

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE



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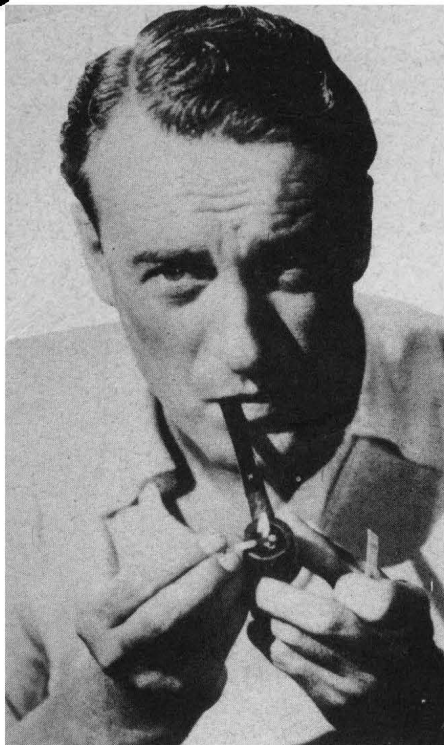
William Wilson's Racket
Meanest Man in Europe
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Arsene Lupin vs. Col. Linnaus

John Dickson Carr
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Valma Clark
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By George Sanders

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

VOL. 5 NO. 19

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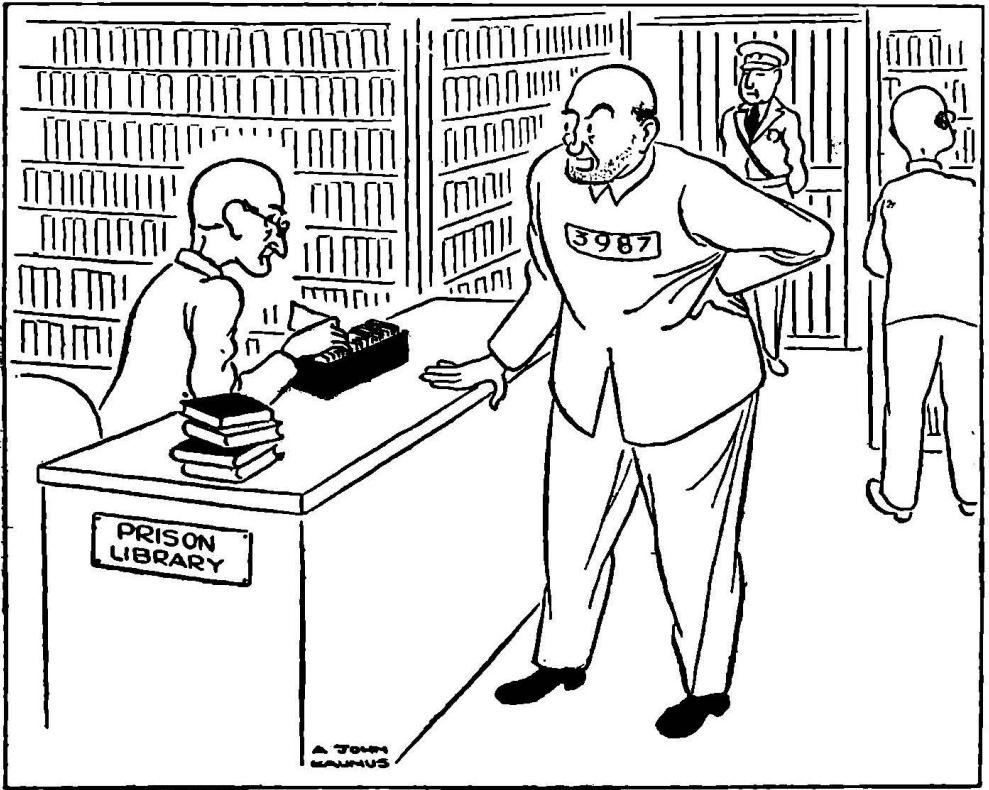
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"D'ya Have Any 'Escapist' Literature?"

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the glass mask

By the author of
SKELETON KEY, etc.

**LENORE GLEN
OFFORD**

*"Now that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,
May gaze thro' these faint smokes curling whitely,
As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's smithy—
Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?"*

This first verse of Browning's "The Laboratory" is the source of the title for Lenore Glen Offord's newest mystery novel. No one in the gingerbread Tillsit mansion actually used a glass mask, of course. But Todd was sure someone had used someone else as a shield — as a mask through which they might, if they could only see plain, mark the face of a murderer... \$2.50

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THE CRIME CLUB



After spending half a lifetime collecting the detective short story, your Editor has come to the conclusion that there are fifty key books in the field. By key books I mean those books which are outstanding for any of three reasons: sheer quality of contents, historical significance and/or rarity of first edition.

Your Editor has gone further in his bibliographic analysis and divided the fifty books into seven "periods." Chronologically these major periods could be named: Pre-Poe; Poe and Pre-Doyle; Doyle Era; 20th Century, First Decade; 20th Century, Second Decade; 20th Century, Moderns; and 20th Century, Contemporaries. The last group takes in the fourth decade to date — from 1930 to the present.

The books in this Contemporary Period have not, of course, had the opportunity to withstand the acid test of time. But there can be no doubt that one of them — Carter Dickson's [John Dickson Carr's] THE DEPARTMENT OF QUEER COMPLAINTS, published in 1940 — will pass every test and remain one of the important books of modern detective short stories. The volume contains eleven tales of which the first seven concern Colonel March, head of the Scotland Yard Department whose curious name serves as the title of the book.

All of which is a terse and somewhat academic preamble to a startling announcement — a discovery of epic importance to the American fan. Yes, you may indeed hold your breath — for did you know that there are two Colonel March short stories which were not included in Mr. Carr's book? These two stories, believe it or not, have never been published in the United States!

We bring one of them to you now — "William Wilson's Racket" — and we have scheduled the second for an early issue.

In "William Wilson's Racket," two great series of detective-mystery stories seem to blend and intermingle. For a fleeting moment Mr. Carr's THE DEPARTMENT OF QUEER COMPLAINTS and Mr. Chesterton's THE CLUB OF QUEER TRADES seem to meet on the Strand of Detection Town, shake hands, clap each other on the shoulder, chuckle loud enough to be heard all the way to America, and then, arm in arm, strut off together. Could a happier twosome be imagined in all the annals of detective literature?

WILLIAM WILSON'S RACKET

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

COLONEL MARCH, of the Department of Queer Complaints, has entertained many an odd sort of visitor in his office at New Scotland Yard. But it is seldom that he entertains a visitor so socially distinguished as

Lady Patricia Mortlake, only daughter of the Earl of Cray.

She burst in like a whirlwind, that pleasant, spring morning two or three years ago. She almost snorted through her aristocratic nose. And this despite

the fact that Lady Patricia was normally one of those languid ladies, with a bored blank eye and a sullen under-lip, who would have made an ideal heroine for Mr. Coward.

"She refuses to fill up an official form, sir," Colonel March was told. "And she's got a blasted Pekingese with her. But she showed me a note from the Commissioner himself —"

"Send her up," said Colonel March.

Lady Patricia subsided into a chair in a whirl and flop of furs, nursing the Pekingese. As a famous beauty, she perhaps photographed better than she looked. It was a highly enamelled sort of beauty, and her jaw looked as hard as porcelain.

She found herself facing a large, amiable man (weight seventeen stone) with a speckled face, a bland eye, and a cropped moustache. He was teetering before the fire, smoking a short pipe; and Inspector Roberts stood by with a notebook.

"I want you to find him," Lady Patricia said crisply.

"Find him?" repeated Colonel March. "Find whom?"

"Frankie, of course," said Lady Patricia, with some impatience. "My *fiancé*. Surely you've heard of him?"

Light came to Colonel March. Any newspaper-reader will remember the political reputation which was being made at that time by the Right Hon. Francis Hale, youngest of the Cabinet Ministers. Francis Hale was young. He was rich. He was intelligent. He had a great future ahead of him.

Anything that could be said against

him was, so to speak, to his credit. Francis Hale always did the correct thing, even to becoming engaged to the impoverished daughter of an impoverished peer. He was a teetotaller, a non-smoker, and a man of almost painfully strait-laced life. Colonel March privately considered him a good deal of a stuffed shirt.

"As far as I'm concerned," said Lady Patricia coolly, "I'm finished with him. We've done everything for that man. Everything! The right people, the right places, the right contacts. And I do hope I'm broad-minded. But when he turned up to make a speech at that Corporation banquet, tight as a tick and practically blind to the world —!"

Now it has been stated before that nothing ever surprised Colonel March. This, however, came close to it.

"And," continued Lady Patricia, flirting her furs, "when it comes to that red-haired hussy — actually carrying on with her in public — well, really!"

Colonel March coughed.

In fact, he covered his happy smile only just in time. To any normal human being there is something heartening, something wholly satisfying, about seeing any stuffed shirt go on the razzle-dazzle. The colonel was no exception to this rule. But he caught sight of her eye, and was silent. Lady Patricia Mortlake was no fool. Also, it struck him that she had rather a mean eye and jaw.

"I dare say you think this is all very funny?" she inquired.

"Not at all."

"And I dare say," she continued, opening her veiled eyes and cuddling the dog with dangerous quietness, "you wonder why this concerns the police?"

"Since you mention it ——"

"But it *would* interest the police, I hope, to hear that Frankie has disappeared? Throwing his whole department into confusion at a critical time; to say nothing of the inconvenience to my parents and me? It *would* interest you to hear that he vanished out of that horrible office in Piccadilly, where heaven knows what has been happening?"

Colonel March regarded her grimly.

"Go on," he invited.

"He's been acting queerly," said Lady Patricia, "for over a month. Ever since he first saw this."

From under her coat she took out a copy of a famous literary weekly, of the conservative and highbrow order, and unfolded it. She turned to the advertisements. With the tip of a scarlet finger-nail she indicated one advertisement printed in bold black type. It said simply:

William and Wilhelmina Wilson,
250A, Piccadilly. Nothing more.

"It's been appearing in only the best papers," the girl insisted. "And every time Frankie sees it, he seems to go off his head."

Colonel March frowned.

"What," he asked, "is the business of William and Wilhelmina Wilson?"

"That's just it! I don't know."

"But if they're in a legitimate busi-

ness, they must be listed?"

"Well, they're not." Her upper lip lifted defiantly. "I know, because we've had a private detective after Frankie. The detective says they sell vacuum cleaners."

Though Inspector Roberts had ceased in despair to take notes, Colonel March betrayed only an expression of refreshed interest. He continued to teeter before the fire, and puff at his short pipe.

"It started," she went on, "one afternoon when I was waiting for him in the car outside the House of Commons. He stayed behind on the steps, talking interminably to that dreadful Labour man What's-his-name. He simply *wouldn't* come on, no matter how many gestures I made. When he did condescend to join me, he looked at me in a queer way, and asked the chauffeur to stop at the nearest news-agents. There he got out and bought a copy of that paper."

She pointed.

"I couldn't tell what he was looking at. But I knew there was something wrong with him. I asked him if he couldn't take *any* interest in what I was doing for him. Even in the concert of chamber music I'd arranged for that night, where Julio's Trio was to render selections from the modern masters. And he said ——"

"Yes?" prompted Colonel March.

"He said 'Damn and blast the modern masters.' It was too utterly tiresome, when Julio is *all* the rage this season."

"Indeed?"

"Then I caught him cutting out that advertisement from the paper. That wouldn't have mattered, and I forgot all about it. But only a week ago I caught him cutting it out again, this time out of *The Times*. So," explained Lady Patricia, "I decided to find out who this 'William and Wilhelmina Wilson' really were. I paid them a visit yesterday."

Her eyes took on a shrewd, speculative look.

"Whoever they are," she said thoughtfully, "they've got pots of money. I expected to find the office some dreadful little place: you know. But it wasn't. My dear man, it's in a big new block of offices opposite the Green Park. So business-like: that's what I can't understand. You go up in a lift, and there's a big marble corridor and a ground-glass door with 'William and Wilhelmina Wilson' on it."

Her expression was now one of active fury, which she tried to conceal. As though remembering to be maternal, she lifted the Pekingese, shook it in the air, and cooed to it with pouted lips. The dog sneezed the hair out of its eyes, and looked bored.

"I opened the door," she said, "and there was a big waiting-room. Empty. Some rather good bronzes and etchings, too. I called out. I rapped on the table. But nobody answered. Just when I was wondering what to do, Flopit here . . . izzums, precious! . . . Flopit found another door, and began to bark."

She drew a deep breath.

"I opened *that* door. It was a big office, like a secretary's office. In the middle was a big flat-topped desk, with a swivel-chair behind it. In the chair sat Frankie, my Frankie. And on his lap, with her arms round his neck, sat a horrible red-haired hussy, about nineteen years old."

This time it was a near thing.

Colonel March's cough was so prolonged and strangled that a blind man would have noticed something wrong. Lady Patricia's hard eye noted it, and hated it. But she had to speak now.

"Well, really! I mean to say! I hope I'm broad-minded, but —! My dear man, I was boiling; positively boiling. I didn't say anything. I just picked up Flopit by his precious neck, and walked out, and slammed the door. I walked across the waiting-room, and out into the hall.

"But I didn't go any farther. After all, I have Frankie's good at heart. And Frankie is awfully rich, and it didn't seem right that *she* should get his money, whereas I . . . I mean, when you've worked and slaved for a man, as I've worked and slaved for Frankie . . . well, it's rather thick.

"I waited in front of the door. Finally, I decided to go back and have it out with them. Back I marched into the waiting-room; and there I met somebody I hadn't seen before. A well-dressed elderly man. Rather distinguished-looking: bald except for white hair at the back of his head, curling down nearly to his collar.

"He said, 'Yes, madam?'

"I said, 'Who are you?'

"He said, 'I am William Wilson. Have you an appointment?'"

"I just froze him. I asked to see Mr. Hale. He had the nerve to raise his eyebrows and say that Frankie wasn't there: that he had never heard of any Mr. Hale and didn't know what I was talking about. I said I also supposed he didn't know anything about a red-haired girl either? He looked surprised and said he imagined I must mean Miss Wilhelmina Wilson, his niece and secretary — think of it! — but he still knew of no Mr. Hale.

"Well, really, that was too much! I just walked past him and opened the door to the office where I'd seen Frankie before. Frankie wasn't there; but the red-haired girl was. She was standing in front of another little door, which led to a kind of cloak-room, and looking disgustingly guilty. I simply pushed her out of the way, and looked in. But . . ."

Lady Patricia Mortlake gulped.

"Yes?" prompted Colonel March.

"Frankie wasn't there," she said.

"He wasn't in the cloakroom?"

"He wasn't *anywhere*," returned the girl, lifting her shoulders. "There was only one other room, a big private office overlooking Piccadilly on the fourth floor. He wasn't hiding anywhere, because I looked. And there's no way out of any of the offices except through the door to the main corridor, where I'd been standing. Frankie wasn't there. But his clothes were."

"What?" demanded Colonel March.

"His clothes. The suit he'd been

wearing: with his watch, and note-case, and papers, and key-ring, and the fountain-pen I gave him for his birthday. They were hanging up in a locker in the cloakroom. Clothes, but no Frankie. And he hasn't been seen since. Now do you wonder why I'm here?"

Hitherto Colonel March had been listening with an indulgent air. Now his sandy eyebrows drew together.

"Let me understand this," he said in a sharp and rather sinister voice. "You mean he literally disappeared?"

"Yes!"

"He couldn't, for instance, have slipped out while you were examining the various offices?"

"Without his clothes?" asked Patricia unanswerably.

There was a silence.

"Frankie!" she almost wailed. "Of all people, Frankie! Of course I suppose he could have sneaked out. For that matter, he could have climbed out of a window and down the face of the building into Piccadilly. But in his underwear? Frankie?"

"Suppose he had another suit of clothes there?"

"Why?" asked Patricia, again unanswerably.

It is not often that Colonel March finds himself stumped, definitely left flat and up against it. This appeared to be one of the times.

"And what have you done since?"

"What could I do? He's not at his flat here, or at his place in the country. Not one of his friends, including his private secretary, seems to know

where he is. I even tackled that dreadful Labour man he seems to have been so thick with recently; and I thought for a second he was going to burst out laughing. But even *he* swore he didn't know where Frankie was."

"H'm," said Colonel March.

"We can't make this public, you see. That would be dreadful. And so you're our last hope. Haven't you got any theory?"

"Oh, theories!" said Colonel March, waving a big arm irritably. "I can think of half a dozen theories. But they don't explain the main difficulty. Suppose any lurid theory you like. Suppose the mysterious William and Wilhelmina Wilson have murdered him and hidden his body. Suppose there is a sinister political conspiracy against him. Suppose Francis Hale has disguised himself and is masquerading as the distinguished-looking old gentleman with the white hair . . ."

Patricia sat up straight.

"A supposition," said the colonel grimly, "about as likely as any idea that he went walking about the streets in his underwear. But I repeat: suppose anything you like! It still won't explain what puzzles me most."

"Which is?"

"The profession of William and Wilhelmina Wilson," answered Colonel March. "Any ideas, Roberts?"

Inspector Roberts, shutting up his notebook, ruminated on this.

"Well, sir —" he began hesitantly.

"Yes, yes; go on!"

"Well, sir, the point seems to be this. Either Mr. Hale disappeared of

his own free will, or else he didn't. It looks to me as though he didn't."

"Oh? Why not?"

"The personal effects," said Roberts. "The watch and the notecase and the rest of it. If you were going to do a bunk somewhere, wouldn't those be the very things you'd take with you? It isn't as though he were trying to stage a fake suicide, or anything like that. One minute he's comfortably in that office, with the young lady in his lap" — Roberts coughed, and looked swiftly away from their guest — "and the next he's gone. That's the part I don't like."

Colonel March grunted.

"And yet," pursued Roberts, "if that pair have managed to make away with him, I can't for the life of me see how or why. It's like something out of Edgar Allan Poe."

He broke off, for a curious expression crossed Colonel March's face: it was as though he had been hit across the back of the head with a club.

"Good lord!" he muttered, in a hollow voice like a ghost. "I wonder if that could be it?"

"If it could be what?" demanded Lady Patricia.

"The name," argued Colonel March, half to himself, "might be a coincidence. On the other hand, it might be most infernally apt: the seal of Wilson." He turned to Lady Patricia. "Tell me. Can Francis Hale hold his liquor?"

She stared back at him.

"I don't know what on earth you're talking about!"

"Yes, you do." The colonel was irritable. "You told me a while ago that Hale, in one of his fits of being fed up — ahem! — in one of his more erratic moments, got tight at a Corporation banquet. What did he drink?"

His visitor set her jaw.

"Everything," she said. "Beginning with cocktails and going all the way through to brandy. He simply sloshed it down. My father was frantic."

"And how did it affect him? Hale, I mean?"

"They said he never made a better speech. He mixed up the pages in reading it; and, to anybody who really knew what the speech was about, it sounded *horrible*. But nobody noticed anything. They even seemed to like it: which was a mercy, because ——"

Colonel March rubbed his hands together. He was utterly pleased and absorbed, with a smile which threatened to dislodge the pipe from his mouth. Then he went over and patted his guest on the shoulder.

"Go home," he said. "Go home, take an aspirin, and stop worrying. Inspector Roberts and I are going to call on the Wilsons. I have every reason to believe I see a way out of the difficulty. In fact, I think I can promise it, now that I am able to guess ——"

"Guess what?" demanded Lady Patricia, lifting the dog and shaking it at him.

"The racket of William Wilson," said Colonel March.

A smooth-slipping lift took them up to the fourth floor of number 250A Piccadilly. A holy calm, as of a temple, pervaded these marble premises. The names *William and Wilhelmina Wilson* were printed on the ground-glass door in black lettering as discreet as a visiting-card. Motioning Inspector Roberts to precede him, Colonel March opened the door.

The waiting-room inside was softly lighted and carpeted. Magazines were scattered on a centre table for the convenience of those who waited; the point which racked Inspector Roberts's wits was what in blazes they were supposed to be waiting for. And behind the reception-desk at the far end sat a small, sleek, trim young lady with red hair. She was glancing through a copy of a fashionable weekly.

"Miss Wilson?" said Colonel March.

"Yes?" said Miss Wilson with polite briskness.

"I should like to see your uncle."

Colonel March laid his official card on the desk.

For a few seconds Miss Wilson looked at it gravely, and then raised her head. If the notoriously frigid Francis Hale had fallen for Miss Wilson, Inspector Roberts for one did not blame him; she had blue eyes of a deceptive demureness, and a mouth of the sort called generous.

But if Roberts expected to see any sign of guilt or even nervousness, he was disappointed. What flashed across her face was a smile of almost unholy glee, which she instantly corrected.

"My uncle has been rather expect-

ing you," she admitted. "Will you walk into our parlour?"

She led them through the secretary's office — with its famous desk and swivel-chair — to a third office overlooking Piccadilly. Here, behind another flat-topped desk, sat a stout old gentleman with the manners of a cardinal. His glossy bald head was set off by a fringe of white hair which curved down to the back of his collar. He wore pince-nez, through which he was studying a pile of large photographs. He welcomed his visitors courteously.

"As my niece says," he told them, "I have been rather expecting you." His mouth tightened. "Please sit down. You had better remain too, Wilhelmina, my dear."

"In that case," said Colonel March, "I'll come straight to the point. Of course, your name isn't really Wilson?"

Mr. Wilson looked pained.

"Naturally not. It is a trade name. A" — he waved his hand — "a flight of poetic fancy, if you like."

"Yes," said Colonel March. "That's what I thought, as soon as I guessed what your racket was."

Now Mr. Wilson seemed more than pained; he seemed hurt.

"Racket!" he protested. "My dear sir! No, no, no, no! That is too much. Profession, if you like. Business, if you insist. Yes: say a business, and on a large scale. After all, I am a modern man who has simply seen a modern need for those who can afford it. I supply that need. And there you are."

"Aren't you afraid I'll give you away?"

Mr. Wilson permitted himself a slight smile.

"Hardly. If you were to look in there" — he indicated a row of filing-cases along one wall — "and see the names of some of my more illustrious clients, I hardly think you would talk of exposure. There is one client, for instance . . . but we must not be indiscreet." He returned to an old grievance. "Profession, yes. Business, yes. But racket? Really, now! On the contrary, I flatter myself that I am something of a public benefactor."

Inspector Roberts was a patient man. As Colonel March's assistant, he had to be. But there are limits to the human curiosity of even the best-trained subordinate.

"Sir," he suddenly cried, "I can't stand any more of this. Before I go completely off my chump, will you tell me what this is all about? What's going on here? What *is* the fellow's racket? And why should he call himself Wilson?"

All three of them looked at him — Mr. Wilson with a reproving cluck of the tongue, Miss Wilson with a smile, and Colonel March with blandness.

