Doll swapped eye flickers. They put their guns in their pockets and kept their hands in the pockets with them.

Doll called, "Yeah?"

"The storm shutters, Mister," a drawling cracker voice explained. "We're puttin' 'em over the windows."

Doll smirked. "Just a minute until my wife gets her clothes on."

He seized the body of Doctor Smith, hauled it to the closet, dumped it inside and locked the door. Looking around for give-aways, he saw the ropes which had bound the girl. He

chucked those out of the window. Then he made his gun and his hand big in his coat pocket.

He told Sail, "They killed Rothstein in a hotel, if you remember back that far. Now, get moving." He moved the pocketed gun.

To the men on the other side of the door, "All right, now."

Two men came in, struggling with a steel shutter.

One of them peered sleepily at Sail and mumbled cunningly, "Gee whillikers, Mister, do you feel any wind up there yet?"

Doll said, "Hah, Florida humor!" and went out. Sail and Nan Moberly followed, then Tom. The elevator operator who took them down showed no interest in anything but Sail's height.

In the lobby, a man with white whiskers was demanding querulously if the hotel was safe in a hurricane and the other persons there were showing much interest in the desk clerk's reply. Only one small boy stared at Sail. Doll kept close with his gun. Sail didn't pay any particular attention to either Doll or his gun; he went on with a docileness that suggested he was willing to go wherever the two men planned to take them.

Tom and Doll stopped the silent march at a gray sedan. Sail and Nan Moberly sat in the rear. Doll turned down the folding seat and sat on that. Tom turned on the radio and drove.

The radio warmed up and began, "*It is advised that all citizens fill available containers with water to avoid discomfort in case the city water supply should be interrupted. The following hotels have extended an invitation to the public to seek shelter during the disturbance.*" Names of the hotels followed.

Doll declared hilariously, "It sounds as if the circus was coming to town."

Sail asked quietly, "Ever attended that special kind of a circus?"

"No."

Sail said, "It'll probably tickle hell out of you."

The car ran silently, and they could hear the sound of hammers at times. At one house, a woman was taking in her lawn furniture.

Doll looked at the girl. "It'd simplify things if you'd cough up now, honey."

The girl said nothing.

Doll shook his head. "We're boys who didn't go to Sunday School, you know."

Nan Moberly said, "What do you take me for? Regardless of where I told you I took the pictures, you would hold me. I think you would torture me, just to make sure I had told the truth."

The car made a corner and Sail swung against Nan Moberly, then straightened himself. He said, "A goofy business, all of it."

Doll shouted to Tom, "Did you hear that? He calls a million or so queer business!"

"Pipe down, fat," Tom advised. "Here we be," he said.

They were close to Biscayne Bay and a boathouse. A scabby looking boathouse, green around the bottom

with moss, more black than white.

"Out," Doll ordered.

Nan Moberly quitted the car listlessly and following, Sail tried to look sleepy and resigned.

Tom had a key to the boathouse. Two boats were inside. One was a twenty-two foot speedboat which could probably do fifty. The other was a yard or two longer, a job for Gulf Stream fishing — two maple chairs on fixed mountings in the cockpit, a small cabin forward. It might do fifteen knots if pushed.

"In," Doll ordered.

Nan Moberly said swiftly, "If I tell you exactly where I took the pictures, will you let this man go?"

She meant Sail.

"Sure," Doll said.

Sail shook his head at her. "Don't. I'm not sure that you've got what they want. Evidently it's more than the pictures. But you know they killed Doctor Smith, and they won't let you or me go."

Tom came up behind Sail and hit the back of his head with his gun. Sail's knees hinged, his arms hung down, but it did not seem he was going to fall. Then he did, suddenly. He stood very close to the water, on the edge of a concrete slip wall. He started in head first, and Doll leaped and grabbed his legs.

Sail's head and shoulders were in the water. His arms groped, found a projection in the slip wall. One of the board forms had bulged when they poured the wall. He tried to pull himself under the water.

Doll pulled to prevent him.

Doll groaned, "Shoot him!"

Tom yelled, "Where?" and leaned over the edge of the slip. Sail gave a jerk, and got into the water, pulling Doll after him. He expected Doll to let go. Doll didn't. Sail swam madly, pulling Doll after him. He came up against the bottom of the fishing boat, and lack of breath began to bother him.

Doll still hung to his ankles. Sail doubled, got hold of Doll. The man felt spongy. He still had his gun. The grip he had on Sail's ankles was a hug. Sail concentrated on getting the gun. It exploded, and for some time thereafter he heard nothing. But he got the gun.

He came to the surface on the other side of the fishing boat, still fighting with Doll. He got air in his lungs, then clubbed Doll once and Doll relaxed.

Tom came sidling cautiously around the end of the slip. Sail fired at him. It was a good gun, and had not split its cylinder when it went off under water. The bullet broke on one of the boathouse tiles behind Tom and he leaped back.

Sail yelled, "Doll is dead!" for the effect. He hardly heard himself, due to the effects of the shot underwater.

During the next few seconds, he did not hear anything. Then he felt a throbbing in the water and knew the speedboat motor had started. The speedboat was on the other side of the fishing boat and he could not see it.

Doll was senseless, drowning noisily,

although Sail still held him. Sail swam quietly, dragging Doll, but the man made enough noise to betray their position. Sail was on the point of abandoning him when the speedboat scooted out of the end of the boathouse open to Biscayne Bay.

Tom, driving the speedboat, and facing back and holding Nan Moberly up in front of him as a shield, fired twice at Sail. The bullets tore splinters out of the fishing craft. Sail did not fire back. The speedboat went towards Miami with no more than its rear third in the water.

Sail hauled Doll out and dragged him, more drowned than not, to the gray sedan and slung him into the front seat.

When Sail bumped the sedan against the curb in front of the City Yacht Basin, there was no other car in the street and no other boat except his black bugeye, *Sail*, at any of the piers. Only one man was visible and he was locking up the lunch stand near Pier Five. Sail got his dripping wet man out of the car. Doll could walk, although he coughed intermittently. Their feet sobbed in their shoes, and Sail's hearing had improved enough to get that.

They went out on the dock.

A puff of air hit the left sides of their faces. It died away quickly. There was not a bird in sight.

Something large and black was in the eastern sky.

The bugeye cabin hatch was open. Doll had a spasm of coughing — he was still getting a little water out — as Sail pushed him aboard. Sail gave him a chance to climb down into the cabin, but he slipped and fell headlong.

The port cabin kerosene lamp was knocked out of its gimbal mounting and broken. Cushions were off the seat and lay on the floor.

John Silver looked at Sail and made a noise that might have been made by a large, disturbed bumblebee.

He was gagged and roped to the mast, which extended down through the cabin. The knots in the rope had been greased.

Sail removed the gag, but did not untie the ropes.

The peg-leg taxi driver hocked out his mouth, then said, "They greased the knots. Who ever heard of such a thing?"

Sail opened the oilskin locker. Sonny Dear, the osteopath, was not in it. Sail looked in the staterooms, forward in the tiny fo'castle with its one pipe berth and stowed gear, then into a clothes locker, into the head, into a lazaret aft under the cockpit flooring. No osteopath anywhere.

Doll sat on the cabin floor where he had fallen, coughing in long, excruciating spasms, keeping his mouth wide open and taking air in with an "Uh-h-h-h!" between spells.

John Silver stared at Doll and said, "It was another fat craft like him that moored me to this mast. That one was called Tom."

Sail said, "So now you are going to explain?"

John Silver knocked his wooden leg against the mast as he tried to make himself more comfortable.

"I'm cured, mate," he said. "I want to say that right now. I don't do any more favors. Not for anybody except myself. I'm scuttled, keelhauled and deckwiped if I ever help my fellowman again."

"Wouldn't it make sense if you told it another way?" Sail demanded impatiently.

"I come down here in the cabin. I hear a noise. It's a man tied up in the oilskin locker. I lay him on the floor and untie his hands. He takes me by the leg and I never seen such a swab. He almost gets me leg. Then he ties me up. How's that, mate?"

Sail said, "Keep it up."

"Look, mate, if you'd untie me —"

"Try talking yourself loose from that mast," Sail suggested.

"Well, break my keel, how was I to know better? He looked like a kid, and I thought I could man a craft like him. How was I to know he could tie reef knots in my arms and legs?"

"What else happened?"

"Well, a fat guy named Tom came in a speedboat. Him and this arm-twisting swab was shipmates. They went away together. I think from their talk there was a girl in the speedboat. And that's the whole story, except that they went south in the speedboat."

Sail said, "Go on. Why did you come aboard in the first place?"

John Silver sighed deeply. "I don't know if you're gonna believe this. But every time I see a boat, I have to stop and look at it. I like to get on a boat every chance I get. All the boats had left the yacht basin. This one was still here. I couldn't bear seeing such a sweet craft wrecked. I came aboard to take her up the river myself."

Sail remained silent.

The peg-leg man gulped, "A woman wouldn't leave a little strange baby out in a storm, would she?"

Wind went, "*Whooo-o-o!*" softly in the rigging and the halyards popped against the varnished masts and the boat leaned over slightly. The puff died quickly, and the bugeye straightened and sat calmly in the little waves that fluttered against the hull planks.

Unseen hooks seemed to take hold of the corners of Sail's mouth and pull them back until the lips were taut, blue. Then he swung back suddenly and put his foot on Doll, held him down and began tying him. He finished off the rope ends with a crabber's eye knot which was harder to untie than a bowline.

Sail got a slim red bottle of tobasco sauce out of the refrigerator and unscrewed the top. He leaned down quickly and shook a drop of the stuff in the fat man's mouth, and the fellow jumped as if it were a globule of molten lead.

Sail said, "You ever have this stuff in your eyes?"

Doll's eyes popped and parts of his torso bulged as he strained at the ropes.

"Hell, Jack!" he gurgled. "Have a heart!"

"I've got a heart, fat man. That's why I'm going to put your eyes out if you don't come across with where they took that girl. I like that girl. She does cuckoo things, and I wouldn't want her around as a fixture, because she'd probably get me killed in no time. But I like her, even if she is funny. And I'm going to bat for her. Where is she?"

Sail spoke slowly and his voice was no less earnest because he did not lift it. Then he pried open one of the fat man's eyes.

Horror opened Doll's mouth wide. He started to pump out a scream. Sail, grabbing a fistful of the fat lips, held most of the sound back. Sail twisted the lips cruelly, ground them against the teeth, pounded the man's head on the floor.

"Where," he gritted, "is she?"

"Angelfish," Doll croaked.

Peg-leg John Silver added, "On a cabin cruiser named the *Oilman*."

Sail came around, grabbed the peg-leg man's shoulders. "How'd *you* know?"

"Heard Tom tell the arm-twisting kid as they got in the speedboat," John Silver said calmly. "They said something about it being twenty-five or thirty miles away."

"That sounds like Angelfish," Sail said.

"What is Angelfish, mate?"

"Angelfish Creek. It's a tide gut between two mangrove keys south of here."

Wind came again outside. It said, "*Wheee-e-e!*" this time, and the bug-eye heeled more.

Sail said hoarsely, "Angelfish! My God!"

He lurched, tall and strained looking, to the companion and put his head out. The wind took hold of locks of his hair and shook them a little. The sky looked unnatural, full of brassy threat. The halyards were bowed out and the owner's flag and club burgee were trembling at the tips of the masts.

Drops of perspiration came out on Sail's forehead and were pushed around by the wind. He slammed back into the cabin, took Doll by the throat.

"You sure about Angelfish?" he gritted savagely.

Doll looked at the tall weathered man in black and plainly couldn't understand why he was so worked up.

"Yeah. Angelfish it is."

Sail asked, "What kind of a boat?"

"It's got a motor in it, and a lot of room. It ain't cramped like one of these damn sailboats. It's a swell boat. It's a power boat. They'll be all right."

Sail released him and stepped back. He said, "A power boat! A gaudy, unballasted, topheavy crate with two-inch ribs and three-quarter inch planking." He stopped and breathed deeply. "Swell for what they're intended for! Sundays on the Sound or the Bay, or day trips outside."

Doll mumbled, "A little wind. What the hell?"

Sail shook his head slowly. "You're

the guy who never saw old man *whee!* doing his stuff. It's too bad you never went down to Matecumbe Key to see the railroad rails tied in knots half a mile back in the mangroves, or the tug that was put three-quarters of a mile inshore on Knights Key."

Outside, the wind suddenly stopped, went absolutely dead. The bugeye jumped up and down on little waves. The springlines strained and the halyards slatted.

John Silver asked, "You're trying to make up your mind, ain't you?"

Sail said, "I was waiting for a lull so we can get out of this slip," and bounded out into the cockpit. The Diesel, starter and all, was controlled from there. He got it banging over, leaped forward, flung off the bow springlines, came aft, cleared the stern springlines from the bitts that were like little square posts.