"He calls himself William Wilson," replied Colonel March, "after the story of the same name. That story was written by Edgar Allan Poe, as you so helpfully suggested. You don't remember the story?"

"No, sir, I can't say I do."

"William Wilson," said Colonel March, "met himself."

Roberts blinked.

"Met himself?"

"He met his own image," explained Colonel March, settling back comfortably. "I rather admire Mr. Wilson here. He is the proprietor of a unique Agency. He provides doubles for eminent men and women in their unimportant public appearances, so that the real men can stop at home and get on with their work."

Mr. Wilson leaned across the desk and spoke earnestly.

"You would be surprised," he said, "at the call there is for our services. Consider the life of a public man! While he should be at work, custom demands that he make endless public appearances, none of them in the least an iota of good. He makes interminable tours of inspection; he lays corner-stones; he addresses mothers' meetings. Few if any of the people he meets have ever seen him before, or will ever see him again. And a good double ——!"

Mr. Wilson drew a deep breath, rather sadly.

"I fear the idea is not mine," he went on. "It was tried out a few years ago by a very eminent American. He simply could not stand all the handshaking."

Wilhelmina Wilson intervened loyally.

"But you were the only one who saw its commercial possibilities," she cried, and sat down on the edge of his desk as though to defend him. She somewhat spoiled the effect of this by winking at Colonel March.

"Thank you, my dear," said Mr. Wilson. He turned back to his guests.

"Our fees, of course, are considerable," he added apologetically. "But you have no idea of the difficulties. Once I had to send all the way to South Africa to get a passable double for . . . well, well, again we mustn't be indiscreet!" He closed his eyes and smiled happily. "Then there is the question of elocution, voice-training, and so on. On the whole, I am proud of my handiwork. The next time you go to a cinema and see a newsreel, watch very closely! You may see something that will surprise you."

Inspector Roberts was getting his breath back.

"Then Mr. Hale ——" he began.

"Ah, yes," murmured the proprietor of the Agency, brushing his dry palms together and frowning at Colonel March. "Mr. Hale! I imagine you saw a discrepancy when Mr. Hale's double, a promising young actor named Gabriel Fisk, got drunk at that banquet?"

"A discrepancy," said Colonel March; "but probably not the discrepancy you mean. Wasn't that rather rash of him, by the way?"

"Perhaps," admitted Mr. Wilson sadly. "But the lesser of two evils. You see, we hadn't known that Mr. Hale's *fiancée* was to be present; otherwise we should not have risked it. So, in case Fisk made a bad slip of some kind, he had to have an excuse for making a slip. Mr. Hale is a notorious and genuine teetotaller. But then (I thought) even a teetotaller

can change his mind."

Colonel March chuckled.

"He can change his mind," said the colonel. "What he can't change is his digestive system. He can't work his way through a huge wine-list, from cocktails to brandy, without either becoming ill or going to sleep. In a man who has never taken a drink in his life, I submit that it's a physical impossibility. When I heard of that little performance, I said to myself: 'It is magnificent; but it isn't Hale.' And, speaking of his *fiancée* . . ."

Wilhelmina Wilson stiffened.

Throughout this conversation, she had several times seemed on the point of speaking. She still sat on the edge of her uncle's desk, staring moodily at the toe of her slipper. When Colonel March spoke, she looked at her uncle as though with appeal.

But Mr. Wilson remained unruffled.

"Ah, yes!" he said. "That unfortunate affair yesterday morning!"

"What was unfortunate about it?" the girl demanded, with sudden passion.

"Tush!" said her uncle, raising a gentle but admonitory forefinger. He looked distressed. "Colonel March, my niece is — impulsive. Like her poor mother, my sister. And she is very fond of young Gabriel Fisk.

"You understand now what happened, I hope? That suit of clothes, with the notecase and watch and the rest of it, has nothing to do with the case. It's a supernumerary. Mr. Hale provided us with an exact duplicate of his possessions. I am an artist, sir,

or I am nothing. Neither the suit nor its contents has been worn for a week. Fisk left it hanging there in the locker when he changed in that cloakroom after appearing at the Muswell Hill Flower Show last Tuesday week.

"Yesterday Fisk, in his ordinary clothes, came in for instructions. He and my niece —" Mr. Wilson coughed. "It was unfortunate that Lady Patricia Mortlake walked in when she did. Fisk, of course, simply slipped out when her back was turned. Unfortunately, Lady Patricia is a strong-minded person. She ransacked the place, found the suit, and suspected I hate to think what."

"And Hale?" asked Colonel March, without batting an eyelid. "The real Hale? Where is he now?"

Again Mr. Wilson was apologetic.

"At his country place, with his head under the bedclothes, until he can think up an excuse to explain his supposed conduct. Even if he tells the truth, I'm afraid Lady Patricia will not like it. And I shall probably — er — lose a client. Life," said Mr. Wilson, shaking his head, "is difficult."

"Yes."

"In any case, as I said before, *you* will respect our little secret? Our racket, as you prefer to call it?"

Colonel March got to his feet. Always an impressive figure, he now seemed to fill the room. He put on his soft hat at a more rakish angle than was seemly, and picked up his silver-headed stick. His speckled face was aglow.

"Candidly," he said, "I can't do

anything else. You've got me. If I understand the situation, to show up this racket would be to wreck half the public reputations in England. We can't have that. The public demands to be deceived. By gad, it *shall* be deceived! So, if Miss Wilson vouches for the truth of this story —?

"Yes," said the girl, with her eyes on the floor.

"Then there's nothing more to be said. Sir, good day to you!"

"And to you, Colonel March," beamed Mr. Wilson. "Wilhelmina, my dear, will you show these gentlemen out?"

Wilhelmina did show them out. Yet she did not appear to be happy about anything. For the first time her manner displayed a trace of nervousness. In the outer office she suddenly stopped, and whirled round on them.

"You old —" she began explosively, and then broke off to laugh; or cry — Colonel March was not sure which. "What are you thinking?"

"Thinking?" repeated Colonel March, with massive innocence.

"Yes, you were! You know you were! I could see it in your face. What's the matter? Don't you believe our story even now? I swear to you that that suit of clothes hasn't been touched for a week!"

"Oh, that?" said the colonel, as though enlightened. "I believe that."

"Then what is it? What were you thinking?"

"Well," said Colonel March, "since you ask, I was thinking about the dog."

"Dog?" she echoed blankly.

"Lady Patricia Mortlake's dog. An objectionable dog. But then I don't like Pekes." Colonel March reflected. "It had one quality, though, that I did notice. The dog Flopit took absolutely no interest in strangers. You could show it the whole personnel of Scotland Yard, and it never so much as opened an eye — let alone barking. It's the sort of dog which barks only when it scents or senses someone it knows very well. So, if it *was* Gabriel Fisk who was here with you yesterday, I only wondered why Flopit set up the clamour that drew Lady Patricia Mortlake's attention to you both."

While the blue eyes never left him, and an expression of impish animation survived even the embarrassed colour of her face, Colonel March added a last word.

"Stick to him," he advised in an even lower voice. "You'll be much better for him than that high-born shrew who's got his life planned out to the last musicale and reception."

"I've been in love with Frank Hale for a long time," the girl confessed. "But I thought it might be better for him if we said —"

"There's no reason for you and your uncle to lie in order to please her," said Colonel March. "As for Hale, there are still a few gleams of humanity in him. Under you, please God, he may yet develop into a statesman. Good afternoon, Miss Wilson. Come, Roberts. We must go and find some more queer complaints."

The only contemporary detective novel in the Modern Library series is Dashiell Hammett's THE MALTESE FALCON. From the standpoints of historical importance, vigor of style, and creative originality, no worthier American standard-bearer could have been selected.

For the Modern Library edition, Mr. Hammett wrote a special introduction in which he mentioned an earlier story called "The Gutting of Couffignal." He confessed that in this earlier tale he had failed to bring off a "promising dénouement" but thought that he "might have better luck" if he incorporated the same climax in THE MALTESE FALCON, combined with another failure of the past.

Obviously, it was your Editor's duty to unearth "The Gutting of Couffignal" and find out what Mr. Hammett was talking about. Disguised as a literary detective, your Editor followed up an ingenious clue and nailed "The Gutting" in its hideout. On reading the story, the mystery was solved. Mr. Hammett's allusion refers to the climactic scene between The Continental Op and Princess Zhukovskí which in conception bears a strong resemblance to the climactic scene between Sam Spade and Brigid O'Shaughnessy at the end of THE MALTESE FALCON. Otherwise the two stories are completely different.

Aside from this interesting historical point, "The Gutting" is an excellent example of Hammett's startling powers — a tremendously effective thriller in which The Continental Op operates at the top of his form. It is a privilege to reprint this "forgotten" Hammett, now destined to become an anthological favorite.

THE GUTTING OF COUFFIGNAL

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

WEDGE-SHAPED Couffignal is not a large island, and not far from the mainland, to which it is linked by a wooden bridge. Its western shore is a high, straight cliff that jumps abruptly up out of San Pablo Bay. From the top of this cliff the island slopes eastward, down to a smooth pebble beach that runs into the water again, where there are piers and a clubhouse and moored pleasure boats.

Couffignal's main street, paralleling the beach, has the usual bank, hotel, moving-picture theater, and stores. But it differs from most main streets of its size in that it is more carefully

arranged and preserved. There are trees and hedges and strips of lawn on it, and no glaring signs. The buildings seem to belong beside one another, as if they had been designed by the same architect, and in the stores you will find goods of a quality to match the best city stores.

The intersecting streets — running between rows of neat cottages near the foot of the slope — become winding hedged roads as they climb toward the cliff. The higher these roads get, the farther apart and larger are the houses they lead to. The occupants of these higher houses are the owners

and rulers of the island. Most of them are well-fed old gentlemen who, the profits they took from the world with both hands in their younger days now stowed away at safe percentages, have bought into the island colony so they may spend what is left of their lives nursing their livers and improving their golf among their kind. They admit to the island only as many storekeepers, working-people, and similar riffraff as are needed to keep them comfortably served.

That is Couffignal.

It was some time after midnight. I was sitting in a second-story room in Couffignal's largest house, surrounded by wedding presents whose value would add up to something between fifty and a hundred thousand dollars.

Of all the work that comes to a private detective (except divorce work, which the Continental Detective Agency doesn't handle) I like weddings as little as any. Usually I manage to avoid them, but this time I hadn't been able to. Dick Foley, who had been slated for the job, had been handed a black eye by an unfriendly pickpocket the day before. That let Dick out and me in. I had come up to Couffignal — a two-hour ride from San Francisco by ferry and auto stage — that morning, and would return the next.

This had been neither better nor worse than the usual wedding detail. The ceremony had been performed in a little stone church down the hill. Then the house had begun to fill with reception guests. They had kept it

filled to overflowing until some time after the bride and groom had sneaked off to their eastern train.

The world had been well represented. There had been an admiral and an earl or two from England; an ex-president of a South American country; a Danish baron; a tall young Russian princess surrounded by lesser titles, including a fat, bald, jovial and black-bearded Russian general who had talked to me for a solid hour about prize fights, in which he had a lot of interest, but not so much knowledge as was possible; an ambassador from one of the Central European countries; a justice of the Supreme Court; and a mob of people whose prominence and near-prominence didn't carry labels.

In theory, a detective guarding wedding presents is supposed to make himself indistinguishable from the other guests. In practice, it never works out that way. He has to spend most of his time within sight of the booty, so he's easily spotted. Besides that, eight or ten people I recognized among the guests were clients or former clients of the Agency, and so knew me. However, being known doesn't make so much difference as you might think, and everything had gone off smoothly.

Shortly after dark a wind smelling of rain began to pile storm clouds up over the bay. Those guests who lived at a distance, especially those who had water to cross, hurried off for their homes. Those who lived on the island stayed until the first raindrops

began to patter down. Then they left.

The Hendrixson house quieted down. Musicians and extra servants left. The weary house servants began to disappear in the direction of their bedrooms. I found some sandwiches, a couple of books and a comfortable armchair, and took them up to the room where the presents were now hidden under grey-white sheeting.

Keith Hendrixson, the bride's grandfather — she was an orphan — put his head in at the door.

"Have you everything you need for your comfort?" he asked.

"Yes, thanks."

He said good night and went off to bed — a tall old man, slim as a boy.

The wind and the rain were hard at it when I went downstairs to give the lower windows and doors the up-and-down. Everything on the first floor was tight and secure, everything in the cellar. I went upstairs again.

Pulling my chair over by a floor lamp, I put sandwiches, books, ash-tray, gun and flashlight on a small table beside it. Then I switched off the other lights, set fire to a Fatima, sat down, wriggled my spine comfortably into the chair's padding, picked up one of the books, and prepared to make a night of it.

The book was called *The Lord of the Sea*, and had to do with a strong, tough and violent fellow named Hogarth, whose modest plan was to hold the world in one hand. There were plots and counterplots, kidnappings, murders, prison-breakings, forgeries and burglaries, diamonds large as hats

and floating forts larger than Couffignal. It sounds dizzy here, but in the book it was as real as a dime.

Hogarth was still going strong when the lights went out.

In the dark, I got rid of the glowing end of my cigarette by grinding it in one of the sandwiches. Putting the book down, I picked up gun and flashlight, and moved away from the chair.

Listening for noises was no good. The storm was making hundreds of them. What I needed to know was why the lights had gone off.

I waited. My job was to watch the presents. Nobody had touched them yet. There was nothing to get excited about.

Minutes went by, perhaps ten of them.

The floor swayed under my feet. The windows rattled with a violence beyond the strength of the storm. The dull boom of a heavy explosion blotted out the sounds of wind and falling water. The blast was not close at hand, but not far enough away to be off the island.

Crossing to the window, peering through the wet glass, I could see nothing. I should have seen a few misty lights far down the hill. Not being able to see them settled one point. The lights had gone out all over Couffignal, not only in the Hendrixson house.

That was better. The storm could have put the lighting system out of whack, could have been responsible for the explosion — maybe.

Staring through the black window, I had an impression of great excitement down the hill, of movement in the night. But all was too far away for me to have seen or heard even had there been lights, and all too vague to say what was moving. The impression was strong but worthless. It didn't lead anywhere. I told myself I was getting feeble-minded, and turned away from the window.

Another blast spun me back to it. This explosion sounded nearer than the first, maybe because it was stronger. Peering through the glass again, I still saw nothing. And still had the impression of things that were big moving down there.

Bare feet pattered in the hall. A voice was anxiously calling my name. Turning from the window again, I pocketed my gun and snapped on the flashlight. Keith Hendrixson, in pajamas and bathrobe, looking thinner and older than anybody could be, came into the room.

"Is it —"

"I don't think it's an earthquake," I said, since that is the first calamity your Californian thinks of. "The lights went off a little while ago. There have been a couple of explosions down the hill since the —"

I stopped. Three shots, close together, had sounded. Rifle-shots, but of the sort that only the heaviest of rifles could make. Then, sharp and small in the storm, came the report of a far-away pistol.

"What is it?" Hendrixson demanded.

"Shooting."

More feet were pattering in the halls, some bare, some shod. Excited voices whispered questions and exclamations. The butler, a solemn, solid block of a man, partly dressed, and carrying a lighted five-pronged candlestick, came in.

"Very good, Brophy," Hendrixson said as the butler put the candlestick on the table. "Will you try to learn what is the matter?"

"I have tried, sir. The telephone seems to be out of order, sir. Shall I send Oliver down to the village?"

"No-o. I don't suppose it's that serious. Do you think it is anything serious?" he asked me.

I said I didn't think so, but I was paying more attention to the outside than to him. I had heard a thin screaming that could have come from a distant woman, and a volley of small-arms shots. The racket of the storm muffled these shots, but when the heavier firing we had heard before broke out again, it was clear enough.

To have opened the window would have been to let in gallons of water without helping us to hear much clearer. I stood with an ear tilted to the pane, trying to arrive at some idea of what was happening outside.

Another sound took my attention from the window — the ringing of the doorbell. It rang loudly and persistently.

Hendrixson looked at me. I nodded.

"See who it is, Brophy," he said.

The butler went solemnly away, and came back even more solemnly.

"Princess Zhukovski," he announced.

She came running into the room — the tall Russian girl I had seen at the reception. Her eyes were wide and dark with excitement. Her face was very white and wet. Water ran in streams down her blue waterproof cape, the hood of which covered her dark hair.

"Oh, Mr. Hendrixson!" She had caught one of his hands in both of hers. Her voice, with nothing foreign in its accents, was the voice of one who is excited over a delightful surprise. "The bank is being robbed, and the — what do you call him? — marshal of police has been killed!"

"What's that?" the old man exclaimed, jumping awkwardly, because water from her cape had dripped down on one of his bare feet. "Weegan killed? And the bank robbed?"

"Yes! Isn't it terrible?" She said it as if she were saying wonderful. "When the first explosion woke us, the general sent Ignati down to find out what was the matter, and he got down there just in time to see the bank blown up. Listen!"

We listened, and heard a wild outbreak of mixed gun-fire.

"That will be the general arriving!" she said. "He'll enjoy himself most wonderfully. As soon as Ignati returned with the news, the general armed every male in the household from Aleksandr Sergyevich to Ivan the cook, and led them out happier than he's been since he took his division to East Prussia in 1914."

"And the duchess?" Hendrixson asked.

"He left her at home with me, of course, and I furtively crept out and away from her while she was trying for the first time in her life to put water in a samovar. This is not the night for one to stay at home!"

"H-m-m," Hendrixson said, his mind obviously not on her words. "And the bank!"

He looked at me. I said nothing. The racket of another volley came to us.

"Could you do anything down there?" he asked.

"Maybe, but —" I nodded at the presents under their covers.

"Oh, those!" the old man said. "I'm as much interested in the bank as in them; and, besides, we will be here."

"All right!" I was willing enough to carry my curiosity down the hill. "I'll go down. You'd better have the butler stay in here, and plant the chauffeur inside the front door. Better give them guns if you have any. Is there a raincoat I can borrow? I brought only a light overcoat."

Brophy found a yellow slicker that fitted me. I put it on, stowed gun and flashlight conveniently under it, and found my hat while Brophy was getting and loading an automatic pistol for himself and a rifle for Oliver, the mulatto chauffeur.

Hendrixson and the princess followed me downstairs. At the door I found she wasn't exactly following me — she was going with me.

"But, Sonya!" the old man protested.

"I'm not going to be foolish, though

I'd like to," she promised him. "But I'm going back to my Irinia Androvana, who will perhaps have the samovar watered by now."

"That's a sensible girl!" Hendrixson said, and let us out into the rain and the wind.

It wasn't weather to talk in. In silence we turned downhill between two rows of hedging, with the storm driving at our backs. At the first break in the hedge I stopped, nodding toward the black blot a house made.

"That is your —"

Her laugh cut me short. She caught my arm and began to urge me down the road again.

"I only told Mr. Hendrixson that so he would not worry," she explained. "You do not think I am not going down to see the sights."

She was tall. I am short and thick. I had to look up to see her face — to see as much of it as the rain-grey night would let me see.

"You'll be soaked to the hide, running around in this rain," I objected.

"What of that? I am dressed for it."

She raised a foot to show me a heavy waterproof boot and a woolen-stockinged leg.

"There's no telling what we'll run into down there, and I've got work to do," I insisted. "I can't be looking out for you."

"I can look out for myself."

She pushed her cape aside to show me a square automatic pistol in one hand.

"You'll be in my way."

"I will not," she retorted. "You'll probably find I can help you. I'm as strong as you, and quicker, and I can shoot."

The reports of scattered shooting had punctuated our argument, but now the sound of heavier firing silenced the dozen objections to her company that I could still think of. After all, I could slip away from her in the dark if she became too much of a nuisance.

"Have it your own way," I growled, "but don't expect anything from me."

"You're so kind," she murmured as we got under way again, hurrying now, with the wind at our backs speeding us along.

Occasionally dark figures moved on the road ahead of us, but too far away to be recognizable. Presently a man passed us, running uphill — a tall man whose nightshirt hung out of his trousers, down below his coat, identifying him as a resident.

"They've finished the bank and are at Medcraft's!" he yelled as he went by.

"Medcraft is the jeweler," the girl informed me.

The sloping under our feet grew less sharp. The houses — dark but with faces vaguely visible here and there at windows — came closer together. Below, the flash of a gun could be seen now and then.

Our road put us into the lower end of the main street just as a staccato rat-ta-tat broke out.

I pushed the girl into the nearest

doorway, and jumped in after her.

Bullets ripped through walls with the sound of hail tapping on leaves.

That was the thing I had taken for an exceptionally heavy rifle — a machine gun.

The girl had fallen back in a corner, all tangled up with something. I helped her up. The something was a boy of seventeen or so, with one leg and a crutch.

"It's the boy who delivers papers," Princess Zhukovski said, "and you've hurt him with your clumsiness."

The boy shook his head, grinning as he got up.

"No'm, I ain't hurt none, but you kind of scared me, jumping on me."

She had to stop and explain that she hadn't jumped on him, that she had been pushed into him by me, and that she was sorry and so was I.

"What's happening?" I asked the newsboy when I could get a word in.

"Everything," he boasted, as if some of the credit were his. "There must be a hundred of them, and they've blowed the bank wide open, and now some of 'em is in Medcraft's, and I guess they'll blow that up, too. And they killed Tom Weegan. They got a machine gun on a car in the middle of the street."

"Where's everybody — all the merry villagers?"

"Most of 'em are up behind the Hall. They can't do nothing, though, because the machine gun won't let 'em get near enough to see what they're shooting at, and that smart Bill Vincent told me to clear out,

'cause I've only got one leg, as if I couldn't shoot as good as the next one, if I only had something to shoot with!"

"That wasn't right of them," I sympathized. "But you can do something for me. You can stick here and keep your eye on this end of the street, so I'll know if they leave in this direction."

"You're not just saying that so I'll stay here out of the way, are you?"

"No," I lied. "I need somebody to watch. I was going to leave the princess here, but you'll do better."

"Yes," she backed me up, catching the idea. "This gentleman is a detective, and if you do what he asks you'll be helping more than if you were up with the others."

The machine gun was still firing, but not in our direction now.

"I'm going across the street," I told the girl. "If you —"

"Aren't you going to join the others?"

"No. If I can get around behind the bandits while they're busy with the others, maybe I can turn a trick."

"Watch sharp now!" I ordered the boy, and the princess and I made a dash for the opposite sidewalk.

We reached it without drawing lead, sidled along a building for a few yards, and turned into an alley. From the alley's other end came the smell and wash and the dull blackness of the bay.

While we moved down this alley I composed a scheme by which I hoped to get rid of my companion, sending

her off on a safe wild-goose chase. But I didn't get a chance to try it out.

The big figure of a man loomed ahead of us.