He was about to put the clutch in gear when he seemed to make up his mind about something. He left the wheel, let the bugeye bob out toward the middle of the slip, and came long-legged down into the cabin.

He got the sailor's knife out of the sheath beside the companion in passing. He slashed peg-leg John Silver loose from the mast.

"On the dock with you," Sail said. "You're not going."

"Huh? Listen, mate —"

"You fool," Sail said. "Anybody who has been through one of these things respects them from that time on."

"It ain't that."

"Then what is it?"

"I'm a company dick," John Silver said.

"A what?"

"A private detective employed by the oil company which also employs Nan Moberly," John Silver elaborated. "I was sent here to watch her."

The bugeye ran out of the slip between the City Yacht Basin piers, clearing the dolphins about equidistant, riding her clipper bow high like a graceful black swan. Sail put the wheel over, headed her south toward the row of finger-boards that marked the dredged channel down toward Cape Florida. He screwed down the clamp that lashed the wheel, then galloped forward, unstopped the stays'l and yanked it up. He did the same with the fores'l.

He started to lift the main, looked back and saw that another puff of wind was coming. Leaping to the cockpit, he paid out the sheets that led back to cleats around the cockpit.

The puff hit. The water got varicose veins all around them. The bugeye seemed to lift itself a foot and rush forward.

The first dredged channel marker went past with a sucking sound. The wind was almost astern now. It got in Sail's hair and stretched it out ahead.

Sail yelled, "Get below and make everything fast!"

John Silver went below, agile on his wooden leg.

Sail reached forward and jerked the canvas cover off the compass binnacle,

wadded it, and hurled it down the companion. The first of the tall, channel range lights went past. The channel dog-legged a little there, and he made the turn.

Spray, picked up by the wind, came aboard, beating his back, smashing against the little dinghy, which was lashed to the stern davits.

Then the wind died again. That was the way with some hurricanes when they began. Gusty.

The bugeye lost headway until the push of the Diesel picked up. Sail lashed the wheel again and went to the companionway.

Voices were below.

John Silver was saying, "— and you ain't kidding me any, fat boy! Sancaese and Company hired you boys to get those films from Nan Moberly. Sancaese and Company, the cheapest scabs in the oil business. They haven't any money to spend on honest surveys of their own. So they watch my company. They see our engineers surveying in New Mexico. If the pictures from the plane show oil dome formation we will naturally lease a few sections and sink a well. If Sancaese and Company can find out what the pictures show, they can step in and lease the ground ahead of us." The peg-leg man stopped to snort. "They don't want to drill themselves. Oh, no! They just want to resell the leases to us at a big profit!"

Doll said wearily, "Oh, hell! Do you have to stand there and gobble at me?"

"I'll do more than gobble if Nan Moberly gets hurt!" John Silver yelled. "Damn my company! They thought she might sell out to Sancaese. So they send me to watch her. And I watch her and things begin to happen and before long, damned if I ain't a wooden-legged man who is well mixed up. Now, you tell me —"

Sail called, "Are you making things fast down there?"

John Silver was silent for a while, then said, "O.K."

Sail went back to the wheel, for the wind had come again more slowly than before, which was a bad sign. The bugeye surged and began to run like a mad blackbird.

The peg-legged man came on deck, holding on to things. "How long'll it take us?"

"Depends on the wind. There'll probably be too much or too little."

"Is this the hurricane?"

The wind made the noises of three or four violins in the rigging.

"That," Sail said, "is just the little pups that hang around the skirts of the mother wolf."

The waves came up around them, the short, steep waves that make shoal water so deadly. Biscayne Bay, for all its several miles of width and its more than a score miles of length, was nowhere much more than two fathoms deep.

This time, the wind blew steadily, with increasing force. The waves whitecapped, then began to come to pieces on top.

Spray lifted up in hissing, twisting sheets and came aboard. The scuppers

got brimful and the cockpit sloshed ankle deep, the self-bailing pipes unable to keep up. The bugeye rolled, pitched, bounced, knocked up clouds of spray which the wind caught and rushed on ahead. And the sky above was turning leaden.

John Silver got back beside Sail and hung to the cockpit rail. He got his mouth close to Sail's ears. Then he yelled:

"You probably think pictures and what they mean is a hell of a thing to fight over, mate. If it was money, that'd make sense. But you gotta know the oil business, the way they work it the modern way, and then it makes sense."

Sail roared back, "Get ropes for us to lash ourselves."

"O.K. But I thought —"

Sail bellowed, "It makes sense. I've heard that these airplane survey pictures are sent around the oil fields under armed guard, to keep rival outfits from coppering them."

John Silver nodded, lurched up to get the ropes. The bugeye yawed, rolled rail under, sank dizzily in a wave trough and the peg-leg man went skidding for the Bay. Sail got him, kept him aboard, and fought the boat back on its course.

John Silver yelled, "I ain't so spry. You get the ropes. I'll steer, mate."

Sail said, "You never steered a boat in your life."

The peg-leg man looked disappointed. "How'd you know, mate?"

"No sailor," Sail said, "ever talked quite like you do."

John Silver grinned, put his face close to Sail's and howled, "I was practicin' up on foolin' people. I'm just an oilfield tool pusher who turned half-pants dick after he neglected to keep his leg out of a bullwheel."

He got the ropes, after some difficulty. They tied themselves to cleats, allowing about six feet of play in the line.

The cockpit got level full of water and the weight helped keep the stern of the bugeye down. Waves came up behind and bumped the dinghy on the stern davits and before long the davits began to bend. Finally, the flat bottom came out of the dink, except for a few fragments.

Two shoal banks crossed the lower end of Biscayne Bay, Sail knew. The first had a wide opening, with markers. When he saw how high the water had risen on them, Sail didn't worry as much about the next bank, which was Arsenicker, and bad.

But the next bank, the last one they had to cross, was wide, and it was breaking water for half a mile. The fores'l blew out in that. One moment it was pulling, the next it was a trembling canvas beard along the spars.

Rain caught up with them. Sheets of it traveling along above the water, seeming never to fall, moving so fast that the eye had difficulty following it. Flag and burgee had turned to strings on the mast tips. And the American Jack on the stern staff had narrowed down until it was not much wider than a hand.

They kept their hands over their mouths so they wouldn't breathe

water and Sail angled in towards Angelfish.

The cabin cruiser was a forty-two footer, all white and mahogany, and a sweet thing to tie up to a swanky yacht club dock. There was a lot of glass windows around her cabin, and two neat little lapstrake dinghies were davited, one on each side.

The glass had all been blown out of her cabin. One dink was gone. The other had come loose from the stern davit, had swung over, and was slamming up and down, patting a hole in the cabin top.

There seemed to be about two feet of water inside her.

She had anchored in a mangrove creek, but the wind had pushed her out and she was drifting down on the mangroves on the other side. The *Sail* came in ahead of her. She would never come up into the wind under stays'l alone.

There was no sign of life aboard her.

Sail left the wheel, raced forward, used his sheath knife on the lashings of the heavy anchor. Three hundred pounds of iron, it was. Ridiculously large for such a small boat. And the chain was heavy in proportion.

Sail let it go. The chain ran over the winch wildcat and was arranged so it couldn't jump out. The winch had a brake. Sail came down on it.

The anchor took hold; its yank ducked the whole front of the boat. Sail reached out with the knife and stuck the stays'l. The sail went to pieces with a noise like cats fighting.

The hooker was the *Oilman*. And the *Sail* was hanging directly ahead of her by no more than a hundred feet.

Sail got down on all fours and hung onto things and got back to the wheel. He set it to port, locked it. The bugeye swung over, for water was rushing past underneath just as air was rushing on top.

He went forward and let out chain until he had the bugeye back even with the cruiser. Then he half-hitched the chain over the winch niggerheads.

A boil of water came over the bugeye four or five feet deep and left John Silver hanging at the end of his lashing line. Sail hauled him back, put his mouth against the peg-leg's ear.

"I'll swing her in and board," he shouted. "You swing her off, then bring her back again when and if I clean house."

Sail jockeyed the wheel, and the stream of water moving past and pressing against the rudder caused the bugeye to swing on her chain in towards the power boat. He was facing the wind now. His polo shirt and trouser hugged one side of his body and ballooned out on the other. And he could see at all only when he held his open hand over his eyes and squinted between the fingers.

Sail gave John Silver the wheel. He pulled himself amidships. The bugeye shouldered against the cruiser. Sail was pitched aboard. He got in the deckhouse.

John Silver sheered the bugeye off.

The osteopath came clawing up out of the cruiser's forward cabin.

Sail kicked him in the face.

Sail thought of the doctor with the broken neck, and of his own arm which still hurt, and he kicked hard, permanently altering the fat young man's dentistry and driving him back to land in a water-filled cabin.

Sail followed him down, getting his gun out. Caesar, the very fat, very blond Viking, had been bucketing water out through a porthole.

He dropped his bucket, squawled, "Yumpin' Yoseph!" and dug at his big guns harnessed under his arms.

Sail shot tear gas in his eyes. Caesar went backward as if it had been lead, then began to shoot both his guns aimlessly.

The boat rolled. Mattresses, folding chairs, canned goods, and the osteopath sloshed around on the floor. Sail, looking swiftly, saw no sign of Nan Moberly. The gas got to his eyes and he retreated, made it up the companionway. He fell down in the deck house.

The boat, being built for complete privacy, had no means of entrance from the deck house into the rear cabin. It was necessary to go outside and fight along the rail, dodging the swatting efforts of what was left of the lapstrake dink.

He reached the rear companion slide and jacked it open. He put his mouth close to the slide, but not close enough that his face could be seen from within the cabin, and screeched, "Hey! Help!"

Tom, the other fat man, put his head out and Sail was ready, although he never did know for sure but that he hit too hard. He wasn't trying to kill anybody, particularly.

He dived down after Tom.

There was a port bunk and a starboard bunk. Sanders, the man with the draft horse legs, lay on one bunk. His face was a tint of green and he had messed up the bed and the jacket life preserver he was wearing.

Nan Moberly lay bound in the other bunk.

The cruiser jumped up on a wave and shook itself. Tom's slack body got between Sail's feet and he fell down. Sanders, suddenly losing his seasickness, came off his bed and began to stamp and kick Sail.

Sail lost his gun. He rolled to get away from Sanders' powerful kicking. Landing on his back, he drew back his long legs and kicked once himself. Sanders took it where he probably felt the worst — his stomach. He staggered back against the companion.

The kick took it out of him. Evidently he didn't have a gun. He wheeled, scrambled up the companion. Sail lurched after him and got one of Sanders' legs. They had a fight over the leg and Sanders won.

Sail clawed out on deck after Sanders. The man looked back, saw him, and tried to make more speed. He took a chance, not holding onto the handrail.

The first lurch of the boat put him overboard, and the tide rushed him away, riding high in his life preserver.

Sail backed into the cabin, floundered to the girl and was pitched into

the bunk with her by the motion of the boat. He cut her ropes. She could move, and they reached the deck. Sail waved.

He waved three times before John Silver saw them, and sheered the bugeye over and caved in half the side of the power boat. Sail and Nan Moberly landed to the bugeye deck.

The bugeye bounced away, a wave curled over it, broke in froth and violence. When Sail looked, the military mast of the cruiser was just pulling itself beneath the surface.

He tumbled into the cabin with the girl, got up, thrust his head out of the companionway, looked, and after a while saw Sanders. The man had been washed into the tops of the mangroves. He had left his life jacket hanging on one of the snags, but was clinging to the other, high enough so that only the tallest waves tossed him about.

He saw no sign of the men who had been in the cruiser a little while ago.

He yelled, "Come below!" at John Silver.

The peg-legged fellow tumbled into the cabin. Sail shut the hatch.

He turned on the radio.

Doll, still sick, moaned loudly.

Sail looked at Nan Moberly, at the company detective with the wooden leg. He saw what they were thinking.

"Sanders," Sail said. "He's back in the mangroves. We can't help him. Maybe he'll tough it out."

John Silver peered at Nan Moberly. "What was the line-up, Nan?"

"Those pictures show an oil formation," the girl said dully. "And only I know where they were taken. Sancaese and Company — Sanders and Caesar — tried to buy the location from me. I refused. They said they'd get it anyway. I hired Mister Sail, here, to —"

Sail said, "Explain that later. The thing you can tell me now is why you bore those two punks out when they told me Sanders and Caesar were not it."

Nan Moberly said, "As long as you didn't know the truth, I thought they might let you off."

The radio, cracking and popping, said, "*It is now evident that only the edge of the tropical disturbance is going to touch the Florida coast. Reports from Fowey Rocks and elsewhere indicate. . . .*"

John Silver gulped, "Hully gee — ain't this thing we been having *it?*"

"Only the pups," Sail said.