Stepping in front of the girl, I went on toward him. Under my slicker I held my gun on the middle of him.

He stood still. He was larger than he had looked at first. A big, slope-shouldered, barrel-bodied husky. His hands were empty. I spotted the flashlight on his face for a split second. A flat-cheeked, thick-featured face, with high cheek-bones.

"Ignati!" the girl exclaimed over my shoulder.

He began to talk what I suppose was Russian to the girl. She laughed and replied. He shook his big head stubbornly, insisting on something. She stamped her foot and spoke sharply. He shook his head again and addressed me.

"General Pleshkev, he tell me bring Princess Sonya to home."

His English was almost as hard to understand as his Russian. His tone puzzled me. It was as if he was explaining some absolutely necessary thing that he didn't want to be blamed for, but that nevertheless he was going to do.

While the girl was speaking to him again, I guessed the answer. This big Ignati had been sent out by the general to bring the girl home, and he was going to obey his orders if he had to carry her. He was trying to avoid trouble with me by explaining the situation.

"Take her," I said, stepping aside.

The girl scowled at me, laughed.

"Very well, Ignati," she said in English, "I shall go home," and she turned on her heel and went back up the alley, the big man close behind her.

Glad to be alone, I wasted no time in moving in the opposite direction until the pebbles of the beach were under my feet. The pebbles ground harshly under my heels. I moved back to more silent ground and began to work my way as swiftly as I could up the shore toward the center of action. The machine gun barked on. Smaller guns snapped. Three concussions, close together — bombs, hand grenades, my ears and my memory told me.

The stormy sky glared pink over a roof ahead of me and to the left. The boom of the blast beat my ear-drums. Fragments I couldn't see fell around me. That, I thought, would be the jeweler's safe blowing apart.

I crept on up the shore line. The machine gun went silent. Lighter guns snapped, snapped, snapped. Another grenade went off. A man's voice shrieked pure terror.

Risking the crunch of pebbles, I turned down to the water's edge again. I had seen no dark shape on the water that could have been a boat. There had been boats moored along this beach in the afternoon. With my feet in the water of the bay I still saw no boat. The storm could have scattered them, but I didn't think it had. The island's western height shielded this shore. The wind was strong here, but not violent.

My feet sometimes on the edge of the pebbles, sometimes in the water, I went on up the shore line. Now I saw a boat. A gently bobbing black shape ahead. No light was on it. Nothing I could see moved on it. It was the only boat on that shore. That made it important.

Foot by foot, I approached.

A shadow moved between me and the dark rear of a building. I froze. The shadow, man-size, moved again, in the direction from which I was coming.

Waiting, I didn't know how nearly invisible, or how plain, I might be against my background. I couldn't risk giving myself away by trying to improve my position.

Twenty feet from me the shadow suddenly stopped.

I was seen. My gun was on the shadow.

"Come on," I called softly. "Keep coming. Let's see who you are."

The shadow hesitated, left the shelter of the building, drew nearer. I couldn't risk the flashlight. I made out dimly a handsome face, boyishly reckless, one cheek dark-stained.

"Oh, how d'you do?" the face's owner said in a musical baritone voice. "You were at the reception this afternoon."

"Yes."

"Have you seen Princess Zhukov-ski? You know her?"

"She went home with Ignati ten minutes or so ago."

"Excellent!" He wiped his stained cheek with a stained handkerchief,

and turned to look at the boat. "That's Hendrixson's boat," he whispered. "They've got it and they've cast the others off."

"That would mean they are going to leave by water."

"Yes," he agreed, "unless — Shall we have a try at it?"

"You mean jump it?"

"Why not?" he asked. "There can't be very many aboard. God knows there are enough of them ashore. You're armed. I've a pistol."

"We'll size it up first," I decided, "so we'll know what we're jumping."

"That is wisdom," he said, and led the way back to the shelter of the buildings.

Hugging the rear walls of the buildings, we stole toward the boat.

The boat grew clearer in the night. A craft perhaps forty-five feet long, its stern to the shore, rising and falling beside a small pier. Across the stern something protruded. Something I couldn't quite make out. Leather soles scuffed now and then on the wooden deck. Presently a dark head and shoulders showed over the puzzling thing in the stern.

The Russian lad's eyes were better than mine.

"Masked," he breathed in my ear. "Something like a stocking over his head and face."

The masked man was motionless where he stood. We were motionless where we stood.

"Could you hit him from here?" the lad asked.

"Maybe, but night and rain aren't a

good combination for sharpshooting. Our best bet is to sneak as close as we can, and start shooting when he spots us."

"That is wisdom," he agreed.

Discovery came with our first step forward. The man in the boat grunted. The lad at my side jumped forward. I recognized the thing in the boat's stern just in time to throw out a leg and trip the young Russian. He tumbled down, all sprawled out on the pebbles. I dropped behind him.

The machine gun in the boat's stern poured metal over our heads.

"No good rushing that!" I said. "Roll out of it!"

I set the example by revolving toward the back of the building we had just left.

The man at the gun sprinkled the beach, but sprinkled it at random, his eyes no doubt spoiled for night-seeing by the flash of his gun.

Around the corner of the building, we sat up.

"You saved my life by tripping me," the lad said coolly.

"Yes. I wonder if they've moved the machine gun from the street, or if —"

The answer to that came immediately. The machine gun in the street mingled its vicious voice with the drumming of the one in the boat.

"A pair of them!" I complained. "Know anything about the layout?"

"I don't think there are more than ten or twelve of them," he said, "although it is not easy to count in the

dark. The few I have seen are completely masked — like the man in the boat. They seem to have disconnected the telephone and light lines first and then to have destroyed the bridge. We attacked them while they were looting the bank, but in front they had a machine gun mounted in an automobile, and we were not equipped to combat on equal terms."

"Where are the islanders now?"

"Scattered, and most of them in hiding, I fancy, unless General Pleshkev has succeeded in rallying them again."

I frowned and beat my brains together. You can't fight machine guns and hand grenades with peaceful villagers and retired capitalists. No matter how well led and armed they are, you can't do anything with them. For that matter, how could anybody do much against that tough a game?"

"Suppose you stick here and keep your eye on the boat," I suggested. "I'll scout around and see what's doing farther up, and if I can get a few good men together, I'll try to jump the boat again, probably from the other side. But we can't count on that. The get-away will be by boat. We can count on that, and try to block it. If you lie down you can watch the boat around the corner of the building without making much of a target of yourself. I wouldn't do anything to attract attention until the break for the boat comes. Then you can do all the shooting you want."

"Excellent!" he said. "You'll probably find most of the islanders up be-

hind the church. You can get to it by going straight up the hill until you come to an iron fence, and then follow that to the right."

"Right."

I moved off in the direction he had indicated.

At the main street I stopped to look around before venturing across. Everything was quiet there. The only man I could see was spread out face-down on the sidewalk near me.

On hands and knees I crawled to his side. He was dead. I didn't stop to examine him further, but sprang up and streaked for the other side of the street.

Nothing tried to stop me. In a doorway, flat against a wall, I peeped out. The wind had stopped. The rain was no longer a driving deluge, but a steady down-pouring of small drops. Couffignal's main street, to my senses, was a deserted street.

I wondered if the retreat to the boat had already started. On the sidewalk, walking swiftly toward the bank, I heard the answer to that guess.

High up on the slope, almost up to the edge of the cliff, by the sound, a machine gun began to hurl out its stream of bullets.

Mixed with the racket of the machine gun were the sounds of smaller arms, and a grenade or two.

At the first crossing, I left the main street and began to run up the hill. Men were running toward me. Two of them passed, paying no attention to my shouted, "What's up now?"

The third man stopped because I

grabbed him — a fat man whose breath bubbled, and whose face was fish-belly white.

"They've moved the car with the machine gun on it up behind us," he gasped when I had shouted my question into his ear again.

"What are you doing without a gun?" I asked.

"I — I dropped it."

"Where's General Pleshkev?"

"Back there somewhere. He's trying to capture the car, but he'll never do it. It's suicide!"

Other men had passed us, running downhill, as we talked. I let the white-faced man go, and stopped four men who weren't running so fast as the others.

"What's happening now?" I questioned them.

"They's going through the houses up the hill," a sharp-featured man with a small mustache and a rifle said.

"Has anybody got word off the island yet?" I asked.

"Can't," another informed me. "They blew up the bridge first thing."

"Can't anybody swim?"

"Not in that wind. Young Catlan tried it and was lucky to get out again with a couple of broken ribs."

"The wind's gone down," I pointed out.

The sharp-featured man gave his rifle to one of the others and took off his coat.

"I'll try it," he promised.

"Good! Wake up the whole country, and get word through to the San Francisco police boat and to the Mare

Island Navy Yard. They'll lend a hand if you tell 'em the bandits have machine guns. Tell 'em the bandits have an armed boat waiting to leave in. It's Hendrixson's."

The volunteer swimmer left.

"A boat?" two of the men asked together.

"Yes. With a machine gun on it. If we're going to do anything, it'll have to be now, while we're between them and their get-away. Get every man and every gun you can find down there. Tackle the boat from the roofs if you can. When the bandits' car comes down there, pour it into it. You'll do better from the buildings than from the street."

The three men went on downhill. I went uphill, toward the crackling of firearms ahead. The machine gun was working irregularly. It would pour out its rat-tat-tat for a second or so, and then stop for a couple of seconds. The answering fire was thin, ragged.

I met more men, learned from them that the general, with less than a dozen men, was still fighting the car. I repeated the advice I had given the other men. My informants went down to join them. I went on up.

A hundred yards farther along, what was left of the general's dozen broke out of the night, around and past me, flying downhill, with bullets hailing after them.

The road was no place for mortal man. I stumbled over two bodies, scratched myself in a dozen places getting over a hedge. On soft, wet sod I continued my uphill journey.

The machine gun on the hill stopped its clattering. The one in the boat was still at work.

The one ahead opened again, firing too high for anything near at hand to be its target. It was helping its fellow below, spraying the main street.

Before I could get closer it had stopped. I heard the car's motor racing. The car moved toward me.

Rolling into the hedge, I lay there, straining my eyes through the spaces between the stems. I had six bullets in a gun that hadn't yet been fired.

When I saw wheels on the lighter face of the road, I emptied my gun, holding it low.

The car went on.

I sprang out of my hiding-place.

The car was suddenly gone from the empty road.

There was a grinding sound. A crash. The noise of metal folding on itself. The tinkle of glass.

I raced toward those sounds.

Out of a black pile where an engine sputtered, a black figure leaped — to dash off across the soggy lawn. I cut after it, hoping that the others in the wreck were down for keeps.

I was less than fifteen feet behind the fleeing man when he cleared a hedge. I'm no sprinter, but neither was he. The wet grass made slippery going.

He stumbled while I was vaulting the hedge. When we straightened out again I was not more than ten feet behind him.

Once I clicked my gun at him, for-

getting I had emptied it. Six cartridges were wrapped in a piece of paper in my vest pocket, but this was no time for loading.

A building loomed ahead. My fugitive bore off to the right, to clear the corner.

To the left a heavy shotgun went off.

The running man disappeared around the house-corner.

"Sweet God!" General Pleshkev's mellow voice complained. "That with a shotgun I should miss all of a man at the distance!"

"Go round the other way!" I yelled, plunging around the corner.

His feet thudded ahead. I could not see him. The general puffed around from the other side of the house.

"You have him?"

"No."

In front of us was a stone-faced bank, on top of which ran a path. On either side of us was a high and solid hedge.

"But, my friend," the general protested. "How could he have —?"

A pale triangle showed on the path above — a triangle that could have been a bit of shirt showing above the opening of a vest.

"Stay here and talk!" I whispered to the general, and crept forward.

"It must be that he has gone the other way," the general carried out my instructions, rambling on as if I were standing beside him, "because if he had come my way I should have seen him, and if he had raised himself over either of the hedges or the em-

bankment, one of us would surely have seen him against . . ."

He talked on and on while I gained the shelter of the bank on which the path sat, while I found places for my toes in the rough stone facing.

The man on the road, trying to make himself small with his back in a bush, was looking at the talking general. He saw me when I had my feet on the path.

He jumped, and one hand went up.

I jumped, with both hands out.

A stone, turning under my foot, threw me sidewise, twisting my ankle, but saving my head from the bullet he sent at it.

My outflung left arm caught his legs as I spilled down. He came over on top of me. I kicked him once, caught his gun-arm, and had just decided to bite it when the general puffed up over the edge of the path and prodded the man off me with his shotgun.

When it came my turn to stand up, I found it not so good. My twisted ankle didn't like to support its share of my hundred-and-eighty-some pounds. Putting most of my weight on the other leg, I turned my flashlight on the prisoner.

"Hello, Flippol!" I exclaimed.

"Hello!" he said without joy in the recognition.

He was a roly-poly Italian youth of twenty-three or -four. I had helped send him to San Quentin four years ago for his part in a payroll stick-up. He had been out on parole for several months now.

"The prison board isn't going to

like this," I told him.

"You got me wrong," he pleaded. "I ain't been doing a thing. I was up here to see some friends. And when this thing busted loose I had to hide, because I got a record, and if I'm picked up I'll be railroaded for it. And now you got me, and you think I'm in on it!"

"You're a mind reader," I assured him, and asked the general: "Where can we pack this bird away for a while, under lock and key?"

"In my house there is a lumber-room with a strong door and not a window."

"That'll do it. March, Flippo!"

General Pleshkev collared the youth, while I limped along behind them, examining Flippo's gun, which was loaded except for the one shot he had fired at me, and reloading my own.

We had caught our prisoner on the Russian's grounds, so we didn't have far to go.

The general knocked on the door and called out something in his language. Bolts clicked and grated, and the door was swung open by a heavily mustached Russian servant. Behind him the princess and a stalwart older woman stood.

We went in while the general was telling his household about the capture, and took the captive up to the lumber-room. I frisked him for his pocketknife and matches — he had nothing else that could help him get out — locked him in and braced the door solidly with a length of board.

Then we went downstairs again.

"You are injured!" the princess, seeing me limp across the floor, cried.

"Only a twisted ankle," I said. "But it does bother me some. Is there any adhesive tape around?"

"Yes," and she spoke to the mustached servant, who went out of the room and presently returned, carrying rolls of gauze and tape and a basin of steaming water.

"If you'll sit down," the princess said, taking these things from the servant.

But I shook my head and reached for the adhesive tape.

"I want cold water, because I've got to go out in the wet again. If you'll show me the bathroom, I can fix myself up in no time."

We had to argue about that, but I finally got to the bathroom, where I ran cold water on my foot and ankle, and strapped it with adhesive tape, as tight as I could without stopping the circulation altogether. Getting my wet shoe on again was a job, but when I was through I had two firm legs under me, even if one of them did hurt some.

When I rejoined the others I noticed that the sound of firing no longer came up the hill, and that the patter of rain was lighter, and a grey streak of coming daylight showed under a drawn blind.

I was buttoning my slicker when the knocker rang on the front door. Russian words came through, and the young Russian I had met on the beach came in.

"Aleksandr, you're —" the stalwart older woman screamed, when she saw the blood on his cheek, and fainted.

He paid no attention to her at all, as if he was used to having her faint.

"They've gone in the boat," he told me while the girl and two men servants gathered up the woman and laid her on an ottoman.

"How many?" I asked.

"I counted ten, and I don't think I missed more than one or two, if any."

"The men I sent down there couldn't stop them?"

He shrugged.

"What would you? It takes a strong stomach to face a machine gun. Your men had been cleared out of the buildings almost before they arrived."

The woman who had fainted had revived by now and was pouring anxious questions in Russian at the lad. The princess was getting into her blue cape. The woman stopped questioning the lad and asked her something.

"It's all over," the princess said. "I am going to view the ruins."

That suggestion appealed to everybody. Five minutes later all of us, including the servants, were on our way downhill. Behind us, around us, in front of us, were other people going downhill, hurrying along in the drizzle that was very gentle now, their faces tired and excited in the bleak morning light.

Halfway down, a woman ran out of a cross-path and began to tell me something. I recognized her as one of Hendrixson's maids.

I caught some of her words.

"Presents gone. . . . Mr. Brophy murdered. . . . Oliver. . . ."

"I'll be down later," I told the others, and set out after the maid.

She was running back to the Hendrixson house. I couldn't run, couldn't even walk fast. She and Hendrixson and more of his servants were standing on the front porch when I arrived.

"They killed Oliver and Brophy," the old man said.

"How?"

"We were in the back of the house, the rear second story, watching the flashes of the shooting down in the village. Oliver was down here, just inside the front door, and Brophy in the room with the presents. We heard a shot in there, and immediately a man appeared in the doorway of our room, threatening us with two pistols, making us stay there for perhaps ten minutes. Then he shut and locked the door and went away. We broke the door down — and found Brophy and Oliver dead."

"Let's look at them."

The chauffeur was just inside the front door. He lay on his back, with his brown throat cut straight across the front, almost back to the vertebræ. His rifle was under him. I pulled it out and examined it. It had not been fired.

Upstairs, the butler Brophy was huddled against a leg of one of the tables on which the presents had been spread. His gun was gone. I turned him over, straightened him out, and

found a bullet-hole in his chest. Around the hole his coat was charred in a large area.

Most of the presents were still here. But the most valuable pieces were gone. The others were in disorder, lying around any which way, their covers pulled off.

"What did the one you saw look like?" I asked.

"I didn't see him very well," Hendrixson said. "There was no light in our room. He was simply a dark figure against the candle burning in the hall. A large man in a black rubber raincoat, with some sort of black mask that covered his whole head and face."

As we went downstairs again I gave Hendrixson a brief account of what I had seen and heard and done since I had left him. There wasn't enough of it to make a long tale.

"Do you think you can get information about the others from the one you caught?" he asked, as I prepared to go out.

"No. But I expect to bag them just the same."

Couffignal's main street was jammed with people when I limped into it again. A detachment of Marines from Mare Island was there, and men from a San Francisco police boat. Excited citizens in all degrees of partial nakedness boiled around them. A hundred voices were talking at once, recounting their personal adventures and braveries and losses and what they had seen. Such words as machine gun, bomb, bandit, car, shot, dynamite, and killed sounded again and again, in

every variety of voice and tone.

The bank had been completely wrecked by the charge that had blown the vault. The jewelry store was another ruin. A grocer's across the street was serving as a field hospital. Two doctors were toiling there, patching up damaged villagers.

I recognized a familiar face under a uniform cap — Sergeant Roche of the harbor police — and pushed through the crowd to him.

"Just get here?" he asked as we shook hands. "Or were you in on it?"

"In on it."

"What do you know?"

"Everything."

"Who ever heard of a private detective that didn't," he joshed as I led him out of the mob.

"Did you people run into an empty boat out in the bay?" I asked when we were away from audiences.

"Empty boats have been floating around the bay all night," he said.

I hadn't thought of that.

"Where's your boat now?" I asked.

"Out trying to pick up the bandits. I stayed with a couple of men to lend a hand here."

"You're in luck," I told him. "Now sneak a look across the street. See the stout old boy with the black whiskers? Standing in front of the druggist's."

General Pleshskév stood there, with the woman who had fainted, the young Russian whose bloody cheek had made her faint, and a pale, plump man of forty-something who had been with them at the reception. A little to one side stood big Ignati, the two

men-servants I had seen at the house, and another who was obviously one of them. They were chatting together and watching the excited antics of a red-faced property-owner who was telling a curt lieutenant of Marines that it was his own personal private automobile that the bandits had stolen to mount their machine gun on.

"Yes," said Roche, "I see your fellow with the whiskers."

"Well, he's your meat. The woman and two men with him are also your meat. And those four Russians standing to the left are some more of it. There's another missing, but I'll take care of that one. Pass the word to the lieutenant, and you can round up those babies without giving them a chance to fight back. They think they're safe as angels."

"Sure, are you?" the sergeant asked.

"Don't be silly!" I growled, as if I had never made a mistake in my life.

I had been standing on my one good prop. When I put my weight on the other to turn away from the sergeant, it stung me all the way to the hip. I pushed my back teeth together and began to work painfully through the crowd to the other side of the street.

The princess didn't seem to be among those present. My idea was that, next to the general, she was the most important member of the push. If she was at their house, and not yet suspicious, I figured I could get close enough to yank her in without a riot.

Walking was hell. My temperature rose. Sweat rolled out on me.

"Mister, they didn't none of 'em come down that way."

The one-legged newsboy was standing at my elbow. I greeted him as if he were my pay-check."

"Come on with me," I said, taking his arm. "You did fine down there, and now I want you to do something else for me."

Half a block from the main street I led him up on the porch of a small yellow cottage. The front door stood open, left that way when the occupants ran down to welcome police and Marines, no doubt. Just inside the door, beside a hall rack, was a wicker porch chair. I committed unlawful entry to the extent of dragging that chair out on the porch.

"Sit down, son," I urged the boy.

He sat, looking up at me with puzzled freckled face. I took a firm grip on his crutch and pulled it out of his hand.

"Here's five bucks for rental," I said, "and if I lose it I'll buy you one of ivory and gold."

And I put the crutch under my arm and began to propel myself up the hill.

It was my first experience with a crutch. I didn't break any records. But it was a lot better than tottering along on an unassisted bum ankle.

The hill was longer and steeper than some mountains I've seen, but the gravel walk to the Russians' house was finally under my feet.

I was still some dozen feet from the porch when Princess Zhukovski opened the door.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and then, recovering from her surprise, "your ankle is worse!"

She ran down the steps to help me climb them. As she came I noticed that something heavy was sagging and swinging in the right-hand pocket of her grey flannel jacket.

With one hand under my elbow, the other arm across my back, she helped me up the steps and across the porch. That assured me she didn't think I had tumbled to the game. If she had, she wouldn't have trusted herself within reach of my hands. Why, I wondered, had she come back to the house after starting downhill with the others?

While I was wondering we went into the house, where she planted me in a large and soft leather chair.

"You must certainly be starving after your strenuous night," she said. "I will see if —"

"No, sit down." I nodded at a chair facing mine. "I want to talk to you."

She sat down, clasping her slender white hands in her lap. In neither face nor pose was there any sign of nervousness, not even of curiosity. And that was overdoing it.

"Where have you cached the plunder?" I asked.

The whiteness of her face was nothing to go by. It had been white as marble since I had first seen her. The darkness of her eyes was as natural. Nothing happened to her other features. Her voice was smoothly cool.

"I am sorry," she said. "The question doesn't convey anything to me."

"Here's the point," I explained. "I'm charging you with complicity in the gutting of Couffignal, and in the murders that went with it. And I'm asking you where the loot has been hidden."

Slowly she stood up, raised her chin, and looked at least a mile down at me.

"How dare you? How dare you speak so to me, a Zhukovski!"