He muttered, "We should try to drift a life preserver to Sanders on a long line," and put his head out of the hatch.

Successions of brown muddy waves were curling over the mangroves, breaking with sudsy turbulence, smashing one after another upon Sanders, and finally the water tore him loose and bore him away. He stayed on top for a while, his head back, his mouth wide open.

He was talking to his mother and his God in a loud screaming voice.

Nan put one ear against Sail's chest and clapped a hand over the other. It kept out that sound.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *R. E. Kendall is one of the three new writers discovered by EQMM's Second Annual Contest. With two others — Harry Kemelman and Jack Finney — Mrs. Kendall was awarded a Special Prize for a first-published story. Mrs. Kendall is thirty-nine years old, was born in Chicago, and graduated from the University of Chicago. She started work at the age of fourteen in a corn-plaster factory, progressed "by devious ways" to eleven years of editing, including more than five at "Good Housekeeping." Outside of what she calls "general editorial hackwork" (a phrase we personally have never cottoned to), Mrs. Kendall's only previous attempt at fiction was a short story she submitted to EQMM's First Contest — "which was promptly and with complete justification bounced back." But Mrs. Kendall was not discouraged — she tried again. Therein lies the secret of success: if you try, try again, you build a better mouse-trap, make a better corn-plaster, do a better job of editing, and last but not least, write a better detective story . . .*

LISTEN, LISTEN!

by R. E. KENDALL

MEASURED against the high double door, he was a small man, and his careful dignity was almost painful to see as he walked into the stronghold of the majesty of the law. Yet he was not without a certain majesty of his own when he bared his head — a lost gesture, he saw, looking at the several heads in evidence. The hand that held his hat rose tentatively and dropped to rest again at his side.

He made his way over to a uniform standing apart from the anonymous figures that peopled the dim and musty hall. "I would like —" he addressed the badge in a voice which barely rose above the murmurs of the group near the door.

The uniform's head swiveled around and down. "Hm?"

He swallowed and spoke up. "I would like to see someone about the Jamieson case."

"Burglary?"

The small man blinked. "The Jamieson case. The — uh — stocking murder."

The meaty face quivered as the uniform jerked its head toward a door. "In there."

"Thank you," said the little man. And "Thank you, thank you, thank you" took him from a second uniform to a brown suit to an unpressed gray.

"Thank you," he said again as he arranged himself in a chair at Detective Sergeant Oliver's desk, feet precisely flat on the floor, knees together, hands curved primly around his hat.

Without acknowledging this grave courtesy the man behind the desk opened a drawer and rummaged for a

pencil. Rolling it between his palms, he leaned back and waited.

"It's about the Jamieson case," said the little man. Whatever resolution had brought him there weakened and died under the vast indifference that glazed the detective's eyes. "I think — " He broke off and fumbled with his hat. "That is, it seems to me — " He looked across the desk for reassurance, and saw a face pasty with fatigue. The collar below it was edged with the day's grime, and the hands rolling the pencil were dry and dusty like hands that had shuffled a long time through old papers. He stared at their rolling, rolling, and let out the breath tightening in his chest. "The Jamieson case," he repeated. "Are the police satisfied?"

The pencil thudded down on the blotter. "Don't you read the papers?"

"Yes, yes." The little man said so eagerly it was almost a cry. "That's it. Everybody reads the papers. That's why I've come. Because it was the third murder and everybody knew about the other two. Anybody could read about them — the stocking, the lipstick — and *copy* them, and the police would never know it wasn't the same — "

Sudden distaste twisted Oliver's pasty face, and his dusty hands retrieved the pencil. "You said your name was Smith."

"Smith, yes. Jasper. Ah — Jasper F."

"Occupation?"

"I am a bookkeeper."

"Uh-huh. Well, Mr. Smith, did you kill the Jamieson girl?" He disdained to pause for an answer. "No? Then did you see somebody else kill her? No. Now we've got that straight." He permitted a quirk of good-natured contempt to wipe out the lines of annoyance about his mouth, and when he spoke again, it was with polite patience. "You've got a theory?"

Mr. Smith nodded and opened his mouth. The detective forestalled him.

"We appreciate it. Let me tell you we appreciate it, Mr. — uh — Smith. Very, ve-ry much. The world should be full of good citizens like yourself who take an interest. Only it just so happens this thing is sewed up tight. But tight, they tell me. So if that's all you had on your mind — "

Mr. Smith did not budge. Oliver, a man with a quick eye for the stubborn set of a righteous jaw, sighed.

"Tell you what, Mr. Smith. Actually you came to the wrong place. The murder wasn't in this district. Suppose you have got hold of something. All I could do would be turn it over to the boys who handled the case. So how about you go up to the East Fifty-first Street station yourself, and tell them all about it?"

He got up then, and Mr. Smith rose with him like the will-less man he looked to be. But he hesitated. In his tentative voice he asked,

"Who — whom shall I ask for?"

Oliver frowned. "Just — " he began, but malicious delight swept the frown away. "Why, ask for Lieutenant King. He'll be *glad* to talk to you." In an excess of good feeling he walked around the desk and clapped Mr.

Smith on the back. "Lieutenant King," he repeated, propelling him to the door. "Don't forget."

Mr. Smith was ten yards down the street before he remembered to put on his hat. The early dusk was closing in on the muted Saturday-afternoon clamor of the city, and a damp breeze from the river brushed the fringe of gray hair on his head before he covered it. He shivered, and roused from his abstraction to quicken his pace. He did not need to quicken his thoughts. A week of lonely horror and nights of black sleeplessness had given him plenty of time to rehearse the speech Oliver had not heard.

For a craven instant, while he waited on a traffic light, he allowed himself to consider that he did not have to go on with it. He could turn left to the subway instead of keeping ahead. He could go — home. And not one of the nameless shapes of humanity riding with him, nor anyone else in the city above or on the face of the earth, would ever know his decision.

Yet he went on, compelling himself with the hope that though Oliver had been tired and impatient, Lieutenant King would be different.

Lieutenant King was different. He was very clean, for one thing, and very big, and not at all tired; and when he looked at Mr. Morgan — it was Morgan now, for in a moment of belated prescience he had realized that Smith was not a name to inspire conviction — there was no indifference in his eyes at all, but a business-like alertness. It occurred to Mr. Morgan that he was the model of all the inexorably executive gentlemen whose books he had ever kept. The thought was not a happy one, but doggedly he marshaled his words.