"I don't care if you're one of the Smith Brothers!" Leaning forward, I had pushed my twisted ankle against a leg of the chair, and the resulting agony didn't improve my disposition. "For the purpose of this talk you are a thief and a murderer."

Her strong slender body became the body of a lean crouching animal. Her white face became the face of an enraged animal. One hand — claw now — swept to the heavy pocket of her jacket.

Then, before I could have batted an eye — though my life seemed to depend on my not batting it — the wild animal had vanished. Out of it — and now I know where the writers of the old fairy stories got their ideas — rose the princess again, cool and straight and tall.

She sat down, crossed her ankles, put an elbow on an arm of her chair, propped her chin on the back of that hand, and looked curiously into my face.

"However," she murmured, "did you chance to arrive at so strange and fanciful a theory?"

"It wasn't chance, and it's neither strange nor fanciful," I said. "Maybe

it'll save time and trouble if I show you part of the score against you. Then you'll know how you stand and won't waste your brains pleading innocence."

"I should be grateful," she smiled, "very!"

I tucked my crutch in between one knee and the arm of my chair, so my hands would be free to check off my points on my fingers.

"First — whoever planned the job knew the island — not fairly well, but every inch of it. There's no need to argue about that. Second — the car on which the machine gun was mounted was local property, stolen from the owner here. So was the boat in which the bandits were supposed to have escaped. Bandits from the outside would have needed a car or a boat to bring their machine guns, explosives, and grenades here and there doesn't seem to be any reason why they shouldn't have used that car or boat instead of stealing a fresh one. Third — there wasn't the least hint of the professional bandit touch on this job. If you ask me, it was a military job from beginning to end. And the worst safe-burglar in the world could have got into both the bank vault and the jeweler's safe without wrecking the buildings. Fourth — bandits from the outside wouldn't have destroyed the bridge. They might have blocked it, but they wouldn't have destroyed it. They'd have saved it in case they had to make their get-away in that direction. Fifth — bandits figuring on a get-away by boat would have cut

the job short, wouldn't have spread it over the whole night. Enough racket was made here to wake up California all the way from Sacramento to Los Angeles. What you people did was to send one man out in the boat, shooting, and he didn't go far. As soon as he was at a safe distance, he went overboard, and swam back to the island. Big Ignati could have done it without turning a hair."

That exhausted my right hand. I switched over, counting on my left.

"Sixth — I met one of your party, the lad, down on the beach, and he was coming from the boat. He suggested that we jump it. We were shot at, but the man behind the gun was playing with us. He could have wiped us out in a second if he had been in earnest, but he shot over our heads. Seventh — that same lad is the only man on the island, so far as I know, who saw the departing bandits. Eighth — all of your people that I ran into were especially nice to me, the general even spending an hour talking to me at the reception this afternoon. That's a distinctive amateur crook trait. Ninth — after the machine gun car had been wrecked I chased its occupant. I lost him around this house. The Italian boy I picked up wasn't him. He couldn't have climbed up on the path without my seeing him. But he could have run around to the general's side of the house and vanished indoors there. The general liked him, and would have helped him. I know that, because the general performed a downright miracle by missing him at

some six feet with a shotgun. Tenth — you called at Hendrixson's house for no other purpose than to get me away from there."

That finished the left hand. I went back to the right.

"Eleventh — Hendrixson's two servants were killed by someone they knew and trusted. Both were killed at close quarters and without firing a shot. I'd say you got Oliver to let you into the house, and were talking to him when one of your men cut his throat from behind. Then you went upstairs and probably shot the unsuspecting Brophy yourself. He wouldn't have been on his guard against you. Twelfth — but that ought to be enough, and I'm getting a sore throat from listing them."

She took her chin off her hand, took a fat white cigarette out of a thin black case, and held it in her mouth while I put a match to the end of it. She took a long pull at it — a draw that accounted for a third of its length — and blew the smoke down at her knees.

"That would be enough," she said when all these things had been done, "if it were not that you yourself know it was impossible for us to have been so engaged. Did you not see us — did not everyone see us — time and time again?"

"That's easy!" I argued. "With a couple of machine guns, a trunkful of grenades, knowing the island from top to bottom, in the darkness and in a storm, against bewildered civilians — it was duck soup. There are nine of

you that I know of, including two women. Any five of you could have carried on the work, once it was started, while the others took turns appearing here and there, establishing alibis. And that is what you did. You took turns slipping out to alibi yourselves. Everywhere I went I ran into one of you. And the general! That whiskered old joker running around leading the simple citizens to battle! I'll bet he led 'em plenty! They're lucky there are any of 'em alive this morning!"

She finished her cigarette with another inhalation, dropped the stub on the rug, ground out the light with one foot, sighed wearily, and asked:

"And now what?"

"Now I want to know where you have stowed the plunder."

The readiness of her answer surprised me.

"Under the garage, in a cellar we dug secretly there some months ago."

I didn't believe that, of course, but it turned out to be the truth.

I didn't have anything else to say. When I fumbled with my borrowed crutch, preparing to get up, she raised a hand and spoke gently:

"Wait a moment, please. I have something to suggest."

Half standing, I leaned toward her, stretching out one hand until it was close to her side.

"I want the gun," I said.

She nodded, and sat still while I plucked it from her pocket, put it in one of my own, and sat down again.

"You said a little while ago that you didn't care who I was," she began immediately. "But I want you to know. There are so many of us Russians who once were somebodies and who now are nobodies that I won't bore you with the repetition of a tale the world has grown tired of hearing. But you must remember that this weary tale is real to us who are its subjects. However, we fled from Russia with what we could carry of our property, which fortunately was enough to keep us in bearable comfort for a few years.

"In London we opened a Russian restaurant, but London was suddenly full of Russian restaurants, and ours became, instead of a means of livelihood, a source of loss. We tried teaching music and languages, and so on. In short, we hit on all the means of earning our living that other Russian exiles hit upon, and so always found ourselves in overcrowded, and thus unprofitable, fields. But what else did we know — could we do?

"I promised not to bore you. Well, always our capital shrank, and always the day approached on which we should be shabby and hungry, the day when we should become familiar to readers of your Sunday papers — charwomen who had been princesses, dukes who now were butlers. There was no place for us in the world. Outcasts easily become outlaws. Why not? Could it be said that we owed the world any fealty? Had not the world sat idly by and seen us despoiled of place and property and country?

"We planned it before we had

heard of Couffignal. We could find a small settlement of the wealthy, sufficiently isolated, and, after establishing ourselves there, we would plunder it. Couffignal, when we found it, seemed to be the ideal place. We leased this house for six months, having just enough capital remaining to do that and to live properly here while our plans matured. Here we spent four months establishing ourselves, collecting our arms and our explosives, mapping our offensive, waiting for a favorable night. Last night seemed to be that night, and we had provided, we thought, against every eventuality. But we had not, of course, provided against your presence and your genius. They were simply others of the unforeseen misfortunes to which we seem eternally condemned."

She stopped, and fell to studying me with mournful large eyes that made me feel like fidgeting.

"It's no good calling me a genius," I objected. "The truth is you people botched your job from beginning to end. Your general would get a big laugh out of a man without military training who tried to lead an army. But here are you people with absolutely no criminal experience trying to swing a trick that needed the highest sort of criminal skill. Look at how you all played around with me! Amateur stuff! A professional crook with any intelligence would have either let me alone or knocked me off. No wonder you flopped! As for the rest of it — your troubles — I can't do anything about them."

"Why?" very softly. "Why can't you?"

"Why should I?" I made it blunt.

"No one else knows what you know." She bent forward to put a white hand on my knee. "There is wealth in that cellar beneath the garage. You may have whatever you ask."

I shook my head.

"You aren't a fool!" she protested. "You know —"

"Let me straighten this out for you," I interrupted. "We'll disregard whatever honesty I happen to have, sense of loyalty to employers, and so on. You might doubt them, so we'll throw them out. Now I'm a detective because I happen to like the work. It pays me a fair salary, but I could find other jobs that would pay more. Even a hundred dollars more a month would be twelve hundred a year. Say twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars in the years between now and my sixtieth birthday.

"Now I pass up about twenty-five or thirty thousand of honest gain because I like being a detective, like the work. And liking work makes you want to do it as well as you can. Otherwise there'd be no sense to it. That's the fix I am in. I don't know anything else, don't enjoy anything else, don't want to know or enjoy anything else. You can't weigh that against any sum of money. Money is good stuff. I haven't anything against it. But in the past eighteen years I've been getting my fun out of chasing crooks and tackling puzzles, my satisfaction out

of catching crooks and solving riddles. It's the only kind of sport I know anything about, and I can't imagine a pleasanter future than twenty-some years more of it. I'm not going to blow that up!"

She shook her head slowly, lowering it, so that now her dark eyes looked up at me under the thin arcs of her brows.

"You speak only of money," she said. "I said you may have whatever you ask."

That was out. I don't know where these women get their ideas.

"You're still all twisted up," I said brusquely, standing now and adjusting my borrowed crutch. "You think I'm a man and you're a woman. That's wrong. I'm a manhunter and you're something that has been running in front of me. There's nothing human about it. You might just as well expect a hound to play tiddly-winks with the fox he's caught. We're wasting time anyway. I've been thinking the police or Marines might come up here and save me a walk. You've been waiting for your mob to come back and grab me. I could have told you they were being arrested when I left them."

That shook her. She had stood up. Now she fell back a step, putting a hand behind her for steadiness, on her chair. An exclamation I didn't understand popped out of her mouth. Russian, I thought, but the next moment I knew it had been Italian.

"Put your hands up."

It was Flippo's husky voice. Flippo stood in the doorway, holding an automatic.

I raised my hands as high as I could without dropping my supporting crutch, meanwhile cursing myself for having been too careless, or too vain, to keep a gun in my hand while I talked to the girl.

So this was why she had come back to the house. If she freed the Italian, she had thought, we would have no reason for suspecting that he hadn't been in on the robbery, and so we would look for the bandits among his friends. A prisoner, of course, he might have persuaded us of his innocence. She had given him the gun so he could either shoot his way clear, or, what would help her as much, get himself killed trying.

While I was arranging these thoughts in my head, Flipppo had come up behind me. His empty hand passed over my body, taking away my own gun, his, and the one I had taken from the girl.

"A bargain, Flipppo," I said when he had moved away from me, a little to one side, where he made one corner of a triangle whose other corners were the girl and I. "You're out on parole, with some years still to be served. I picked you up with a gun on you. That's plenty to send you back to the big house. I know you weren't in on this job. My idea is that you were up here on a smaller one of your own, but I can't prove that and don't want to. Walk out of here, alone and neutral, and I'll forget I saw you."

Little thoughtful lines grooved the boy's round, dark face.

The princess took a step toward

him.

"You heard the offer I just now made him?" she asked. "Well, I make that offer to you, if you will kill him."

The thoughtful lines in the boy's face deepened.

"There's your choice, Flipppo," I summed up for him. "All I can give you is freedom from San Quentin. The princess can give you a fat cut of the profits in a busted caper, with a good chance to get yourself hanged."

The girl, remembering her advantage over me, went at him hot and heavy in Italian, a language in which I know only four words. Two of them are profane and the other two obscene. I said all four.

The boy was weakening. If he had been ten years older, he'd have taken my offer and thanked me for it. But he was young and she — now that I thought of it — was beautiful. The answer wasn't hard to guess.

"But not to bump him off," he said to her, in English, for my benefit. "We'll lock him up in there where I was at."

I suspected Flipppo hadn't any great prejudice against murder. It was just that he thought this one unnecessary, unless he was kidding me to make the killing easier.

The girl wasn't satisfied with his suggestion. She poured more hot Italian at him. Her game looked sure-fire, but it had a flaw. She couldn't persuade him that his chances of getting any of the loot away were good. She had to depend on her charms to swing him. And that meant she had to

hold his eye.

He wasn't far from me.

She came close to him. She was singing, chanting, crooning Italian syllables into his round face.

She had him.

He shrugged. His whole face said yes. He turned —

I knocked him on the noodle with my borrowed crutch.

The crutch splintered apart. Flippo's knees bent. He stretched up to his full height. He fell on his face on the floor. He lay there, dead-still, except for a thin worm of blood that crawled out of his hair to the rug.

A step, a tumble, a foot or so of hand-and-knee scrambling put me within reach of Flippo's gun.

The girl, jumping out of my path, was half-way to the door when I sat up with the gun in my hand.

"Stop!" I ordered.

"I shan't," she said, but she did, for the time at least. "I am going out."

"You are going out when I take you."

She laughed, a pleasant laugh, low and confident.

"I'm going out before that," she insisted good-naturedly.

I shook my head.

"How do you purpose stopping me?" she asked.

"I don't think I'll have to," I told her. "You've got too much sense to try to run while I'm holding a gun on you."

She laughed again, an amused ripple.

"I've got too much sense to stay,"

she corrected me. "Your crutch is broken, and you're lame. You can't catch me by running after me, then. You pretend you'll shoot me, but I don't believe you. You'd shoot me if I attacked you, of course, but I shan't do that. I shall simply walk out, and you know you won't shoot me for that. You'll wish you could, but you won't. You'll see."

Her face turned over her shoulder, her dark eyes twinkling at me, she took a step toward the door.

"Better not count on that!" I threatened.

For answer to that she gave me a cooing laugh. And took another step.

"Stop, you idiot!" I bawled at her.

Her face laughed over her shoulder at me. She walked without haste to the door, her short skirt of grey flannel shaping itself to the calf of each grey wool-stockinged leg as its mate stepped forward.

Sweat greased the gun in my hand.

When her right foot was on the doorsill, a little chuckling sound came from her throat.

"Adieu!" she said softly.

And I put a bullet in the calf of her left leg.

She sat down — plump! Utter surprise stretched her white face. It was too soon for pain.

I had never shot a woman before. I felt queer about it.

"You ought to have known I'd do it!" My voice sounded harsh and savage and like a stranger's in my ears. "Didn't I steal a crutch from a cripple?"

The first story to be offered to the American public about Fidelity Dove, Lady Larcenist Extraordinary, was "The Great Kabul Diamond" which your Editor included in his feminology, THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES. In this story the saint-faced and ethereal Fidelity invented a new way of stealing a world-famous diamond — by buying a house!

In "The Meanest Man in Europe" (B. H. — Before Hitler) our modern Miss Robin Hood invents a new way of forcing an old Scrooge to pay a hospital bill — by buying £50,000 worth of pearls!

Did we tell you about that amazing exploit in which Fidelity stole the entire landscape of Swallowsbath — complete with woods, hills, river, meadows, quarry, saw-mill and village? Yes, the whole countryside — and we don't mean a painting! One of these issues we'll bring you that one . . .

THE MEANEST MAN IN EUROPE

by ROY VICKERS

THE case of Mr. Jabez Crewde gives us another reason to believe that Fidelity Dove was at this time developing a conscience. She did not make very much money out of Jabez Crewde. True, she cleared her expenses, which were, as usual, on the grand scale, and she paid herself and her staff well for their time. It was the Grey Friars Hospital which benefited chiefly by this exploit. You, if you are of those who refuse to believe that she had a spark of goodness in her, you may say that she simply indulged her sense of humour in making the meanest man in Europe subscribe twenty thousand pounds to a hospital.

Jabez Crewde deserved his title. He was worth close upon two hundred thousand pounds, which he had made as a financier — for which you can read moneylender, though he never took ordinary moneylenders' risks. Moneylender's interest — banker's

risk — that was the formula on which he had grown rich. He lived in a small, drab house in a drab quarter of Islington.

Fidelity would never have heard of him if he had not had a very mild attack of appendicitis. Feeling unwell one day, he had gone in his shabbiest clothes to the surgery of a struggling slum doctor. The doctor diagnosed appendicitis, and recommended an operation. Jabez was no physical coward, but he expressed the utmost horror. An operation would ruin him. So the doctor, having been persuaded to accept half a crown instead of his usual fee of five shillings, recommended the meanest man in Europe for free treatment at the Grey Friars Hospital.

It was a simple operation — the convalescence was short. It was during the latter period that Gorse, more or less by chance, got to know about it

and related it to Fidelity. Fidelity crossed her hands across the bosom of her dream-grey gown and sadly shook her head.

"Avarice is the very leprosy of the soul," she said. "I am revolted, Cuthbert."

"For once I feel myself able to echo your sentiments," said Gorse. "He's worth about a couple of hundred thousand."

"Those poor, underpaid doctors!" said Fidelity. "And the overworked nurses! And the needy cases crying for admission — or is it perhaps a wealthy hospital?"

"There's a notice up saying if they don't get twenty thousand in three months they will have to close a wing," said Gorse.

"They have given their skill unstintingly to a suffering fellow creature. They have but cast their bread upon the waters —"

"Fidelity!" groaned Gorse. He would have died for Fidelity, as would any other member of her gang, but he alone believed her to be an utter humbug.

"My friend, you are always cruel to me, though you love me," sighed Fidelity. "And because I love you, I must please you. Listen, and tell me if this pleases you."

"I'm listening," grunted Gorse, and waited.

Fidelity's voice, when she spoke again, held the low call of birds at dusk.

"Tell Varley, our jeweller, to buy fifty thousand pounds' worth of pearls

from the best firms he can," she said.

Gorse brightened.

"I thought you'd get down to brass tacks sooner or later, Fidelity!" he said, and left the room to carry out her order.

Jabez Crewde had the usual handful of spare-time agents, and it took no more than a few days for Fidelity to contrive that one of them should approach her. Within a week of her conversation with Gorse, she was sitting timidly in a dingy room in the drab house in Islington, which served Mr. Crewde for an office as well as a living-room.

"I — I have heard that you were ill and I hope you are better," said Fidelity in the tone of one who desires to placate a moneylender.

"I *have* to be better, Miss Dove," answered Crewde. "In these hard times I cannot afford a long illness. What do you want me to do for you?"

"I — I understood you were a financier," began Fidelity, "and I am in a difficulty which you will understand even better than I. A friend of mine, who knows all about stocks and shares, has told me that if I could invest five thousand pounds now it would be worth *thirty-five* thousand in a few days."

Jabez Crewde had no difficulty in suppressing a smile. It was a part of his profession to listen to fantastic tales.

"Go on, Miss Dove," said Crewde. "As long as you're not going to suggest

that I should lend you the five thousand."

"Oh, but I was going to suggest just that," said Fidelity. "You see, I have not the five thousand pounds, and it seems such an awful pity to miss this chance. I don't know anything about money, but with thirty-five thousand pounds I need never think about it again. That is why I am so anxious to avail myself of this opportunity."

Mr. Crewde's eyes strayed to Fidelity's bag. It was of grey brocade — a dainty, home-like affair that suggested knitting and mothers' meetings and little rewards for good children.

"Are you offering any security?" he asked.

"You mean stocks and shares," divined Fidelity. "I'm afraid I haven't any. The only thing I have of any value is the jewellery my great-uncle left me. I must not sell it, and — in my sect we do not wear jewellery — so I thought that if I were to leave the jewellery with you and pay you back when I have the thirty-five thousand pounds —?"

"Have you any idea what the jewellery is worth?" asked Crewde, while Fidelity produced and opened a number of leather cases.

"It was valued at the time of my uncle's death," said Fidelity. "The assessor said it was worth a little over fifty thousand pounds. It seemed to me terrible that so much money should be spent upon adornments."

Mr. Crewde began an expert scrutiny of the pearls. He was inclined to

agree with the assessor as to their worth. He was inclined to think, now that he had taken stock of Fidelity's perfect grey tailor-made and her little white hat, that she was an extravagant and helpless fool.

"They are good pearls, though they're not worth anything like that at the present time," he said presently. "And I don't as a rule lend money upon jewellery. Have you no other securities?"

"None whatever, I fear," said Fidelity in dejection.

That was what Mr. Crewde wanted to know. It is of little use to a money-lender to have a very valuable pledge on a small loan if the client has other securities, because the pledge can always be redeemed. But when the very valuable pledge represents the only security, it is reasonably certain to pass into the hands of the money-lender — especially when the loan is made for the purposes of a get-rich-quick scheme.

"Oh, well, I don't know I'm sure!" Mr. Crewde was muttering with professional reluctance. "Everybody seems to be borrowing money just now. How soon do you expect your — er — your profits to come in, Miss Dove?"

"My friend said in six weeks' time," answered Fidelity.

"Six weeks! H'm! I might just be able to manage it."

Fidelity began to thank him.

"You're quite sure you can pay it back in the six weeks, mind?" challenged Mr. Crewde.

"Oh, perfectly sure," exclaimed Fidelity. "My friend was most positive."

"Very well, then," said Mr. Crewde. "I'll put that into writing and I shall ask you to sign it. If you will come here to-morrow at this time, I'll have the agreement ready for you, together with the money."

Fidelity barely glanced at the document on the following day. Its numerous clauses and penalties had no direct interest for her. She signed the document, gave a receipt for the cheque, took a receipt for her pearls, and left the dingy house in Islington.

She had borrowed five thousand pounds at sixty per cent. interest on a security of pearls worth fifty thousand pounds.

The meanest man in Europe was very pleased at his latest deal. Twenty years' experience had taught him that Miss Fidelity Dove would return in six weeks with a tale of misfortune and beg a renewal of the loan. In a year, with careful manipulation, he would be able to sell the pledge for his own profit without advancing any more money. He was elaborating a scheme by which he could save excise stamps on the numerous documents that would be used in the transaction, when his clerk brought him a card.

"*Mr. Abraham Behrein.*" The address was in Hatton Garden.

He nodded, and the caller was shown in. Behrein was a well-dressed man of dignified appearance. He greeted Jabez with elaborate courtesy.

"I have come to ask a favour, Mr. Crewde," he began. "I have reason to believe that you had a business transaction yesterday with a lady — a Miss Dove."

"Well, what of it?" demanded Crewde. "She's turned twenty-one."

"Quite so!" said Behrein. "I simply wished to ask if you would allow me to look at the pearls she deposited with you. I am aware that the request is most irregular, but — I have reasons."

"What reasons?"

"I do not care to name them."

"Well, that's an end of it. Certainly not!" snapped Jabez Crewde.

"You refuse?" asked Behrein with an air.

"Of course I do. Grant, this gentleman can't find the door!"

Jabez Crewde was more than a little disturbed by the incident. Not so Behrein. Behrein got into the taxi that was waiting for him and drove to Scotland Yard.

Here he again presented his card, explained that he was a dealer in precious stones, and stated that he had been robbed. He wished to speak to a responsible official who would take up the case. There was a short delay, at the end of which he was shown into Detective-Inspector Rason's rooms.

"A short time ago," explained Behrein to the detective, "I bought a parcel of pearls of an approximate value of fifty thousand pounds. It is a big parcel, Mr. Rason, in these days, and my purchase attracted a certain amount of attention. I had many opportunities of unloading, but I was

not in a hurry. A lady, not in the trade, was introduced to me in the belief that she might purchase the entire parcel for her personal use.

"The lady encouraged the belief. She came twice to my office to inspect the pearls and to discuss methods of purchase. Her last visit was on Monday of this week. She was a very pleasant, very well-bred lady, and when I was wanted on the telephone I had no hesitation in leaving her for a moment in possession of the pearls."

Detective-Inspector Rason grunted. He knew well enough what was coming. An oft-told tale!

"My client," continued Behrein, "renewed her expressions of approval, said that she had some final financial arrangements to make, and would call upon me in the following week. This morning I wished to show the pearls to another customer — I had not handled them since the visit of the lady — and I find — a parcel of pretty good imitations, worth possibly one hundred and fifty pounds. I cannot, of course, prove anything, but I am certain that the lady in the case made the substitution while I was answering the telephone."

"Did she give you a name?" asked Rason.

"She gave me the name of Fidelity Dove," said Behrein, "with an address in Bayswater, which I have no doubt is a false one."

"The address is right enough," Rason rapped out. "She's probably waiting for us to call. She's the coolest crook in London and then some. She

never bothers to run away. I've been on her track a dozen times and she always manages so that you can't prove anything. In a way, she's a great woman."

"That is not very consoling to one who looks like losing fifty thousand pounds as the result of her ingenuity," said Behrein bitterly.

"We shall take the matter up, of course," said Rason.

"Then perhaps I could help you," said Behrein. "Chiefly by chance, I happen to know that this lady — if it be not absurd so to call her — borrowed money upon the security of pearls from a Mr. Jabez Crewde. I'm quite sure of my facts. Mr. Crewde underpays his staff, and — er —"

"Quite so," said Rason.

"I was at his house in Islington half an hour ago," continued Behrein. "I asked, with all civility I hope, to be allowed to look at the pearls. He received my request very ill-temperedly and refused it."

Detective-Inspector Rason made a note.

"Did you tell him your suspicion?"

"I would have explained had he given me time," said Behrein. "As it was, I was being shown out of the place before I could explain anything."

"I have here," continued Behrein, "photographs of the pearls, together with an expert description. If you have means of forcing Mr. Crewde, these papers will dispose of any doubt."

"Of course, we could get a search-warrant if necessary," said Rason. "But we always avoid unpleasantness

of that kind if we possibly can. I think it very likely that I could persuade Mr. Crewde to show me the pearls of his own accord."

"Would it be possible for me to accompany you?" asked Behrein. "I could tell at a glance."

The detective agreed to this readily enough, and in half an hour Behrein was again at the house in Islington, this time accompanied by Rason.

When Jabez Crewde found himself confronted with a police officer, he "saw the light" and made no further bones about producing the pearls.

He laid them out on the table, but before he had finished, Behrein intervened.

"These are my pearls, Mr. Crewde," he said. "I could produce a round dozen experts at an hour's notice to identify them. If you care to peruse these documents, you will be satisfied yourself. I—I am very sorry for you."

"Your pearls! What the dickens do you mean?"

Behrein re-told the story of the substitution of the pearls. The end of the story left Crewde babbling incoherently.

"Given that Mr. Behrein can substantiate his account," said Rason, "he will be able to obtain the pearls from you by an order of the Court, as they are stolen goods. Do you wish to take the matter up on your own account, Mr. Crewde?"

"Yes, of course I'll take it up!" snapped Crewde. "No, I can't afford

to pay a lot of thieving lawyers. It's a matter for the Public Prosecutor. I'll give evidence if you'll pay me for my time."

"I take it, Mr. Behrein, that you will prosecute," suggested Rason.

"I have no alternative," replied Behrein. "If you will tell me how to proceed——"

Rason was about to speak, and checked himself.

"If I were you," he said instead, "I'd proceed very carefully, Mr. Behrein. It looks a clear-cut case. But there have been one or two cases before against this particular lady that have looked just as clear-cut. If you like to charge her, of course I must take the charge, but I suggest that you wait till I've seen her."

Mr. Behrein bowed.

"As you please," he said. "You understand these things and I don't. I would like to have a private word with Mr. Crewde if he will allow me."

"Right!" said Rason. "I'll get along to Miss Dove."

"It looks," said Mr. Behrein when the detective had left, "as though you and I, Mr. Crewde, are going to be let in for a great deal of expense and a great deal of wasted time. Are you at all willing to discuss an arrangement?"

"What arrangement can we make?" demanded Crewde. "You are on velvet. I've lent five thousand pounds on those pearls. You can get them from me for nothing by an order of the Court."

"Well, Mr. Crewde," said Behrein indulgently, "I feel that we business

men must hang together when we're up against this kind of thing. I have no desire to stand on my rights at your expense. I'll be frank with you. I have a prospective purchaser for those pearls and time is of the utmost importance. If they are going to be held up three months as exhibits in a trial — to say nothing of a civil action between you and me, which I would profoundly regret — I shall lose my customer. I think — well, now, I won't beat about the bush — I am content to carry the five thousand loss. If you like to hand those pearls to me, I'll give you a proper receipt and five thousand pounds and take my risk of getting my money back."

Jabez Crewde could scarcely believe his ears.

"Eh? What's that? Haven't quite got you," he muttered, and Behrein repeated his offer.

"Of course," said Behrein laboriously, "you will lose your profit on the transaction — but you will have lost that in any case — together with your principal of five thousand pounds. As you admit, I can get the pearls returned to me by an order of the Court. I had hoped that you would accept my offer —"

"I do accept it," said Crewde in haste.

Behrein took out his wallet. "One has to carry large sums about one in my trade," he explained, and counted out five thousand pounds in notes.

He added a formal receipt for the pearls and left the meanest man in Europe trembling with relief at being

spared the loss of five thousand pounds and the necessity of appearing in Court.

It was nearly lunch-time when Detective-Inspector Rason arrived at Fidelity's house in Bayswater. Fidelity, exquisite in grey taffetas, asked him to stay to lunch. Politely, he declined.

"You constantly refuse my invitations, Mr. Rason," she told him, her violet eyes clear and shining as a child's. "And you cannot have come on duty this time."

Rason made a grimace.

"I have come on a clear-cut case against you for jewel-robbery, Miss Dove," he said. "But I'm old enough now not to attach too much importance to that fact."

Fidelity's smile was seraphic.

"All the same," continued Rason, "I'm taking a pretty keen professional interest in this particular case. I've been trying to guess how you're going to keep out of prison this time, and I'll admit I've clean failed."

"There is an elusive suggestion of flattery in your words, Mr. Rason," reproved Fidelity. "And flattery falls strangely on my ears. Let me confess I cannot in the least understand what you are saying."

"Yesterday morning," said Rason, with a sigh, "you pledged with Mr. Jabez Crewde pearls which on Monday you are alleged to have stolen by means of substituting false ones from a Mr. Abraham Behrein. Mr. Behrein has photographs of the pearls and ex-

pert descriptions. They have been identified as the pearls you pledged with Mr. Crewde."

"Mr. — what is the name of the other gentleman — Berlein?"

"Behrein," said Rason. "Are you going to deny knowledge of him, Miss Dove?"

"Yes," said Fidelity. The word had all the sanctity of a vow.

For a moment there was silence. A look almost of fear flashed into Rason's eyes.

"May I use your telephone?" he asked.

Fidelity's little bow gave consent. Rason fluttered the leaves of the telephone book, looked for Behrein, and could not find him. He rang up the Holborn police.

He gave particulars of himself, and then:

"Abraham Behrein," he said, and gave the address in Hatton Garden. "Send a man at once to verify name and address. 'Phone me here." There followed Fidelity's number.

In a quarter of an hour, in which Fidelity spoke gracefully and well of pearls as mentioned in the scriptures, there came the return message. Abraham Behrein was unknown in Hatton Garden.

"And now, Mr. Rason," asked Fidelity, "are you going to apologize for doubting my word?"

"No," said Rason. The emphasis of his refusal left Fidelity's gravity undisturbed until he had left her drawing-room; but as he crossed the magnificent hall silvery laughter followed

him and rang in his ears long after he had left the house.

On the next day Mr. Jabez Crewde was severely startled at being told that Fidelity Dove was on the doorstep and wished to see him.

"Show her in, and run for the police," he whispered to the clerk.

Fidelity came in, gracefully as ever. She inclined her head in the *soupcon* of a bow.

"Oh, Mr. Crewdel" she said in clear tones. "I do not know how to thank you! The money that you lent me must veritably have been bewitched. The scheme was successful beyond my friend's wildest dreams. So much money has been made that — is it the firm or his stockbroker? — has advanced on account of my profits all the money I borrowed from you, and I have come to repay you five thousand five hundred pounds."

"Let's have a look at it," said Crewde coarsely.

"But of course I wish you not merely to look at it but to take it," — and Fidelity laid the notes on the table.

Mr. Crewde counted the notes.

"You can leave those there," he said, and glanced towards the door. Then, for safety, he picked them up and put them in his pocket. Fidelity looked offended.

"Will you give me a receipt and return my pearls?" she asked.

"We'll see about that in a minute," snapped Crewde.

"Against my inclination, I am driven

to believe that your manner is intentionally offensive," said Fidelity. "I will wait no longer. The receipt is of no importance, for my bankers have the numbers of the notes. You will please return the pearls to my private address."

"Your private address! Yes, I know it — Aylesbury prison it'll be in a week or two," jeered Crewde. "As for the pearls, they are back with Mr. Abraham Behrein, whom you stole them from."

"Oh! How can you —" Fidelity produced a handkerchief.

"Tell it all to the policeman," invited Mr. Crewde as the clerk returned with a constable.

"What's all this?" asked the constable.

"That's the woman you want. Fidelity Dove, she calls herself," shouted Crewde. "Scotland Yard knows all about her."

The policeman looked embarrassed.

"Do you give the lady in charge, sir?" he asked.

"No, I don't give her in charge," said Crewde. "I'm not going to be mixed up with it. It's a matter for the Public Prosecutor. Scotland Yard!"

"We've no orders to arrest anyone of that name as far as I know," said the constable. "I can't take the lady unless you charge her, sir."

"There is my card, constable," said Fidelity. "My car is outside if you care to take the number."

In the car Fidelity drove home.

As soon as she had left, Jabez Crewde telephoned to Scotland Yard.

He was put through to Rason, who informed him that all efforts to trace Abraham Behrein had failed.

"It was hoax of some kind, I'm afraid," said Rason. "But you're all right, Mr. Crewde. You have the pearls, I take it? It was apparently a swindle that didn't come off."

"But she's paid me back the money I lent her, and wants the pearls back," protested Crewde.

"Well, I can't advise you," said Rason. "But I should have thought the best thing to do would be to give them to her."

"But I haven't got them!" yelled Crewde. "I handed them to Behrein — they were his — and he gave me the five thousand I'd lent her."

"O-o-oh!" said Rason. It was a long-drawn sound that held a world of meaning.

"What's the good of saying 'oh,'" raged Crewde. "You're a pack of fools, that's what you are," he added, after he had replaced the receiver.

On the next morning Jabez Crewde received a letter from Fidelity Dove's solicitor, Sir Frank Wrawton, demanding the immediate return of the pearls or their value in cash, which had been estimated by competent and unassailable experts at fifty thousand pounds.

By eleven o'clock Jabez Crewde had learned that Sir Frank Wrawton was empowered merely to give him a receipt for pearls or the cash equivalent.

By twelve o'clock he was at Fidelity's house in Bayswater.

He was received by Fidelity in the morning-room.

"I've been thinking about this," he shouted at Fidelity, "and I can see what's happened. That Behrein, as he calls himself, is a confederate of yours. You two are in it together. I'll show you the whole bag o' tricks. You bought those pearls — they were genuine. Then you borrowed five thousand from me, and paid back five thousand five hundred. You dropped that five hundred. Then your confederate dropped another five thousand in getting the pearls from me. That's five thousand five hundred you've dropped — and for that outlay you've landed me with a liability for fifty thousand pounds. Why, you probably had those pearls hidden away an hour after Behrein left me, and you'll sell them again quietly later on —"

"Have you also been thinking, Mr. Crewde, how you are going to establish this terribly slanderous theory in a court of law?" asked Fidelity, nunlike and serene.

"Bah! The lawyers are robbers, like the police —"

"And the hospitals?" asked Fidelity.

Crewde looked very nearly startled.

"They call you the meanest man in Europe, Mr. Crewde," said Fidelity.

"I alone have maintained that that is a slander. I want you to prove my words. You owe me fifty thousand pounds. To dispute my claim would merely mean the loss of another thousand pounds or so in lawyers' expenses. It is a pleasure to wring money from a mean man, but it is no pleasure if the man be not mean. The Grey Friars Hospital requires twenty thousand pounds, I understand."

"Eh?" grunted Crewde. "I don't get you. D'you want me to give them twenty thousand? What if I do?"

"If you will write a check for twenty thousand pounds to the Grey Friars Hospital," said Fidelity, "I will withdraw one-fifth of my claim against you. Twenty thousand to the Grey Friars Hospital, twenty thousand to myself — and I will give you a receipt for fifty thousand pounds."

"That's close on fifteen thousand pounds clear profit to yourself," said Crewde, a ghastly pallor spreading over his face.

"You may phrase it so," said Fidelity. "Or you may say that I am offering you ten thousand pounds to remove from London the reproach of harbouring the meanest man in Europe. . . . Ah, I see you have no fountain-pen. I beg you to use mine."



P. Moran, correspondence-school sleuth, 1944 model, is another old friend. His first appearance in our September 1943 issue met with instant and unanimous approval. Even before you asked us to, we had already persuaded Percival Wilde to have Pete cut another caper and apply his marvelous deductive talents to the defeat of crime.

P. Moran is indeed a rare bird — the comic sleuth. Only a small coterie of these droll detectives, these farcical ferrets, these humorous Holmeses, these burlesque bloodhounds, these ludicrous Lecoqs — only a handful have laughed their way into our plethoric literature of crime. Until Mr. Wilde created P. Moran for EQMM, the best of them included Ellis Parker Butler's Philo Gubb, Sir Basil Thomson's Mr. Pepper, and W. A. Darlington's Mr. Gronk. Now — well, our vote goes to "gorjous" Pete, who, in the great tradition, plays a criminous fiddle when the occasion demands.

P. MORAN, DEDUCTOR

by PERCIVAL WILDE

From: Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, N. Y.

To: Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.

. . . No subject is more important than that of occupational deduction. The occupation marks the man. The horny-handed son of toil who has spent forty years digging ditches will not look like the cloistered professor who has given a lifetime to the teaching of mathematics. The salty mariner who has sailed the seven seas will not resemble the apothecary who makes up your doctor's prescription. With a single glance the trained detective will determine the occupation of a total stranger. "This man," he will say, "is obviously a streetcar motor-man: notice the large hands, the distended stomach, and the left foot larger than the right from stamping

on the gong. This is a bookkeeper: observe the mark of the eyeshade on his forehead, see the groove over his right ear where he puts his pen, and notice the red ink at the side of his right forefinger. This is a riding-master: notice the bow-legs, observe the peculiar way in which he walks, and smell the odor of the stable."

Think what it will mean if you know that a certain murder has been committed by a pastry-cook, and you can go out into a crowd and positively identify every pastry-cook in it. You will let ninety-nine men pass, but you will snap your handcuffs on the one hundredth and you will say, "John Doe, the game is up. I arrest you as the mysterious murderer of the wealthy millionaire, Richard Roe. Come to Headquarters with me."

Read over the section which we have entitled "The Impress of an Occupation," and particularly read over

our long quotation from Dr. Wm. E. Presbrey, formerly professor of Medical Jurisprudence at the Philadelphia University Medical School, who combed Europe and America in his search for facts regarding the influence of occupations on the body. Then, after you think you have mastered everything in this lesson, take a long ride in the subway, jotting down on a piece of paper the occupations of all the men who take seats opposite you, and try to confirm your deductions by supplementary observations. For example, a plumber will not be reading a book of poetry and a clergyman will not be studying the racetrack results. A steamfitter's assistant will not have well manicured fingernails and a choir singer will not be chewing tobacco. If you decide the man facing you is a prizefighter, and you see him sniff furtively at a bunch of flowers, you may be sure something is wrong somewhere.

J. J. O'B.

P. S. I repeat what I said in my previous letters. Now that you have a dictionary do not be ashamed to look up the spellings of words. You will not find "gorjous" in the dictionary.

J. J. O'B.

From: Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.

To: Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, N. Y.

Well, I studied the lesson and the long quotation from Dr. Wm. E. Presbrey, though these are busy days

for us what with Mr. & Mrs. McRae throwing a big dance on the Sunday before Labor Day which is this Sunday for more than a hundred people. We are going to have music by the Amenia Concert Orchestra which is three musicians, one saxophone, one drummer, and one piano player, and there will be dancing and green and yellow lanterns in the garden and eats and free drinks and a waxed floor which I have been waxing and as Annabell, the new hired girl, says, "Joy will be unrefined," though I don't see how that can happen with gas being rationed like it is these days. They say a bicycle gets you there just the same but I observed you cannot park in it with one arm around a girl.

I read that section the Impress of an Occupation and I could not find John Doe, the pastry-cook, in this village, though I stood at the corner outside the post-office and watched for two hours, so I guess the mysterious murderer of the wealthy millionaire, Richard Roe, is not hiding in these parts, but I will look again if there is a reward for him. And I cannot take a long ride in the subway because there isn't any subway inside of 98.6 miles which is the distance to New York. And detecting isn't as easy as it used to be because the boss is a good American, he says, and I cannot take the coop on my evenings off.

"Peter," he says, "from now on we are only going to use the cars for sensual driving. Do you understand that?"

I said "Yes, sir," though I didn't.

"When you drive Mrs. McRae to the A. & P. store to buy provisions that is sensual driving. When you take her to the dentist in Millbrook that is O. K. likewise. When you are sent to Lakeville to get a perscription filled that is simily O. K. But when you go out on a petting party with one of your girl friends that is not sensual driving and it is out for the duration. Is that perfectly clear?"

"I can't drive to Torrington any more?"

"Not unless it is sensual."

"I guess you wouldn't hardly call it that, Mr. McRae."

"Certainly not. Keep on studying how to become a detective but do it here in Surrey. Peter, I know I can depend on you."

I said, "Yes, sir," and that is that.

Rosie, the maid, has quit us to run a steam-hammer at Pratt & Whitney's where they make airplane motors for airplanes, and that is how we got that new redhead named Annabell. She showed up yesterday from the employment agency which they have in Poughkeepsie but she is just as sassy as if she had been with us for years. Mrs. McRae sent me to the A. & P. to bring home some vegetables she ordered over the phone and I took Annabell along and we parked near the post-office.

I saw lots of horny handed sons of toil but I did not say there were ditch diggers because these days they are all master mechanics getting \$1.10 an hour running machines they don't

know anything about.

I did not see any salty mariners who sailed the seven seas because the only sailing here is canoes up at the lake at Lakeville and it is not salty.

I did not see any cloistered professors who gave a lifetime to teaching mathematics but that is because they are busy teaching at Hotchkiss and they get their letters at the Lakeville post-office.

By and by Tom Saunders, the tinsmith, came for his mail.

I said, "Annabell, the trained detective can deduct that man is a tinsmith."

"How can you deduct that?" she says.

"By the Impress of his Occupation. Also I can deduct Mr. Heasey, the fishman, is a fishman. Here he comes now."

She says, "Pete, did anybody ever tell you you are wonderful?"

I says, "Now that you ask me the answer is yes." Then I saw Butch Krieger, the stone-mason. "Annabell, I can deduct that man is a stone-mason."

"How can you deduct that?"

"By his large hands, his muddy shoes, and especially the spot of mortar on his coat lapel."

"That ain't mortar. That is egg, and I can deduct he has been quarreling with his wife or she wouldn't let him go out looking such a terrible mess.

Well, I figured I had her there, because Butch has been single since his wife died long ago, and when he

comes up to the car to pass the time of day I says, "Butch, you're a stonemason, aren't you?" but he says, "Why, Pete, I give up that job more than a year ago. Ain't you heard? I been making cartridges at the American Brass Co. for quite a while now."

I says, "No, I didn't hear that," because I hadn't heard it, and then that redhead Annabell cuts in, "Hey, mister, how are you getting along with your wife these days?"

Butch gives a sad look like he was going to bust out crying and then he says, "Not so good. She threw a plate of eggs at me this morning."

That was a body blow if you know what I mean. I says, "Butch, I thought your wife was dead."

"Only the first one, Pete. I got married again."

"Oh. Congratulations."

"You can keep the change. Pete, I'll give you some good advice: don't never marry one of them dizzy blonds."

Then Butch goes off, shaking his head and swearing to himself, and Annabell, the redhead, just sits there and grins because she is not a blond but I deduct maybe she used to be a blond before she decided to go redheaded.

She gives me a push. "Don't take it to heart, Pete. Just keep on deducting and you will be right some time. Look, what do you make out of this fellow?"

Well, I took a good look at the guy who was a total stranger hoping he was John Doe, the pastry-cook, but I could see he wasn't. "Annabell," I

says. "with a single glance the trained detective can tell that man is a slaughterhouse employee who does his own sewing and plays the violin on the side."

She kind of gives a gasp and says, "Pete, say it again slow."

Well, I did, and she says, "My God, Pete, how could you deduct that?"

"It is easy for the trained detective who will let ninety-nine men pass but will snap his handcuffs on the one hundredth. It says in the long quotation from Dr. Wm. E. Presbrey who combed Europe and America for facts regarding the influence of occupations on the body that slaughterhouse employees have bad teeth due to contact with animal hides which carry foot and mouth disease, and tailor's lips are thick and swollen, their right forefingers thick and calloused from snapping off the thread, and the violinist has a red groove on the underside of his jaw."

"Can you see all that from where you are sitting?"

"At a single glance. Am I right?"

"I don't know. I never saw the guy before."

She is flirting with him like nobody's business, and he comes slouching up to the car. She says, "Hello, mister. We want to ask you some questions. Was you ever a slaughterhouse employee?"

He says, "Yep."

"Do you do your own sewing?"

He says, "Yep."

"Do you play the violin?"

He says, "Yep."

"That's all we wanted to know." She jerks her thumb at me. "Pete here, who's chauffeur down at the McRae's, could deduct all of them things about you when you was twenty foot off because he's a trained detective. He's taking a correspondence course in detecting."

He comes right up close and I can see the bad teeth and the thick lips and the red groove under his jaw plainer than ever, and he says, "Yep?"

Annabell says, "Yep. Well, good by, mister. I certainly enjoyed your conversation."

I figured that was a good time to step on the gas, having put Annabell in her place, and she cuddled up under my arm friendly like and did not let out another chirp all the way home. Then she gives a big sigh, and says, "What a man! What a man!" and she wasn't talking about the slaughterhouse employee, you can bet.