"It's about the Jamieson case."

Interest quickened in the Lieutenant's eyes.

"I understand you're in charge of the case?"

The Lieutenant shook his head. "I was. The District Attorney's office has it now."

Mr. Morgan was not to be deflected. "What I mean is — you know all about it? You could pass on new evidence or anything?"

This time the Lieutenant nodded. "The evidence is complete for the first two murders. We could use a witness to testify that he saw Schultz going into the Jamieson girl's place."

With a little smile he meant to be deprecatory but bright with promise. Mr. Morgan went on: "Nothing like that, I'm afraid. But if you could spare a few minutes I'd like to tell you what I've been thinking." It was not a good opening. He saw at once that King was too busy to spare minutes and too thoughtful to be impressed by thinking. He pressed on:

"There were three murders. Three girls, all young, all living in walk-up apartments alone. Three weeks ago today the Evans girl was found by her cleaning woman, naked and dead, strangled by a brand-new nylon stocking knotted around her throat. On her forehead was scrawled a

capital A in *Mon Péché* lipstick. Exactly one week later Eva Sestrom's sister, coming to spend the weekend, found her naked and dead, strangled by a stocking, an A smeared on her forehead with the same kind of lipstick. One week later — "

The Lieutenant, who had become restive with the second sentence, thrust up a protesting hand. "You don't have to tell me. It was my case, you know. Helen Jamieson was found like the other two. Next day we picked up the phony stocking salesman we'd been tracking down since the first murder. He had a wild look on his face and the lipstick in his pocket. He's waiting trial now. What's your point?"

Against this direct attack on his laborious indirection, Mr. Morgan had no defense. Feebly he asked, "Has Schultz confessed to the Jamieson murder?"

"He hasn't confessed to any. The man is mad. We've got him cold on the first two — I don't intend to waste my time telling you how, you can read the papers when he's tried — and you can take my word for it the Jamieson affair fits right into the picture. I must say I don't see — "

"Please," said Mr. Morgan. "Please. I just wanted to ask whether it had occurred to the police — that is, had you taken it into consideration — " For a moment he bogged down, and then struggled out with it: "The first two murders made a pattern. If anybody wanted to kill a girl, he — she — they could do it the same way without much risk. They would count on the police thinking it was one of a series, they — "

King indulged in an heroic shudder. "My dear Mr. Morgan — " he invested the name with solemn awe — "you have been reading too many detective stories."

Mr. Morgan had faced mockery too often to be silenced by it now. "I think the police are making a mistake."

His tone was meek, but it moved the Lieutenant to a burst of anger. "Oh, you do? You think the police are making a mistake? Well, you came to the wrong place to say so. I am the police, in this case. If you have any complaints, take 'em to the Commissioner. Take 'em to the D.A., take 'em to City Hall for all I care. Write to the papers. But don't come around here telling me how to do my work! I'm a busy man!"

Mr. Morgan knew his cause was lost. He was halfway across the room when a sharp "Just a minute" turned him about.

Breathing deeply, the Lieutenant was once more in control of himself. "Who sent you here to me?"

"Sergeant Oliver, at Thirty-fifth Street," said Mr. Morgan, and lingered hopefully.

But the Lieutenant only muttered, "Oliver, eh," breathing a little deeper. He got up and stalked ahead of Mr. Morgan to open the door. "Riley," he called to the anteroom. "Get me Oliver on the phone, will you?" He glared at Mr. Morgan. "Good day, sir."

It was small comfort to walk in merciful shadows and tell himself, "I did my best." His best had never been good enough, and he knew it. Yet he walked, and told himself, till dusk settled and a heavy mist settled with it. He wandered aimlessly till he stood irresolute on Broadway, staring up at the Times Building where a flickering ribbon of lights spelled out news of the weary day. A phrase of the Lieutenant's echoed in his ears. Write to the papers. A letter would not do it. But if he could find a glib reporter to seize on the idea and find the right words and string them together and spread them over the front page —

Carefully picking a path through the grinning crowd, he walked to the Forty-second Street corner and waited there, jostled and unheeding, while the light changed from red to green and back to red again. The sharp wind cutting across town swept a filthy chocolate wrapper from the gutter and flattened it against his shoe. His eyes focused on it, unseeing. It still clung damply when he crossed the street with the next green light and went into the Times Building.

The lone clerk on duty was young and bored and inclined to amusement. "This," he explained with lordly restraint, "is the want-ad office."

Mr. Morgan's chin wobbled. The young man grinned. Mr. Morgan was never a figure to inspire respect; damp and spent, he was worth only a grin.

Planting an elbow on the counter, the clerk leaned across it and smirked knowingly. "If you want to see reporters this time of evening — " he flicked a finger in the direction of the wall clock — "the place to go is Joe's."

Mr. Morgan looked at the clock and back again at the young man. "Joe's," he repeated.

"That's right. It's a bar on Eighth near Forty-third. A lot of them hang out there."

Mr. Morgan nodded helplessly and turned away, turned again and said: "Joe's. Thank you."

Mr. Morgan had never been in a bar. When he was young, men — other men — drank in saloons. All he knew of them was the beery smell that seeped out swinging half-doors. On the way to Joe's he braced himself to meet bold stares and raucous abuse and other lusty terrors, but the small pricking fears that assailed him were routed by astonishment. Joe's was almost like a restaurant. There were booths along one wall, and women spoke quietly with men in two of them. A pair of men, dressed like persons of consequence and engrossed in barely audible talk, perched on stools at the far end of the bar. At the middle, alone, a man slumped against it, intent on the damp circles he was inscribing with the base of a half-filled glass.

That was all. None of them looked up. The white-jacketed man lounging glumly behind the bar unfolded his arms and stepped forward.

"Good evening," said Mr. Morgan.

A vague surprise briefly lightened

the bartender's face.

Mr. Morgan discarded the small smile he had so hardily put on. "That is — a glass of sherry, please."

White-jacket's sparse eyebrows moved up another notch, but he brought the wine, shining gold in a clear goblet. Mr. Morgan gave himself time to think how pretty it was before he took the sip he felt was a necessary concession. When he put down the glass, the bartender had retreated, and he had lost the opportunity to make a casual opening for his momentous question. To still his small panic, he studied the bottles ranged opposite, and in the mirror above caught sight of his own pink mouse-face and the gray hat set with utter rectitude, square above it. The image blurred. He saw instead the cold face of a girl naked and hideously dead, and his fingers closed again about the stem of the glass.