P. S. I could not find gorjous in the dictionary so you are right but everybody knows that word and why should I stop using it just because the man who wrote the dictionary is a back number? Where's he been living, that is what I would like to know, and what would he do if he saw a gorjous blond and deducted maybe she used to be a redhead once but she sat in the sun and it bleached her hair?

From: Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, New York,

To: Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.

I can only mark you 30% on your lesson, which is bad. It does not require a trained detective to "deduct Mr. Heasey, the fishman, is a fishman," or "Tom Saunders, the tinsmith, is a tinsmith." Read the lesson again and then see if you cannot find another tinsmith you do not know already or another fishman you do not know already, and confirm your deduction by supplementary observations.

Your deduction that the stranger was a slaughterhouse employee who plays the violin is ridiculous. Slaughterhouse employees do not play violins as supplementary observations would have told you.

"Morter" is spelled "mortar."

J. J. O'B.

From: Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.

To: Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, N. Y.

What's the difference if it is "morter" or "mortar?" It was egg, like I wrote.

Well, I cannot find another tinsmith in Surrey because this is a little village and if there were two tinsmiths one of them would starve to death and I cannot find another fishman here for the same reason unless he ate his own fish. And on Thursday evening I saw Jim Estabrook, the plumber, sitting in the garden back of his house and he had a book of poetry in his lap which he was reading to his little daughter Minerva even

though Lesson Five says plumbers do not read poetry or something is wrong somewhere, and I kept my distance from the churches on the way home because it says in the same lesson clergymen will not be studying the racetrack results and I didn't want to catch any of them at it. But I observed the slaughterhouse employee again and this is how it happened:

We are still working hard getting ready for that big dance Sunday night which is the night after tomorrow night and it seems like every five minutes we run out of something like miniature electric lights for the green and yellow lanterns in the garden or coat hangers for the cloak room where Annabell is going to check coats or more wax for the floor which I waxed until you can see your face in it or music stands for the Amenia Concert Orchestra though I told the missus there is not one of them that can read notes and they just make up the music as they go along. Friday afternoon, which was today, Mrs. McRae says, "Peter, drive to Lakeville quick and get that dress I left to be dry cleaned and if it isn't ready stand over the man until he gives it to you, goodness gracious I expect to wear it Sunday night."

I says, "Excuse me, Mrs. McRae, is that sensual driving?"

She says, "No, I guess it isn't, but you can stop in at the drug store and buy me a dozen aspirin tablets and then everything will be all right just like the people who are coming to the dance will stop in at the post-office to

get their mail first even though it is Sunday and they know the post-office will not be open."

So I says, "Yes, Mrs. McRae," and I picked up that redhead Annabell who sneaked out the back door when I gave her the high sign and we went in the coop.

Well, the dress was ready and buying the aspirins didn't take a minute, but Annabell says, "Pete, why should we hurry back? The moment we get there the missus will think of more things for us to do and my back aches, so let's take our time and tell her we had to wait."

I said, "That sounds like a practical idea, Annabell, and there are some excellent parking places which I would like to show you."

She said, "Parking places do not interest me in broad daylight because they are so public, and what else have you got?"

"There's the Green Lantern where we could have a couple of beers."

She said, "No, the missus would smell it on my breath."

"I can't think of anything else."

"Think, Peter. Do we have to go back the same way we came?"

"No, there are side roads which go to the parking places."

"But if we keep on going past the parking places?"

"Well, one of the side roads goes to Ore Hill."

"Never heard of it."

"Another one goes to Lime Rock."

"Let it go. Say Pete, isn't there a road that goes to Sludge Pond?"

"You mean Mudge Pond. Yes, another road goes to Mudge Pond and then it splits so you can go down either side of it."

"That sounds very exciting. Let's go there."

So we did, stopping only once or twice because we knew Mrs. McRae would be in a hurry for her dress, and when we got to the beginning of Mudge Pond where you can see the cat-tails growing in the water we could hear a funny noise like "Whack! Whack!"

I says, "Annabell, that sounds like a gun to me."

She says, "Nonsense. I deduct that is a redheaded woodpecker."

"A redheaded woodpecker because you are one too?"

"No, because they make a noise like that."

I says, "What's the bet?" and when she says O. K., if I win she will let me show her some of the parking places on her first night off, I drive along the right bank of Mudge Pond with the "Whack! Whack!" getting louder every minute.

There are not any cottages there, only a couple of tumble down shanties with nobody living in them, and the "Whack! Whack!" so loud that I says, "Annabell, wouldn't you like to call that bet off and compromise on fifteen minutes right now because I don't know where we will get a car on your night off?" but she says, "Pete, I'm a good sport and when I lose I pay up."

I says, "I will remind you of those words," and then we drive past a

clump of bushes, and there is a clearing, and we can see the slaughterhouse employee who is in his shirt sleeves and he has got a target pinned up on an old elm and he is plunking pistol bullets in the target which is a piece of paper just as fast as he can shoot.

Annabell says, "Oh my!" and the slaughterhouse employee sees us just as we see him.

He comes right up to the car, slouching, with that pistol in his hand, and he looks just as dangerous as a rattlesnake on legs until he sees who it is.

Annabell says, "Hello, mister. Shooting?"

That is a foolish question because anybody could see he wasn't playing the violin with that pistol, but he only says, "Yep."

"Are you good at it?"

He says, "Yep."

"O. K. if we get out and watch you?"

He sticks his face right up near, so I can see that red groove under his jaw plainer than ever, but he says, "Yep."

Well, he wasn't kidding when he said he was good. He fixed up a new target by putting his thumb in his mouth and rubbing it in the middle of a piece of paper so there was a round black mark in the middle, and he loaded the pistol, and he slammed seven or eight shots in the black just as neat as you please. I says, "Gee, when you were a slaughterhouse employee they must have had you shoot the bull!"

That is meant to be humerus but he only says, "Yep."

Annabell says, "Mister, I don't know your name, but I'd like to see if Pete here can shoot as good as you. Pete is a trained detective like I told you."

He says, "Yep."

He puts up a new target, fixing it the same way which is easy because his hands are so dirty, and he puts just one cartridge in the gun because it is an automatic and they are tricky, and I point it at the tree and it goes off before I am ready.

Annabell jumps and says, "What do you think of that?"

He just says, "Yep," because I hit the bull smack in the center, and I was so surprised I didn't know what to say so I didn't say anything.

"I'd like for him to shoot again."

He says, "Yep," and this time it is another bull's eye, right where the dirt is blackest, and I guess I have been wasting my time driving cars for all these years if I can shoot like that which I did not know until this minute.

Annabell says, "Hey, mister," and the two of them walk off together, and I observe they are argueing because he is pounding the palm of his right hand which is open with his left hand which is a fist and he keeps looking back at me and Annabell is holding on to his arm and shaking her head and every now and then I can hear her saying, "Not now. Don't spoil everything. Not now," and I understand what she means because they

are the very same words she said to me when I stopped the car with her in it and tried to steal a couple of kisses and she would not let me do it. She cannot talk good English but that is because she was brought up in Poughkeepsie, but you cannot get fresh with her unless you are one of her good friends and certainly not the first or second time.

Well, I am all alone and she can take care of herself, so I take aim again and I pull the trigger, but this time nothing happens because the slaughterhouse employee forgot to give me more cartridges though I would have hit the bull's eye like before being practicy a dead shot which you will see for yourself when you look at the target which I am putting in this envelope with two holes in it right in the center. I took it down and I started to walk to the shanty, and then, next to the shanty, on the side where you could not see it from the road, I observed a sporty roadster with Illinois license plates and I deducted that car was a long way from home.

I deducted Annabell was in the shanty with the slaughterhouse employee because the sun was getting low and I could see shadows moving around, and I sneaked up to the shanty without making a sound. You remember how Annabell said "When I lose I pay up," and I did not want her to pay up to the wrong man even if he was a fast worker.

Well, I looked in through a window which did not have any glass, and it

was just one room with a stove and a chair and a broken down sofa and a table in it, and on the table I observed —

Well, this is going to be a big surprise to you, so I won't tell you what I observed on the table till I come to the P. S. part of this letter, and then I will make you sit up and take notice.

Well, they were arguing more but they were acting proper, so I walked away thirty or fifty feet, and then I started whistling, careless like, because I was so happy, and the slaughterhouse employee came out and Annabell came out also, and she says, "What's the matter, Pete? Tired of shooting?"

I says, "I am a dead shot with any weapon but I cannot shoot without bullets," and she says, "That is so. Ha! Ha!" and he says, "Yep."

Annabell says, "I forgot to introduce you. Pete, this is Hubert Honeywell. Hubert, this is Peter Moran."

I says, "Pleased to meet you."

He says, "Yep."

We shake hands, and I observe that his right forefinger is thick and calloused from snapping off the thread just like Dr. Wm. E. Presbrey says in the long quotation, and I squeeze hard but he squeezes harder and he has got a grip like a Stillson wrench and I am lucky I don't get some bones broken.

Annabell laughs. "What are you boys doing? Playing Indian wrestling?"

By this time Hubert has let go of my hand and I count the fingers and

there are not any missing though I guess I can wear a smaller glove for a while, so I take the words right out of his mouth and I says, "Yep."

Annabell laughs some more. "Pete, I been telling Hubert about the dance Sunday night. How many people would you say was going to be there?"

"We expect one hundred and ten."

"See, Hubert? Just like it said in the paper. Will the Grimshaws be there?"

Mr. Grimshaw is a bank president and him and the boss are like that. "Oh, sure."

"And the Cutlers?"

"All four of them: mister and missus and Miss Betty and Miss Jane."

"And the Auchinclosses?"

"They always come to our parties."

"Will there be many young men?"

"Not this year. They're all in the Army."

"See, Hubert? Just like I told you."

"There will be what the missus calls a shortage of stags. If your boy friend here has a dress suit, Annabell, maybe he can crash the gate."

"Maybe he will."

I was only joking when I said that, because I was pretty sure the slaughterhouse employee did not have a dress suit even if he did have a sporty roadster with Illinois license plates, and anyhow Annabell had promised to dance with me in the pantry after she got through checking the coats, but he looks at me hard and bobs his head up and down just a mite, and he says, "Yep."

Then Annabell says, "Pete, we

better be hurrying back because it is getting late and the missus will be in a hurry for that there dress," so we drove back home, which is only a couple of minutes from Mudge Pond, and Annabell says, "Joe is a rough diamond, isn't he, Pete?"

I says, "Yep. Extra rough," and then I says, "I thought you said his name was Hubert Honeywell."

Annabell gives me a funny look and says, "So it is now that you remind me of it but his good friends call him Joe for short."

I deducted he was a fast worker and I better keep my eye on that redhead Annabell, but I never let a girl know if I am jealous, and I only said, "Hubert or Joe, don't you ever let me catch you dating him," and she snuggled up close and said, "Why, Pete, the very idea!"

P. S. 1. Please send back the target. I am starting a collection of targets.
P. S. 2. You only gave me 30% on my last lesson because I deducted the slaughterhouse employee played the violin which you said was ridiculous. Well, here is where you make that 130% instead, because what I saw on the table in the shanty when I looked in through the window which did not have any glass was a violin case, a black leather violin case, and it was so near I could have reached out and touched it.

TELEGRAM.

PETER MORAN, C/O MR. R. B. McRAE,
SURREY, CONN.

MAN YOU DESCRIBE MAY BE JOE

COSTELLO ALIAS JOE CASTELLI ALIAS JOE COSTANZE ALIAS JOE CASTRUCCIO WHO WAS HANGED IN TEXAS BUT PAR- DONED WHEN ROPE BROKE STOP HE IS WANTED FOR ARMED ROBBERY HIGH- WAY ROBBERY AND ROBBERY IN ILLI- NOIS INDIANA AND MISSOURI BUT NOT IN TEXAS STOP THUMBPRINT ON TAR- GET WOULD HAVE MADE IDENTIFICA- TION CERTAIN IF YOU HAD NOT SHOT OUT MOST OF IT STOP TRY TO OBTAIN FRONT AND PROFILE PHOTOGRAPHS OF HIM AND MAIL THEM TO ME STOP TELEGRAPH AT ONCE IS HIS NOSE BRO- KEN.

CHIEF INSPECTOR, ACME INTERNA- TIONAL DETECTIVE CORRESPOND- ENCE SCHOOL.

TELEGRAM.

CHIEF INSPECTOR, ACME INTERNA- TIONAL DETECTIVE CORRESPOND- ENCE SCHOOL, SOUTH KINGSTON, N. Y.

YES. I BROKE IT.

OPERATIVE P. MORAN.

From: Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.

To: Chief Inspector, Acme Interna- tional Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, N. Y.

Well, your telegram did not get here until Monday morning which is this morning for reasons which I will tell you when I get around to them for I must not get ahead of my story.

Sunday which was yesterday dawned bright and clear with the night ditto, and everything was O. K. until nine or nine-thirty or ten P. M. in the

evening when everybody was through saying "Oh, how do you do?" and "So nice to see you again?" and "Isn't it a lovely evening?" to everybody else, and the missus calls me over and says, "Peter, wherever is the Amenia Concert Orchestra, goodness gracious what shall we do without them?"

I says, "I have been asking that myself, Mrs. McRae, and I deduct they have got a flat tire."

"Oh, is that all? Then they ought to be here any minute."

"Yes, Mrs. McRae."

"Peter, you're such a comfort."

A couple of minutes later the boss comes up and he's mad. "Peter, where the hell is that confounded orchestra? Are they lapping up my liquor in the kitchen?"

I said, "No, Mr. McRae, the help has not yet started sampling the liquor."

"Well, we can't have dancing until the orchestra gets here."

I knew that without anybody telling me, and I hated to hear it because that redhead Annabell had promised to dance with me like I wrote you and she was going to teach me the Lindy hop.

The boss says, "Peter, this is serious. We shall have to do something."

"Mr. McRae, we could turn on the radio."

The boss shakes his head. "This is Sunday night, and not even the subdebs can dance to the sixty-four dollar question. Peter, the guests are here and there is no orchestra. Telephone

to Amenia and find out when they started."

So I telephoned Amenia, and Horace Ruggles, who works in the garage and plays the drums in the Amenia Concert Orchestra when they go places to play answered the telephone.

I said, "Horace, why aren't you here?" and he says, "Pete, we are out of luck. You know Clint Newton, who plays the saxophone?"

Naturally I knew Clint because he cut my hair once a month shingling it up the sides before they drafted him, and I said, "Sure I know him."

"Well, Clint lied to us."

"What do you mean, lied to you?"

"Clint said he was home on a furlough when he wasn't. He was A. W. O. L., and we didn't suspicion it until the M. P.'s caught up with him just as we were starting for Mr. McRae's more than an hour ago. We told the M. P.'s it would spoil Mr. McRae's party if they arrested Clint and they could arrest him just as easy after the party, but you can't reason with them guys, and they took Clint away in a jeep."

I thought that over. "Horace, Clint is just one man out of three. Why didn't you come without him?"

"Pete, you know how it is. Vince Dudley, the sheriff, who plays the piano, only knows seven chords, four major and three minor, and he's no good if there ain't a saxophone for him to follow."

"How about you?"

"I play the drums, and while I can fake pretty good, there ain't nobody

that can dance to a drum solo."

I thought the boss had better talk to him and he was madder than he was before. He says, "Look here, Ruggles, you can't do this to me. I've hired your orchestra because everybody says it's the real local color. Get another saxophonist and come right over."

Well, I knew what Horace would be answering. Clint Newton is the only man who plays the saxophone in these parts, and it would take an hour to get another one from Poughkeepsie or Torrington if you could find another one in Poughkeepsie or Torrington, which Horace tried to do, he told me later, only he couldn't.

The boss says, "If there isn't a saxophonist, there must be one good musician who can lead. Don't tell me there isn't one real musician in this area! I'll pay him twenty dollars! I'll pay him fifty dollars! I've got to have him!"

And then I got an idea!

I says, "Mr. McRae!"

He says, "Hush! I'm talking to Horace Ruggles."

I says, "Mr. McRae, I got a musician for you!"

He says, "Ruggles, hold the wire," and he gives me a funny look. "Peter, you haven't been taking a correspondence course in how to play the saxophone, have you?"

"No, sir, but I know where I can find a violinist."

"You do, Peter?"

"Yes, sir, right in this town."

"A violinist, here in Surrey, and I

never heard of him? Peter, is he good?"

"Well, Mr. McRae, he has played the violin so long he has got a groove on the underside of his jaw."

The boss slaps me on the back. "Peter, you are a man after my own heart! Offer him fifty dollars, and here, keep this twenty for yourself. How long will it take you to get him?"

"If he's home now —"

"Why shouldn't he be home now?"

"You can never tell, Mr. McRae."

"If you drive to his house and bring him back with you, how long will you be?"

"Twenty minutes. No, better make it half an hour." I didn't tell the boss, but I deducted it would take Hubert Honeywell all of ten minutes to scrub some of the dirt off of himself.

The boss turns back to the phone. "Ruggles, we've got a violinist for you! Yes, a violinist! Jump into your car and come right over! Right?" He hangs up and slaps me on the back again. "Peter, you're a lifesaver! Ruggles says he will be here just as soon as he can pick up the piano player. And now, Peter, get that violinist, and drive like hell!"

Well, if I had not been in such a hurry I would have stopped at the cloakroom, which is on the second floor, and I would have shown the twenty-ease note to that redhead Annabell, and I would have told her that even if the slaughterhouse employee was coming I expected her to dance with me like she promised. But something told me that she would

ask for some of the money for herself because she interduced us, and anyhow Hubert would give her five dollars out of his fifty if he really liked her, so I beat it out to the garage without stopping.

There must have been forty or forty-five cars parked in the driveway and in the courtyard and in the street outside, and I observed one car parked right in front of the house with the lights on and the motor running. If I had not been in such a hurry I would have turned off the motor because it was wasting rationed gas and besides I could see there wasn't anybody in the car. But the boss said, "Peter, drive like hell," and that was what I did.

I turned into Main Street going so fast the tires screamed, and I turned the corner at West Main Street going ditto ditto. I turned the corner where the casino used to be before it burned down, and I was hitting sixty miles an hour, and I went down the long hill next to the cemetary the same way and more of it.

I had to slow down when I got to the Mudge Pond road which is bumpy and if you drive faster than fifteen miles an hour or maybe twenty you will break a spring or maybe an axle and if there is somebody coming the other way and he is going fast also it is just too bad.

I got to the slaughterhouse employee's shanty.

It was dark.

I blew the horn.

Nothing happened.

I yelled, "Hubert! Hubert!"

He didn't come out, so I took the flashlight we keep in the glove compartment and I walked right into the shanty, which was not locked.

I yelled, "Hubert!" but I could see he was not there. There was the same stove, the same chair, the same tumble down sofa, the same table — nothing on it this time — and that was all.

I climbed out through the window which did not have any glass in it, and I went to the place where I saw the roadster with the Illinois plates.

It was gone.

I deducted Hubert was not there, having gone to the movies maybe, and I also deducted I could kiss those twenty dollars good by.

I turned the car around, which was not easy on that narrow road and in the dark, and I drove back doing fifteen miles an hour and mostly less than that, and I was so low in spirits that I felt like bawling.

I turned into our driveway, and there was the same car I observed when I left, and the lights were on and the motor was still running, so I got out to turn off the motor and park it somewhere where it wouldn't be in the way, and suddenly I observed it was a roadster and it had Illinois plates.

Well, that did not make me more cheerful, if you know what I mean, because I deducted that redhead Annabell had beat me to it if Mrs. McRae said to her what she said to me, and Annabell had sent for Hubert Honeywell without letting on,

and maybe the boss would tell me, "Peter, you had a good idea but Annabell had it first. Give her fifteen dollars out of that twenty."

But I parked the roadster, turning off the motor, that being my job, and just as I was going to get out—

Yes, I saw it on the back seat, the violin case, and I deducted the rest like a shot: maybe Hubert Honeywell wasn't so good, and he wasn't going to play until they paid him!

Well, two can play at that game, so I picked up the violin case, which was heavy as lead, and I tiptoed into the house.

Well, I could see I had deducted right. There was Hubert with his back to me, and there were the guests, all lined up along the walls, and there was Annabell, and she was going from one guest to another with a bag which looked like it was one of our best pillowcases, and she was saying, "Contribute liberally, ladies and gentlemen. Shell out like you enjoyed doing it. Feed the kitty. Nice kitty. Thank you, sir. Oh, thank you, ma'am."

I could see Mrs. Grimshaw drop in three or four rings and a wrist-watch, and Mrs. Cutler dropped in a diamond chain she was wearing around her neck, and Mr. Cutler didn't bother to take some money out of his wallet because he dropped in the wallet without opening it, and I could see Hubert Honeywell was going to get a lot more than the boss promised because those people really wanted to dance. But like the boss always says, what is fair is fair, and it wasn't right

that the Amenia Concert Orchestra would play for twenty-five dollars and Hubert Honeywell would get so much more for just leading them.

I pressed the catch on the violin case, meaning to give Hubert his violin, and I said out loud, "Here's your violin, Hubert, and don't be greedy," and then everything started to happen at once.

Annabell gave a scream and dropped the pillowcase, and Hubert spun around and he couldn't see me at first because it was dark where I was standing, and that violin case came open in my hands and I made a grab so the violin wouldn't drop on the floor and it wasn't a violin at all. It was a funny kind of gun, and it had a funny bulge like a differential housing in the middle, and it had a stock like a rifle and a pistol grip like a pistol.

Hubert had his automatic in his hand, and he shot twice, and the big mirror in the hall, which was about ten feet to my left will not be the same again until they put in a new glass.

I says, "Hubert, don't shoot. It's me, Pete," but he turns toward the sound of my voice and I can see he means business so being a dead shot I just touch the trigger of the gun I've got in my hands, and I drill him through the right shoulder as neat as you please.

He drops the automatic, and the women start screaming and fainting, and by this time I am suspicious of Hubert who is not a good American because he does not turn off his motor

which wastes a lot of gas when he parks and it keeps on running. "Hubert," I says, "the trained detective will let ninety-nine men pass but will snap his handcuffs on the one hundredth. Hubert, were you ever a slaughterhouse employee?"

His shoulder is hurting him, and he is holding it with his left hand, but he says, "Yep."

"Where?"

"The Chicago stockyards."

"Were you ever a tailor?"

"Yep."

"Where?"

"They put me to tailoring in the prison at Joliet."

"And now, what is your real name?"

He is going to answer, but that redhead Annabell throws her arms around his neck. "Don't say another word, honey," she says. Then she turns to me. "Pete, his name is John Doe."

You could have knocked me flat with a toothpick when I heard that, but I had been through a lot that night, and just like Mr. Grimshaw said when they took up that collection for me later, "Peter's unairing aim, his coolness, and his reckless bravery saved us all."

I says, "Who did you say he was?"

"John Doe."

I says, "Were you ever a pastry-cook?"

He says, "Yep."

"Where?"

"In the prison they got at Columbia, Missouri."

And I says, "John Doe, the game is

up. I arrest you as the mysterious murderer of the wealthy millionaire, Richard Roe. Come to Headquarters with me."

He tries to get away when the Amenia Concert Orchestra comes, and Sheriff Vince Dudley, who plays the piano, starts to put him in his car, but I tap him on the nose with his own automatic, and that is how his nose comes to be broken.

TELEGRAM.

ASSOCIATED PRESS, UNITED PRESS, INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK, N. Y.

PETER MORAN WHO FOILED DARING HOLDUP AT HOME OF WEALTHY MILLIONAIRE R. B. McRAE COMMA SURREY COMMA CONNECTICUT AND ARRESTED JOE COSTELLO ALIAS JOE CASTELLI ALIAS JOE COSTANZE ALIAS JOE CASTRUCCIO SINGLE HYPHEN HANDED IS A STUDENT AT ACME INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL COMMA SOUTH KINGSTON COMMA NEW YORK STOP PROSPECTUS AND LITERATURE FREE ON REQUEST STOP RATES REASONABLE STOP EARN WHILE YOU LEARN STOP NOW IS THE TIME TO STUDY THIS FASCINATING AND UNCROWDED PROFESSION.

CHIEF INSPECTOR, ACME INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL.

From: Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.,

To: Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, N. Y.

Well, you certainly stirred up things with those telegrams. This is Friday and the reporters keep coming but the boss says, "Peter, there has already been too much publicity," so I tell them "I am not giving out any more interviews," though I cannot stop them from printing the flashlight pictures they took of me and me and the boss and me and Mr. & Mrs. Cutler and me and Mr. & Mrs. Grimshaw and me and Sheriff Vince Dudley and the rest of the Amenia Concert Orchestra and me and Joe Costello.

But I will tell you what I told the reporters from the New York *Mirror* and the New York *News* and the New York *Herald* and the New York *Post* etc. because you may not read any of those papers especially if you have a paper in South Kingston where the school is.

After Sheriff Vince Dudley and the boss and a couple of others had collected the evidence, I deducted for them and they just stood there, listening and nodding every now and then and wishing they knew how to deduct themselves.

That redhead Annabell read about the dance Mr. & Mrs. McRae were going to give in a paper they have in Poughkeepsie, where she was laying low with her boy-friend Joe Costello who has a red groove on the underside of his jaw because he was hanged in Texas only the rope broke. So they came to Surrey and that redhead Annabell got a job where she could size up things and she told Joe it

would be a pipe. They figured a good time for the hold-up would be ten-fifteen P. M. in the evening, and Joe would have brought his machine-gun right in with him only Annabell met him and said he would not need it because she saw me driving away and she deducted I was running out on the party and I would be gone for hours. So Joe left the machine-gun outside in the car which he says he now regrets. He has had a lot of experience and he thought the automatic would be enough, and it would have been only I came back when I was not expected and sizing up the situation instantly he acted with brilliant decisiveness like it said in the New York *Sun*. The value of the loot which Costello's confederate had already collected was in excess of \$100,000, and consisted of cash, watches, rings, and jewelry, like it said in the Chicago *Tribune*. The thug had planned to make his getaway unmolested, hence had severed the telephone wires leading to Broker R. B. McRae's palatial mansion (photo on Page 1), a fact which was not discovered until Sheriff Vincent Dudley, being in Connecticut, hence out of his own bailiwick, tried to summon the State Police and found the instrument was dead, like it said in the New York *Mirror*. The telegraph office is in Lakeville and when they get a telegram for Surrey they phone it here but they couldn't do that Sunday night after Joe cut the wires, so it didn't come till Monday and you would have saved money if you had

just written me a letter.

Joe says Butch Krieger, had the right dope when he warned me about dizzy blonds which Annabell used to be before the apothecary who makes up your doctor's perscription and who will not resemble the salty mafiner who has sailed the seven seas put her wise to henna, and Joe says she steered him wrong or he would have shot me accidentally last Friday and then this story would have had a happy ending. She talked him out of it because she hates the sight of blood. But Joe is a good scout and he is glad I shot him in the right shoulder where he has been shot before so he does not mind it much and ditto about his nose which has been broken so often that he is beginning to lose count. He says you got to be philosophical about life, sometimes you're up and sometimes you're down, and he had never been in prison in Connecticut and he is curious to find out what it is like and if they will let him have a violin. He wants to play the violin, having such a good groove on the underside of his jaw in which to put it, and he expects he will have plenty of time to practise where he is going now. But he can't

make his plans for the future till he knows how much they knock off for good behavior, and if he never sees that redhead Annabell again, why it is O. K. with him.

A gorgeous brunett stopped me on the street outside the post-office last night and she says, "Excuse me for talking to a total stranger which I never do, but you are Mr. Moran, aren't you? I recognized you from your pictures. Mr. Moran, do you know you are my hero?"

I says, "No, I didn't know that."

"Well, you are, especially after I read that piece about you in the *Lakeville Journal*."

I says, "Tonight is my night off and I haven't got a date. Maybe I could give you a lift wherever you're going."

"Oh, could you? I am in no hurry to get there."

She squeezes up close to me as I let in the gears. "I'm so thrilled, Mr. Moran, to have a real hero driving for me!"

"I don't know," I says, "if you could call this sensual driving."

She says, "Oh, Mr. Moran!" and then she squeezes up still closer. "To a hero," she says, "all things are permitted."



EQMM boasts an honorable roster of husband-and-wife detective teams. True, we have not brought you an escapade of Mr. and Mrs. North, or an exploit of Nick and Nora Charles, but we cannot be held responsible for these glaring omissions — neither duo exists in short-story form. We have brought you, however, Agatha Christie's Tommy and Tuppence Beresford, Margaret Manners's Desdemona (Squeakie) and David Meadow, and Cyril Plunkett's Joe and Jeri Jones. And now we offer another domestic duet, another 'tecting twosome, another crime-crushing couple. Flippancy aside, meet "Professor" Hollis Mears and his wife Marjorie, in the strange case that linked Honeymoon Island and Mangrove Island. It happened in tropical Florida during that languid period when the south wind, like the mistral of Mediterranean France, blew hot and sultry and maddening . . . when sabotage and death were invisible fingers of the wind . . .

Your Editor found a certain fascinating femininity in this story — in the domestic scenes, in the romantic interludes, even in Miss Clark's deft strokes of characterization. Women readers will recognize the authentic touch of a talented woman-writer; and male fans will welcome a distaff detective story that skillfully avoids the down filling and purple patchwork of the Had-I-But-Known school of sleuthery.

DEATH ON THE SOUTH WIND

by VALMA CLARK

LITTLE Mrs. Mears sometimes felt that there was a great scarcity of really good murders on an isolated Florida island — until the letter that morning. She was engaged in making over her poky little historian husband into a world-famous detective. Naturally he did not know this.

She scowled up at him reproachfully, from the letter, over the mid-morning coffee in his study. "I didn't know you knew the Riders, Hollis!"

His magnificent forehead (it was startlingly brown from the sun beneath the silver crest of hair, it dwarfed everything about him) lifted to her from the eternal book list from his bookseller. Hollis was fenced in by books so that you could scarcely get

to him. He was writing a History of the American Civil War, and the current world war could have been fought and won by the sheer tonnage of the tomes they already owned — all their money went for reference books — but still he was never through buying. "Are you reading my letters again?" he asked, resigned. "I don't. Who are the Riders?"

"Tobacco. Fifty million dollars. Kidnaping."

She passed to him the incredible, inconsequential, alarming letter:

Bar Harbor, Maine

April 18, 1942

MY DEAR MR. MEARS,

Or is it professor Mears? John can't seem to remember, and Sheriff Tice *does*

not say, but a professor would make me feel even safer about sending my niece, Anastasia Rider, to you, but of course a professor would hardly be a detective, would he? And a detective is what we do so need, that is one who *detects in advance* and prevents all the trouble. But of course I felt completely relieved when I learned you were in my brother John's class in Yale.

It was sheer coincidence that this Sheriff Tice from Florida came to dinner, but it seems he and John were "buddies" in the first war in France. John met the *strangest* people in France. He was here trailing someone, if you can imagine — I mean Sheriff Tice. So he told us the safest place in the whole wide world if Anastasia was ever threatened again was your island and the sharpest detective he'd ever met was you. And it was coincidence again that this island is not far from MacDill Field where Anastasia's fiancé is stationed. That is this Brook Hanna. And he is even training with all the others over this Honeymoon Island next to you. So for once Anastasia's wishes do *not* conflict with ours. For right away we had this anonymous warning note that she would be kidnaped again. Naturally John and I are as terrified as Anastasia — *so* unfortunate when she already has this kidnaping complex.

The Sheriff says you have a big rambling old house with plenty of room, and of course Anastasia will reimburse you, we insist, and I hope she will be no trouble, she is a dear girl, but you know about the kidnaping when she was five. She is twenty now and after all, she cannot remember what happened to her when she was five, her *growing imagination* must have built this up. It is absurd to say that Carl Schee resembles this kidnaper, he was only five himself when

the kidnaping occurred. Personally I favor Carl, he cannot be running after her money as I tell Stacy, for the Schees, as you know, are Oil. This Brook Hanna could quite easily be marrying her for her money. But after all, I am only forty and very tired of this situation and entitled to my little fling. I am going to Mexico City. The main thing is not to let her be kidnaped again or of course murdered or anything.

Gratefully yours,
(MISS) LUCINDA RIDER

P.S. As it is an island, the bodyguard will not perhaps be necessary.

"So that," exclaimed Mr. Mears, "is what I get for helping the Sheriff solve two murder cases! Just wait till I get at him! Any job *he* does not fancy —"

"'Helping' him," scoffed Marjorie. "You mean *solving* them. That stupid Tice did not have a bean in that soup. You are always too modest, Hollis. It is a good thing you have a wife who —"

"Wire her at once that we are not having any Anastasia."

"It would be too late," demurred Marjorie cozily. "Anastasia would already be in full flight."

"*Marjorie, I will not allow —!*"

"Darling." She was a pretty, bright young thing with very blue eyes and very pink cheeks and snapping curly black hair. "The money will come in handy."

"Money!" he scorned.

"Yes, money," firmly. "There are some things I want besides your old Civil War books."

"I . . . never knew you felt like that," he choked. He gazed at her with his blue eyes — that deep-sea blue that you could drown in. "I . . . I guess the honeymoon is over. All-right. Just you wait, my dear, if it's money you're after, till my book is publish —"

"I can't. The old glass coffee drip is broken, we have got to have a new one. And my bathing suit has no seat to the pants," she giggled, "a new one is absolutely indicated. Besides, I have always wanted to see what the principal of a famous kidnaping case is like grown up."

"From this letter, she is obviously a mental victim from the experience. Even if I were a detective, which I do not admit, that does not make me a psychiatrist. Get this clear, Marjorie. She *can* be kidnaped AND murdered. I am not again being deflected from my book."

Marjorie gazed at her husband through welling tears. "I guess . . . the honeymoon is over."

They were always saying that to each other. After three years, it never was over. So suddenly she was flung into his arms, a fence of tomes avalanching with the passionate abruptness of her movement, but nobody noticed. He held her with such tenderness, such shyness growing bolder — he had been a bachelor so long that he did not take easily to the privileges of matrimony. So then they were conscious only of their multiple heart beat, joined — like the multiple engine beat of those army planes over-

head. The planes distanced; came the *phut-phut-phut* of rapid machine-gun fire. Again *phut-phut-phut*. One young aviator after another taking his morning drill at the target set up in the lagoon of the neighboring Honeymoon Island.

"That target practice is too near. Honeymoon Island, my eye," he muttered, once more claiming her lips.

"This is," she blissfully sighed. "Little Mangrove Island has been misnamed . . ."

So, of course, Anastasia arrived.

The bodyguard was with her — he saw her to the dock, then rode the hired speedboat back to the mainland for the return trip to New York — and also a tall, gaunt, middle-aged woman, dressed in black like a crow, her personal maid.

Stacy was a dear girl. Marjorie loved her at sight. She had that simplicity of the very rich to a degree that made her almost invisible for a moment: "tropical gray" outfit without a stitch of ornamentation. Or perhaps she herself had this ghost quality — she looked always as though she had just seen one! She had fine sandy hair, straight, polished from brushing, combed over to one side in a soft roll that gave a curious one-sided effect to her lovely little head. Her eyes were gray, black-fringed, startled. She was small and fine and pale. Her appeal was much stronger than beauty, sex, money, though she had all three. She would have it when she was eighty, when — and if — she

lost all three. Every man who loved her would ask only of life a long one, with which to take care of her and keep her safe, A-men.

"I am Marjorie Mears. You are welcome, dear."

"Thanks." She looked widely about, took a long quivering breath. "It is safe?"

Marjorie smiled. "Horribly safe."

"Nobody knows I'm here? I mean my real name."

"Nobody."

"Nothing has ever happened here?"

"Well . . ." said Marjorie. (Only two murders, but they were not, so to speak, indigenous.) "Nothing not imported. And nobody is on the island but you and me and my husband and our negro maid Moselle and your —?"

"This is Yvette."

Yvette kept her place with a reticent, lady's-maid smile.

The Rider heiress did not at once relax. The twilight hour was the bad time for her. That was the time at which "they" had snatched her. But in the tropics the sun shines hard, then it ceases to shine with no lingering. And the maid Yvette — already she was like a mother to the girl, though she was new — stayed close to her mistress. The nights were also bad. Until her father finally contacted the kidnapers and paid the colossal ransom, the baby had spent four black nights chained in a box-coop in remote wild country. That first night Stacy had one of her screaming nightmares, which brought the whole household up standing. She needed

only to hold someone's hand tight. Yvette's hand offered.

Stacy had brought the anonymous note to Mr. Mears. In spite of his avowed disinterest, he studied closely the fine slanted handwriting:

DEAR MR. RIDER:

Your niece is in grave danger. She must go far away from this place. If she stays, wicked men will kidnap her again. I can say no more. Profit by this warning!

Hollis assured the girl that he did not believe in this danger; she was safe.

After a day or two, when she had been shown the whole long, narrow island, Stacy really relaxed. She threw up her arms, and let the south wind blow through her hair, and said, for the first time in her life that she could ever remember, she felt safe and free. And she and Marjorie began to have those happy times together.

You would see them going about, fair head close to dark head, like two schoolgirls. "Isn't it marvellous, Hollis, she is not the least bit afraid. But we must not let anything happen."

"What could?" asked little Mr. Mears shortly. He was perhaps a little hurt, thinking it had been dull for his Marjorie with only a middle-aged scholar.

Stacy looked about wonderingly. The lamps were kerosene, there was no telephone, the grounds were lushly ragged. She had never stayed at any place like this in her life. Instead of a private swimming-pool — here was the Gulf. The simple life. (It was a

good deal less simple than before she hit the place, preparations for the Rider heiress having been elaborate!) Stacy loved it. She got into a one piece cotton playsuit and beach shoes — all one could support with that dry, hot south wind still blowing — and followed Marjorie to the so-called garden. Three white hollyhocks stood up at uneven intervals, a triumph. These were Exhibit A of the island. To achieve them, Marjorie had fertilized till she all but ran them off the island with the stench. When Stacy took a hoe and dug in, Marjorie was exultant.

But if Marjorie taught Stacy the simple life, Stacy introduced her hostess to standards of luxury. The array of clothes in the guest's closet, of little treed shoes, of hats, was a marvel to Marjorie. Stacy, quite as a matter of course, insisted upon paying a fabulous sum for the accommodation, and Marjorie's little Panama handbag had never been so stuffed. The two girls went over to the little town of Clearwater on shopping orgies — Stacy timid, without her bodyguard, off the island.

Hollis would come upstairs, from a day's tussle with the Civil War, to find Marjorie in a new ice-blue dinner dress with a spray of blue pearl flowers in her hair. (They dressed for dinner even alone, but never like this.) On the bed would be spread out a new white chintz beach costume with waterlily design, a new yellow peasant dirndl, etc., etc.

"You care for all this so much?"

he would ask, touching it.

"No. No! Darling, I love *you!* But tell me, do I look nice?"

"You are a little materialist, Marjorie, married to a scholar," rather sadly . . .

The golden treasure of this halcyon interlude was Yvette. Marjorie was so sick and tired of the slovenly, childlike negro help. This Frenchwoman was quick, deft and sophisticated. They said about the negroes that if you were a northerner, you never did get on with them. You were too easy on them. She tried sporadically to be very severe indeed. But with Yvette, you could completely let down. You did not need to keep her in her place. She kept herself in her place. There was nothing she could not do — and she was so willing to do it. She took over the washing and ironing of Marjorie's lingerie: ironed a \$2.98 nightgown in dozens of tiny pleats, so that it looked like one of Stacy's fifty dollar Rue de la Paix masterpieces — almost. . . when Hollis's new shoes hurt him at the heel, she said: "You give those to me, Mr. Mears. I feex." She did, too, — hammered out the lining ridge, worked them soft with her hands. "You know what we women do when war come to France?" she asked, returning them. "We turn cobbler, tailor. In *Marie Claire*, that is magazine like your *Vogue*, it is article how to make shoes, how to make woman's suit from man's old suit. Frenchwoman is very, how you say —?"

"Resourceful," supplied Hollis. "Thank you, Yvette."

"Mos' welcome, *Monsieur*."

She even went into the kitchen and whipped out a light, yellow breakfast cake, delicious with jam, which she called "*brioche*".

Moselle's flat black nose was out of joint — even after Yvette obligingly produced from somewhere the fine wire for a new leader when the colored girl, an inveterate fisher in off hours, lost her tackle. In her feud with the Frenchwoman, you had to be sorry for the sullen, dumb black girl. But when Marjorie heard her black handmaiden jawing the dishrag, "She take it outta your hide, Miz Mears do. Your whole *body* get tired a-toilin' for her." . . . It was then Marjorie decided she would have to fire Moselle. . . . But Moselle's hush puppies, with fish, were memorable. And it was so difficult to get help to stay on an island. And Moselle had seen them through two murders. . . .

Yvette, poor thing, was a refugee out of France. When the army planes went over — as they did forty times a day; the island's peace was long since shattered; every sort of engine pooped and screamed and roared, these waters seemed to have been picked by the United States Army for an intensive training ground for everything from bombers to amphibian tanks — Yvette's poise sagged. She asked fearful questions.

These planes might always contain Lieutenant Brook Hanna, and little Stacy stood off on a point and waved

to them, just on the chance. When Hanna got leave and came to dinner, he proved to be such a sternly handsome youth that Marjorie was prejudiced against him. But when he emerged in bathing trunks, you could but gasp at the Apollo-like body.

"What makes you love him so?" she asked Stacy frankly.

Stacy flushed. Then she answered, as frankly: "There is nothing about Brook that reminds of — I mean everyone else almost *could* have been one of them, even if he isn't. But Brook couldn't have. Never in a million years."

"You mean . . . one of the kidnapers?" groped Marjorie, appalled.

"Yes."

"Who is this other boy?"

"Aunt Cinda wrote you about Carl?"

"She mentioned . . ."

"He swore he'd kill Brook if I married him. He'd kill me, too."

"Impulsive lad."

"He means it," shuddered Stacy with her wide-eyed, ghost-seeing look.

But it was a happy, carefree week, with not a murder, not a kidnaping, not a hint of anything ominous but the noisy procession of planes going over and that dratted south wind that blew and blew — rattled the dry palms and sighed in the Australian pines and scorched your arid skin.

It never rains but it pours tenants. The Rider heiress had no sooner settled in nicely than two of the Mears's three fishing shacks, "Win-

drift", "Spindrift" and "Seadrift", which stood on the windy Gulf side, remote from the house, and were almost never occupied, were spoken for. Stieg McCloud came for a week every year — that was not unusual. But the statement from a local real estate agent that she had a tenant from New York *was* curious. The shacks were shabby. And who, from distant New York, would ever have heard of Little Mangrove Island?

But Marjorie, with a full pocket-book, grew greedy. She consulted nobody. She began to have hopes of buying that second-hand scarlet speed-boat for sale at the Imperial Dock, which would make good murder cases even on the mainland accessible to her unsuspecting husband.

Old McCloud was a great asset. It was a foursome now, and they had jolly dinner parties. Always a superior housekeeper, even on a shoe-string, Marjorie now outdid herself. The meals were magnificent Yvette served them, it went easier so. Her service was so sympathetic that she all but put the food in your mouth. "Good woman you've got there," barked McCloud. "Beautiful hands." (Surprisingly they were, and so *knowing*, hands that could do anything.) "Where'd you get her?"

"She's Miss Rider's personal maid. French refugee."

"French? Hal?"

McCloud observed her sharply, under his tufted white eyebrows, when she melted back into the room.

"Must be peasant French. Big and

bony," he barked, when she again withdrew. "French girls are little and trim."

"Well," drawled little Mr. Mears, twinkling, "where and when did you get this comprehensive knowledge of French girls, Stieg?"

McCloud blushed.

"Paris. Two days. 1910."

"We . . . e . . . ell. Those were busy days. I suppose you . . . er, saw Notre Dame and the Louvre and went up in the Eiffel Tower and had . . . er, crêpes Suzette, besides other Suzettes. . . ."

"Hollis!" scolded Marjorie.

Everybody laughed.

"Matter of fact, I had something at the Café de la Paix that was a lot better. Little chocolate *éclair*s, shaped like the holes out of the doughnuts your mother used to fry, filled with ice cream, covered with chocolate sauce and called . . . ha . . ."

"*Profiterolles*," softly supplied Yvette, who had materialized again.

"Damme, that is the funny name!"

Yvette, the next day, actually went out into the kitchen and composed profiterolles, working with heaven knows what for the pastry chef's tools.

"Ha," said McCloud, lapping them up. "The woman's a wizard. She's French all right."

And replete, he happily got going on kites again. "Cuban boy over in Ybor City in Tampa can stand on his back porch and put a little six-footed kite up over his neighbor's roof — place it — with the right wind. He learned this trick, because there are

so many interfering wires in Ybor City, ha . . . Chinese have the same precision. Kite flying always has been a national pastime of Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, Tonkingese, Annamese, Malays, East Indians."

He droned on.

Kites, kites, till Marjorie thought she would go daft. He really came to Little Mangrove not to fish, but to talk kites with Hollis. McCloud was a walking encyclopedia on kites — indeed, had written the authoritative Encyclopedia digest on that subject. Hollis, as usual, collected any and all expert information which came his way. Hollis was a two-footed encyclopedia on all subjects.