He drained it and held it up for a signal, and the bartender had scarcely reached him when he began boldly, "They tell me newspapermen use this place a lot."

The answer was slow and insolent when it came. "Do they?"

Mr. Morgan persisted. "Are there any here now?"

The bartender assessed him incuriously. "Guy standing there alone is Beekman. On the *Times*," he said at last, and went back to sullen meditation.

With great precision Mr. Morgan raised his glass again and, sipping, glanced covertly at Beekman slouching a few feet away. He sidestepped closer, till his small hand rested within inches of lean fingers holding a long-ashed cigarette. It became distressingly plain to him that the smoke was going to make him cough. Trying to keep the rasp as inoffensive as possible, he almost choked on a murmured "Excuse me," reached for the sherry to wash down his throat, and strangled on that. His neighbor watched his struggles impassively and only shrugged when, red-faced and swimming-eyed, the little man gasped as if in apology, "Nasty damp evening, isn't it?"

But Mr. Morgan, reaching into a vest pocket for his little pink spectacle-polishing rag, congratulated himself. The cough had made it easier, even though his quarry had resumed contemplation of his damp pattern of circles.

"Sherry," he announced, "is a nice warming drink."

The newspaperman was startled into looking up.

"My name," said Mr. Morgan, "is Reid, Ralph Reid."

Very slowly Beekman reached out for an ashtray. Very gravely he replied, "That is a mighty pretty name."

Words he had read in half a hundred books welled up in Mr. Reid. "Have the next one on me."

The hearty phrase languished on the air for the moment it took Beekman to crush out his cigarette. "No, thank you."

Mr. Reid knew no other formula for establishing camaraderie. So he

was silent for a while, and even found heart to wonder how soon he could expect the alcohol to make him a sodden travesty of Christian man. Ice tinkling in Beekman's glass recalled him to the urgency of the moment. He edged a little closer and half-whispered,

"Have you been reading about the stocking murders?"

Beekman grunted and tapped his empty glass with a fingernail.

"The girls, you know, the girls they found naked and s-s-strangled — " Mr. Reid stuttered over the horrible word and stopped.

The reporter straightened up to give him his full attention. "What a cunning little fellow it is. Does it like to smack its lips over naked girls?"

New pain contorted Mr. Reid's mouth. "No, no, it's not that at all. It's the last murder, the police are wrong, they don't know, poor Helen — " His voice broke off in a kind of bleat as he heard the screech of a stool pushed back at the other end of the bar and a high giggle from one of the booths. In a nightmare world outside his own White-jacket loomed and growled, "Take it easy, Pop," and a large young man wagged his head sadly and walked away with a fresh drink in his hand, swaying slightly.

Mr. Reid awoke to feel his fingers tight around the smooth goblet. With some show of self-possession he drained it and fumbled for a bill to lay on the bar.

He had trouble at the door. He pulled at the knob, and pulled again against inanimate obstinacy, until in hot confusion he found it yielded to a push.

It was a moment for cowering in the dark, but neon-reflecting sidewalk lay red before him like a path of shame, and glittered endlessly ahead through sweeping rain. Men sheltering in doorways stared after him, but he walked on oblivious till a scurrying girl, bowed under a tented newspaper, caromed into him and swung him half around. He felt the cold rain on the hand he had flung out to save his balance, he saw the flooded street streaming through his drizzled glasses; automatically he trotted to the subway entrance at the corner for refuge.

Before the rain slackened he was restored to a saner level of misery, and felt a sick weakness vaguely identified with hunger. He forced himself into an Automat and there, eating what he could not taste, swallowed despair.

A cold wind was clearing the night when he left the restaurant; it struck through his wet clothes to the flesh, but he did not feel it. Alone and singular among a pleasuring throng, he walked up Seventh Avenue until the laughter and the women's scents and the press of alien bodies became unbearable. He turned east, against the wind, to search out peace and quiet.

They eluded him, but at another crossing he stopped, and a little whimper escaped him, for the shift in the kaleidoscope of brick and

stone had revealed, dwarfed and half-hidden, the square uncompromising tower of a church. In blind haste he stumbled over to Fifth Avenue and up to St. Thomas'. The broad, shallow steps seemed to lead to sanctuary; eagerly he stretched his hand out to the door.

It was locked. He beat against it with a soft fist, and yielding to his impotence, sagged against it and cried.

Deep in the shadowed embrasure, he dabbed at his wet cheeks and rested till he was steady enough to walk away with a semblance of composure. He turned south, for he had remembered, a little fearfully, that there was one church said never to be closed.

St. Patrick's received him. He trembled in the entry, repelled by the immensity of the high-vaulted nave and the faint breath of stale incense that hung over him like the smell of death. The echo of a muffled cough arrested him in half-flight, to peer dimly at the score of solitary worshipers scattered through the cathedral. Whatever they found there, down on their knees among the popish mysteries of graven images and dancing candle flames, was not free to him. He looked about for human help and found it in a man who hovered unobtrusively near the holywater font.

Lowering his voice to a proper churchly tone, he said, "I'd like to speak to a — monk?"

The unobtrusive man corrected him. "A priest."

Under his scrutiny Mr. Reid lost control of his quivering mouth. For a moment he almost hoped that the man would refuse him; but presently he was led by obscurely lit ways to a small room and told to wait.

The priest who came, humming cheerfully, was old and portly and turned a beaming ruddy face to his visitor. "Good evening, sir — sit down, sit down." With comfortable wheezes and little grunts the priest settled himself and spread his countenance in easy, impersonal benignity. "I am Father Kennedy."

Mr. Reid licked his lips. "My name is Herbert Johnson. My real name, that is," he explained earnestly.

Father Kennedy looked at him sharply. "Are you ill, Mr. Johnson?"

He went on as if he had not heard. "I am not a Catholic."

The priest waved that aside and waited.

Mr. Johnson waited with him until he heard his own voice, far off, unaccountably saying, "No, no, thank you, I'm not ill," and saw the priest's forehead creased in a frown. He knew he must be quicker. "It's about the Jamieson case." Still Father Kennedy was silent. "The murder, the last murder. You know about the murders, don't you?"

"I do not," said the priest firmly. "If it's a police case — "

Mr. Johnson raised a shaking hand to his head and rubbed it as if it hurt. "I thought you would help," he said weakly.

"Of course, of course. But you must tell me how I can. Is there murder on your conscience? Did you wish to confess and be absolved? That's not possible, you know."

The hearty voice stirred Mr. Johnson to incoherent eloquence. "No, sir. I didn't come for that. I thought somebody here might tell me what to do, how to go about — would show me how to get somebody to listen, to make them take it seriously, to see that there might be a mistake and work more at it — " He pulled up and made a new beginning. "There were three girls killed — "

To Father Kennedy it was a fresh story. He frowned and puffed out his cheeks and screwed up his nose and shook his head all in pity, and he sat quite still while the tale was ending.

"So you see," concluded Mr. Johnson, "the first two were in all the papers. There were even pictures, close-ups of the big A on their foreheads. It would be the easiest thing in the world for anybody who wanted to kill the Jamieson girl to go up there and do it the same way, and the police would get the first killer and not bother to look for another and — oh, don't you see how easy it was?"

Father Kennedy studied the pleading face. "I see," he said gently. "And I see that you must not torture yourself any more. It is a matter for the police. Surely they overlooked nothing? They are skilled and trained in such things, while you and I — well, we may think about them, and of course if we have any pertinent information, evidence, like good citizens we will go to them. So — "

"I've been to the police," Mr. Johnson said heavily.

"Ah. Yes." The gentle smile was sharpened by private mirth. "Then you have done your duty, you may set your mind at rest. Justice has been served."

The platitudes failed to still the raging torment in Mr. Johnson's mind. Out of it, with infinite effort, he dredged new words. "I know the Jamieson girl's family."

"Poor souls. Perhaps you feel that they wish to be comforted by a priest?"

Mr. Johnson rushed on. "Her — that is, the family, was very strict. She left home when she was young, only seventeen and so pretty, and live-looking. She was good. Oh — " he might have been talking to himself, the words were so low and hurried, "oh, she was good, I know. She just wanted to be young, and have pretty clothes and laugh. She went on the stage with a new name, she worked hard and got ahead, and she kept in touch, but hardly ever saw her family because they were always scolding and preaching of the wages of sin — " On that note of anguish he became silent.

Moved and uncomfortably mystified, Father Kennedy repeated after him, "The wages of sin." He looked at the tortured man and solemnly intoned, "Death," and shortly sucked in his breath on a new idea and recoiled from its enormity. "No, that

would be too — Her family? It's monstrous, unbelievable. You must be wrong." He laughed a little. "Be easy, man. Come, we will be common-sensible together. You say the police have taken a man and believe him the one who killed all three of the poor women. It is not likely they are wrong. Yet for your sake, to get it off your mind, go to them again. They will listen. I know a man over here at Fifty-first Street and I will give you a letter to him. His name — yes, King, Lieutenant Christopher King, and a fine man he is."

A small hope died in Mr. Johnson's eyes. "I've seen him. He's in charge of the case."

"And he dismissed you?" Father Kennedy was brisk. "Then I am sorry, but I must do the same." His innate kindliness shone out again. "You must not fret, dear man. It is incredible that your thought should be true. The police will do all that is necessary, and you — well, you go to your home and have a good night's sleep and trust in the police and Almighty Justice. You are tired now. Go home and sleep, then come to me again, and we will talk more about it — and other things. Remember — " he got up to put his white hand on Mr. Johnson's shoulder — "remember there is Grace and Comfort for us all." He mouthed the catchwords absently and touched his visitor's cheek lightly. "Yes. I thought so when I saw you. You are feverish, Mr. Johnson. Home now, and have your good wife give you a hot drink and tuck you into your warm bed, and tomorrow — "

Numbly Mr. Johnson let himself be led to the door. He stopped once before they reached it and looked up at the rosy, untroubled face that seemed to float above him. "My wife," he said distinctly, "is a very religious woman."

"Good, good," boomed the priest. "You must bring her with you when you come again." Then they walked on once more.

And soon Mr. Johnson stood alone in the shadows of the street, and thought of going home to the silent woman who had never touched paint to her face, who clothed herself chastely in cotton. And of how she would raise great burning eyes to him when he came in, and carefully close the Bible she would be nursing, and reverently put it away in the drawer that held as well a gold-cased lipstick and a single shimmering stocking.

ABOUT THE STORY: *For a first-published story "Listen, Listen!" is a beautifully written tale — and a subtle one. Mrs. Kendall has a sharp sense of observation, especially for the commonplace details of human behavior and physical appearance — those minutiæ which many writers take so much for granted that they overlook or ignore them; yet these*

"facts of life" are often the most revealing — they are the essence of true realism in literature. Mrs. Kendall's handling of the police — their fatigue, their impatience, their vast indifference — illustrates her keen perception. Indeed, it is difficult to believe that in any of the really important things — characterization, mood, projection of inner compulsion — Mrs. Kendall is only a beginner in the art of writing.

We started by saying that "Listen, Listen!" is beautifully written — and subtle. At the risk of being obvious and pedantic, we'd like to expose that subtlety. Now that you have read the story, you realize that Mrs. Kendall cunningly prepared us for the final whiplash of surprise embodied so economically in the last seven words of the text. The shock-ending is the author's crowning trick on the reader, but it is not pulled out of a hat: it was all carefully "planted" in a series of clues. Follow the steps as we now tear them from the context: first, Mr. Smith-Morgan-Reid-Johnson kept changing his name — suspicious but not definitive; second, he forgot himself for a moment while talking to the reporter at the bar and spoke of the third murdered girl as "poor Helen" — a change from a purely impersonal connection with the case to a purely personal one; third, he told the priest that his real name was Johnson; fourth, he also told told the priest that the most recent victim, Helen Jamieson, had left home when she was only seventeen and had gone on the stage with a new name — surely the "new name" Jamieson was simply a more theatrical version of the little man's own name, Johnson. So the true relationship between Mr. Johnson and the murdered girl was clear: they were father and daughter. Psychologically the author has lulled most of us into the false conviction that Mr. Johnson has been trying to confess that he killed his own child. Then, in the very last paragraph, Mrs. Kendall unmasks the "surprise criminal." True, we did not learn of the existence of a Mrs. Johnson until the third paragraph from the end. Nevertheless, Mr. Johnson's wife has been fully prepared for, fully motivated; and in the final paragraph she emerges solidly and completely (no mean accomplishment) and suddenly we see the whole truth — that it was Mr. Johnson's wife who killed the third victim in the stocking murders and in so doing strangled her own daughter!

You say it was no surprise to you? Then chalk up a winning point for your side. To us it was an unexpected thunderclap — we freely admit that Mrs. Kendall outwitted us . . .

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