"— No difficulty about raising a kite to a height of two miles on the right days. In 1905 the Prussian Aeronautical Observatory at Lindenberg put up the upper one of a train of six kites to over four miles . . . And damme, Mears, consider the military possibilities. Simple method of lifting anything to a height. Used in both army and navy for signaling, for photography, for carrying up flags, lamps—"

The trouble with McCloud, socially speaking, was that he was a retired weather man — still working hard at the weather. When he got going, he talked about nothing else. He had got interested in kites because his meteorological service employed them to obtain information about the temperature, the humidity and the velocity of air up above. He even looked like the weather. Had spent so much

time in a weather observatory tower that his name, McCloud, had become appropriate. His face was white — it was an albino skin condition, lack of pigmentation. He could not take the sun, and when he ventured out in it, swathed himself in misting white like a turbaned Arab. Otherwise he wore neat blue serge and never removed his coat, even in scalding weather. He had Scotch weather eyes and a weather nose, always peering upward for signs. He said this south wind would veer north in two days — and so it did, but not before the first terrible disaster.

They had reached the really unique papaya *mousse*. The yellow candlelight laved over Stacy in white-silver and Marjorie in the new golden net. Suddenly Stacy's black-lashed gray eyes widened upon the dusk beyond the table and her mouth rounded open in a sharp, high scream.

Both Hollis and McCloud sprang to the defense.

Her horror pointed — to a man coming through the open front door.

"For Pete's sake, Stacy, do you have to act like that?"

"Carl Scheel! Where — d-did you come from?"

"Your friends sure will think I am Grade A bad news. I'm sorry to intrude, but the boatman from Clearwater has just landed me on your dock, and I want to know where is this cottage I rented?"

"You — followed me!"

"Sure I followed you."

"He can't stay!" cried Stacy wildly.

But of course he did stay. Naturally the New York tenant to whom Marjorie had rented sight unseen, was the girl's rejected swain! This took some explaining on Marjorie's part. But the Mearses were inclined to agree with Aunt Lucinda. The boy did not make a bad impression. You were forced to recognize that Stacy was not normal, she really was a neurotic. He was a short, stocky, rather German-looking boy, obviously crazy about Stacy, abundantly demonstrative in his affection (he could not keep his hands off the shrinking girl) and with about the mentality and play habits of a healthy puppy. Hollis referred to him drily as "that playboy". It was a literal description. In bathing trunks he came out fat and he would gambol with anybody who would gambol with him, and if nobody would he would gambol with the waves, and if there were no waves he would gambol with the sea weed.

Stacy kept insisting that now something terrible would happen.

When you saw him and Brook Hanna in the same room together, such was their young male antagonism, you were inclined to agree and fix it at murder!

"Aw," begged Schee, "you tell her, Mrs. Mears, it just isn't sense. How could I be one of those kidnapers? Why, gosh, I was only five and away at Nantucket the summer it happened. She says I've got the same shape as one of 'em. She says I may not *be* the kidnaper, but kidnaping is *in* me. By gol, if she keeps it up I *will*

kidnap her, just to keep her from throwin' herself away on that Hanna washout."

It was the next day that the first "accident" happened. The flight of planes roared over — ten of them, in formations of three, with a leader. Stacy, who was walking the beach at the north end of the island with Marjorie, stood out on a point and waved at them, in case one was Brook.

Now they widely circled, and returned, single file, and swooped over the invisible lagoon. *Phut-phut-phut. Phut-phut-phut.* One at a time, at the machine-gun target.

Marjorie thought how they were porpoise-colored, when suddenly there was an explosion, high up — not the *phut*, but bigger, more like the *bump* of a bomb. A white ball of smoke formed, and that rear plane, slightly off line with the others, began to wallow like a porpoise rolling to the surface for oxygen. She had always thought that one day she would see a plane fall. She could not believe that she was seeing it now. It happened so swiftly. The plane was no longer in the hot blue sky at all. This crash was different — longer, more conclusive, with a final metallic death rattle.

Stacy gasped: "*Brook! It's Brook!*"

She was running like a crazy person, Marjorie after her, to the water-logged old rowboat. They were in it, ankle deep in water, wallowing, floundering toward the not distant point of Honeymoon Island. Running again through the impeding sand. Two

uniformed fliers kept them off from the wreck. "Is — it — B-Brook Hanna?" she babbled.

"No, Ma'am. Hanna didn't fly today. He's back at the field." . . .

It took a knock-out sedative to get Stacy quiet. She kept insisting that this was Carl's work, he was gunning for Brook. Yvette soothed her, "*La pauvre petite. Dormez, Mademoiselle.*"

What had happened? Nobody knew. Somebody *shooting* at the plane? That was nonsense — there was nobody to shoot at it — nothing to shoot *with*. So it was put down to an accident, just one of those things that happen when you are training raw recruits. The two boys killed, pilot and gunner, were Michigan lads.

The south wind veered to a north wind, on a regular tear, but it was a relief. As Hollis said, there was something about a south wind, like the mistral in the South of France, and men had once been pardoned for murder when that blew. After that, the days were as calm as your own hand mirror, the sea deep turquoise-blue with green and purple streaks, the red hibiscus poised as still as artificial flowers on their bushes.

Marjorie, roaming the island alone, came upon a broken piece of string snarled in a mangrove tree, like kite string. She also came upon some words spelled large upon the exposed beach with big white clam shells. It was as though a child had been playing on the island — and there was no child! Only the playboy! Or the kite man flying his kites? She had to giggle at

the mental vision of old McCloud with his white turban ends yarding to a kite's breeze!

To Hollis she confided: "Stacy is writing messages to Brook Hanna, with shells, on the beach. Every time a plane flies so low it just misses our roof, that will be Hanna reading them. Today's *billet doux* is 'I STILL DO.'"

"Still do what?" wondered little Mr. Mears.

"Still loves him, you dope," Marjorie tittered.

The breeze was from the east — it was from the west — each shift foretold by McCloud. The war might have suppressed the weather reports, but Little Mangrove had its weather reporter, right with it. McCloud was a good deal better than a barometer: more accurate. But all was peaceful.

Then, one evening, McCloud reckoned that they were due for another south wind. That night Moselle went on a rampage. She came to Marjorie, with the whites of her eyes as big as the whites of a pair of fried eggs, and demanded hysterically to be conveyed off "dis debbil-damned island to the mainland, where Things don't happen, right away now."

Marjorie descended to a bribe. "You mean, leave me? Just when I was going to give you my red silk dress?"

"Don' want no red silk dress . . . The new one?" Moselle wavered.

"The brand-new one. *And* the red strap slippers."

"They am too much murder on dis island," Moselle whinnied.

"Nothin' don' pay you back for murder. Affen you murdered, you can't wear no red silk dress." But she calmed magically; went off muttering to herself about "not likin' dat weaver man, he *make* bad things happen."

Marjorie was troubled. She had learned how truly psychic are the negroes: they smell trouble ahead, as a bird dog smells game.

In the morning Marjorie took a small, solitary excursion. She walked to the north end of Little Mangrove and frowned across at Honeymoon Island, so maddeningly near. You could swim it — but sharks? She remembered the water-logged old boat. One oar was now missing, the water was all but sinking it. The south breeze blew her over. She would have to bail with something, before she could pole it back. The island was a low, barren, desolate streamer of land, with a white line of beach showing the blanched old bones of shells and with — at this end — a low growth of mangroves. Nothing ominous — not a thing.

Marjorie followed the beach. A guard came stalking to meet Marjorie, and she remembered the rule: absolutely no visitors and *this means you!* He was very young, uniformed in rags and a peaked official cap. He did not quite know what to do about a pretty feminine trespasser who smiled at him, but he remained stern, if helpless.

So Marjorie wandered on up the beach. He called after her: "'Bout

time for machine-gun practice in that lagoon up there a piece."

"I know," she smiled back. "Thanks."

The island curved, she was soon out of sight of him. Here the beach was more desolate; the sun blazed, not a bush for shelter. The island widened, so that there *were* thickets of trees (Hiding for a machine gun? Absurd, she rejected it, *that was not shooting!*) but Marjorie was loathe to penetrate, afraid of rattlers. She came to the little lagoon, an uneven, deep half-moon, with its target range: a cool, tranquil green, very pretty, with fish playfully leaping.

Curiously she was not at first warned of the approach of planes by the drum of engines. The first hint was a fleeting shadow on the sands — so small that it must be either a bird or a plane very high up. She stared into the blistering blue, until her eyes watered. Nothing. Not a sound — not a sign.

Then, almost at once, the planes came pulsing up — high, like shadowy, double crosses in the sky — ten of them. Circling off — then lowering — looming — the roar a terror. Marjorie could not credit what was then happening. Couldn't they *see* her? The roar of guns and engines was terrific. It seemed to rock the little island like a floating custard island. The shells spat up the water — they kicked up the sands about her. *Boom-boom. Tut-tut-tut-tut. Boom-bump.* Marjorie was in the midst of skyrockets going off every which way all at once. Relentless — zoom —

swoop — boom. They were aiming at *her*. She sat — shocked down — and gaped defiance.

It was from this position that she saw again the exploding ball in the heavens — not like these other explosions, in either action or position — and saw the great plane seem to falter — something drop away from it, a wing? — roll over and nose-dive toward the water.

Marjorie found her quavering legs and ran — floundered through the sand. "I'll — t-tell — H-Hollis. They are sh-shooting each other. They are sh-shooting everything. But — that wasn't shooting. It was more as though it ran into a load of dynamite. *But there was nothing there.*"

The guard, justified, called: "I told you so!"

"You fool," babbled the pretty woman, "that was another c-crash and you don't even *know* —!". . .

Hollis was extremely angry with her.

His really eloquent fury was interrupted by Yvette, who urged a doctor for her mistress. Stacy was not calmed by the news that her *fiancé* was safe. The dead were a boy from Nebraska and a boy from Texas. This was Carl Schee's work! He had only missed again. He would get Brook yet. No appeal to reason quieted her. It took again the knock-out tablet.

Hollis, in their own room, resumed. By this time, Marjorie, her nerves crying out, was in tears — but the tears did not melt him. "Unless they bomb me off the island, I am finishing

my book, Marjorie. And all that I ask of you, as my wife, is the negative assistance *of not going out and standing under the bombs!*"

It was the first time that her power over him had totally failed.

The honeymoon was over . . .

Of course, it was not over . . .

But even in his cherishing arms, Marjorie could not move him.

She said: "This is a very funny thing, darling. It was like running into dynamite, with no dynamite there."

"I am not interested, beloved."

She repeated to him what he had said to her on their first murder case: "You have a trained mind. Remember? Do something, darling! And then this shadow at first, with no sound of an engine. The plane must have been very high, because the shadow was so small."

"That," said Hollis, caught, "is odd."

Marjorie would, by this time, have expected her particular anathema, the drawling-witted local sheriff. She did not expect a gentleman who looked like a citizen of the U. S. A. in good standing, and more particularly like one of the better-grade Princeton graduates, class of 1920 — and who announced himself as an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation!

He sat down in the living room like any caller, and accepted a glass of iced papaya juice, and almost casually got the whole set-up.

When ghost-pale little Stacy began

her chatter about somebody (her gaze pointed Carl Schee) gunning for just her *fiancé*, Lieutenant Brook Hanna, this F.B.I. man, Coates, said he was afraid it was much bigger than that. Somebody was gunning for any and all army fliers. At this rate, they would kill off our men while they were still students, before they ever got to the wars. He said skillfully, "You are the Miss Rider who, as a baby, was . . .?"

"Yes."

His look poor-childed her.

It slid off, clicked around the room, ticketed everyone, down to Moselle and Yvette, assisted by a few well-placed questions.

"Unfortunately," he continued, finishing the papaya juice and lighting a cigarette, "it does not appear to be a simple question of gunning. No machine-gun nest. We have combed the islands. Of course, as far as any *sound* of shooting, the roar of the planes and *their* bombs and machine-gun explosions, would be complete cover. But . . . *there are no bullet holes in either of the wrecks!*"

"But it didn't," glowered Carl Schee, "happen over *this island*."

"No," agreed Coates, watching him with his intelligent gray eyes, "over *that island*. Unfortunately there is nobody there whom we could suspect, except the young guard. He is not a clever youth."

"Then," charged Carl belligerently, "you suspect *us*?"

"The advantage of an island," thoughtfully, "is that it does restrict,

geographically anyhow, the suspects. I should think one of you on this island must be guilty."

"It's too bad," said Carl hotly, "that we haven't got a Japanese alien among us."

"That is too bad. Perhaps we won't need one. Which of your ancestors, Mr. Schee, were German?"

"I like that! All right. My father's father, and he was as good an American as you are!"

"That is entirely possible."

"When a crime is committed," offered Stieg McCloud unexpectedly, "it sometimes pays to take a check on the weather. Many a murderer has been convicted on his weather testimony — full moon where there was no moon, saw things he couldn't have — ha."

"What *was* the moon?"

"It wasn't the moon, it was the wind. Damme, both times a south wind blowing."

"As though . . . *sabotage and death blew from this island*," agreed Coates, fixing not on Schee, but on McCloud. "What's the *Stieg* in your name from?"

"Family name," gruffly. "My mother."

"German?"

"Austrian."

"And you're a retired weather man. Advance weather information is as valuable to the enemy as maps of the country."

"What," barked McCloud, "do you mean to insinuate? That I am a Fifth Columnist weather expert? Damme,

I'm as loyal an American citizen as anybody!"

"Doubtless," agreed the F.B.I. agent rather tiredly. "This is all routine, Mr. McCloud. My job is to question."

He rose. "By the way, where's the child on this island?"

"No child," said several voices together.

"That's funny, because . . ."

Then little Mr. Mears said something. He said quickly, as though to get it over: "Mr. McCloud is a recognized authority on kites. I myself know a great deal about kites, from Mr. McCloud."

"Kites," said the agent. "Kites . . . Thank you, Professor."

Mr. Mears blushed: "I am not a professor."

"But the local sheriff said —"

"I have never troubled to correct the local sheriff."

"Thank you," said Coates, faintly smiling, "again. The local sheriff, I take it, troubles you quite a lot. I hope we shall not have to trouble you."

"That is fine," said Hollis, "for I cannot take any more time away from my book."

"What are you writing?" respectfully.

"A History of the American Civil War," said Mears, blushing with pleasure that anybody should ask . . .

Marjorie fretted at her husband. "I don't care if he is a G-man! He is not so smart as you are, Hollis."

"He is quite capable of handling

this job, my dear."

"Who did it, Hollis?"

"Of that I am not quite sure — only of how it was done."

"How? *How?*" cried little Mrs. Mears, beating her hands with curiosity.

But Hollis retired to his study and — for the first time in their life together — locked the door against her.

The south wind blew and blew. For three days it blew, gentle but steady. Everybody's nerves were as raw as those exposed, live frogs' nerves in Advanced Biology. Nothing happened, of course. Nothing would happen with the U. S. government itself on guard.

But something did happen.

Marjorie wandered down to the north end of the island, to talk with the young soldier with a machine-gun who was on guard there. She told herself spitefully that, after a Brain, Stupidity was a relief. The young soldier didn't know much; his job was, moreover, to know less! He would not talk. Would not say *what* he was on watch for, would not say what he would do if what he was on watch for materialized. He would only say that he was Joe Baker from the Bronx, and that he liked beer.

The sun shone blindly, the sky was dizzied with it; the south wind shifted the great white clouds like stage scenery, all in a piece, northward. Neither of them saw a thing. Not a thing.

The army planes were coming, you

could hear their high, distant, multiple beat. Then they seemed to be scattered across the sky. Suddenly one roared low over the island tip, skimmed the beach: Brook Hanna, picking up Stacy's shell message.

The plane lifted and zoomed toward the lagoon. And suddenly, nearer than the other times, lower, there was that terrific pause, that ball of explosion, that slow motion act of falling to pieces in mid-air.

The scream was Stacy: "It's — Brook!"

She came, running raggedly. Fell. Clutched up. Fought on.

Marjorie was running after her.

Both girls ran into the water. Stacy turned and fought off Marjorie. But Marjorie gripped her, dragged her out . . .

It *was* Brook, all right. If you dreaded a thing long enough, it came true . . .

Brook was not dead — he was dying . . .

Then he was not dying — he might even live to give testimony . . .

He did live, but he never needed to give the testimony . . .

"Will you tell me, Mr. McCloud, as an authority on kites," asked the F.B.I. man formally (this was again in the living room, with all present) "whether, since it is possible to float weather instruments on them, it is also possible to lift on them a high explosive which is so sensitive to shock that it detonates with great violence if, say, an airplane collides with the kite?"

"That would be possible," admitted McCloud.

"And will you tell me whether it is possible to send up a flock of little kites, so loaded, precisely over a given locality, presuming the wind is just right, so that one or more planes in a flying squadron would, with luck, encounter one of these?"

"That is probably possible, but —"

"And can the kites be constructed so that they are practically invisible, flown on —?"

"Wire, yes."

"And the wire released at the last instant, so that it will not lead back to the kite flier?"

"Ha. Yes."

"But does it not require long practice and great skill in kite-flying to *place* your kites?"

"Damme, yes, Coates. That's my objection to —"

"*You* have this skill?"

"Certainly!"

"Then, Mr. McCloud, though I have not yet found the evidence of kite making or materials in my search of your quarters, I am going to hold you for the sabotage of three planes and the death of —"

"No," said little Mr. Mears. "Wait!"

"What's wrong?"

"Wrong person."

"You mean — Schee? He doesn't know kites —"

"No, not Schee."

Coates rested back and looked at Mr. Mears. "*Yourself?* You're the only other kite authority —"

Mr. Mears blushed. "No. No. Not me. It is a woman, Mr. Coates, I regret to say. It is . . . Miss Rider's personal maid, Yvette."

The gaunt woman stood up outraged. "Me, a refugee out of martyred France — me who has already suffered much — my seempathy it is with the Axis?"

"I am afraid so. Like so many of the Fifth Columnists, you were probably stationed many years in France. Then, when France fell, you came out, to take up residence, as a refugee, in the next country to be undermined. Unfortunately you have been too obliging. You gave yourself away with that wire for Moselle's fishing leader. I remembered and checked. That is steel piano wire, 1/32 inch in diameter, weighs about 16 pounds to the mile, stands a strain of some 250-280 pounds before it breaks. That is precisely kite-flying wire. You'll find, I think," he turned shyly to Coates, "the materials in her room if you search. I don't presume to know exactly how she made the kites. She is very clever. I don't know where she flew them from — perhaps that highest mangrove hillock. Don't know how many she put up in a flight, or what happened to the loaded kites which weren't blown up. But what I should like to know," said Mr. Mears, turning courteously to Yvette —

The woman stood there now with an expression of resignation. She was the fatalist. This was bound some day to come.

"— What I should really like to

know, is where did you learn kite flying?"

"My father," stated Yvette with strong pride, "he was head of the Prussian Aeronautical Observatory at Lindenberg in 1905 when that train of kites fly so high."

"You served at table that night Sheriff Tice dined with the Riders and heard him advise them to send their niece here — where there was work for *you* to do — if she were ever threatened again."

Even Yvette stared at little Mr. Mears, as at a magician. "The waitress, Alice, she has free day. Yes."

"You sent that threatening note?"

"Naturally," Yvette calmly agreed . . .

"The real coincidence," marveled little Mr. Mears to his wife, "is that there should be two kite experts on the island of Little Mangrove at one and the same time. But probably Mc-Cloud touched Yvette off with all his talk of kites."

"Darling," snuggled little Mrs. Mears, "I do like a man to have a brain. *When* did you first guess?"

"It was something you said."

"Then I *am* a help! Oh, darling, darling."

There was an interlude which proved incontrovertibly that the honeymoon was not yet over.

"What did I say?" she remembered.

"About the plane that cast the small shadow, with no sound of an engine. Suppose it wasn't a plane. What could it have been? A bird, perhaps. Or — a kite."

Many years ago Maurice Leblanc, in a pugilistic mood, conceived the idea of matching his undefeated master-rogue, Arsène Lupin, against the detective champion of the world, Sherlock Holmes. The bout lasted four years, from 1907 to 1911, and extended through three of M. Leblanc's books — THE EXPLOITS OF ARSÈNE LUPIN, ARSÈNE LUPIN VERSUS SHERLOCK HOLMES (also known, among other titles, as THE BLONDE LADY), and THE HOLLOW NEEDLE. There was no knockout, no decision; the final result, by and large, was a draw — a monumental tribute to Holmes considering that M. Leblanc was not only the promoter of the match but also the official timekeeper and referee.

It is a matter of record that the great English author never returned the great French author's compliment. Conan Doyle never wrote a story that could have been called SHERLOCK HOLMES VERSUS ARSÈNE LUPIN. More's the pity — what a classic tale it might have been! It remained, after all these years, for an American author, Mr. Anthony Boucher, to make up in part for Doyle's dereliction. Mr. Boucher, himself the creator of three stellar detectives — Fergus O'Brien, Sister Ursula, and EQMM's own Nick Noble — now gives us the first pastiche (serious and sincere imitation) of Arsène Lupin; and while Sherlock Holmes is regrettably absent, even in adumbration, we have enormous reason to be grateful to Mr. Boucher for what is in essence a "new" Lupin story.

There is a French legend that in times of extreme peril Charlemagne himself would return to save France. Surely Arsène Lupin — yes, the great Arsène, the man who singlehanded won France her vast colonial empire in Africa¹ — is, and always will be, the spiritual descendant of the great emperor.

ARSÈNE LUPIN VERSUS COLONEL LINNAUS

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

THE landmarks that Max Blanchard had memorized so carefully a month ago — the red barn, the lane of poplars — stood out in the starlight with the too vivid clarity of a surrealist painting. The pump with the broken handle was the last signpost on a nightmare road. Now he could stop crawling. He had been crawling ever since he was a young man and that was long years ago.

Max Blanchard is not, of course,

¹ Maurice Leblanc's *THE TEETH OF THE TIGER*; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1914, first U. S. edition, dark blue pictorial cloth.

his real name. Even now, they say, it's better not to print his name nor the exact nature of his mission in France. But Max Blanchard will do. It's the kind of name he had, being a San Franciscan whose father was born in France. In the army they called him "Frenchie," and he took a fair amount of ribbing from the average American's automatic distrust of a bilingual man; but his harshest ribbers owned up to a sort of admiration when he was chosen for this mission.

It's still wise, they say, not to describe how Blanchard got into France

nor where he was going nor how he received the wound. But the part of the story that can be told (and that should be told for the glimpse it gives you of the spirit still living in France) starts near dawn one winter morning in a village that might be named Rozy-sur-Marne, with Blanchard crawling through back hedges and damning the clear sharp starlight and wondering how much longer he can remain conscious after that loss of blood.

Now, with the landmarks in sight, he knew his lifelong crawl was over. Here at this underground station he could snatch a few hours of rest, the last before he reached his destination.

The man who answered Blanchard's knock was, as he had been described, sharp-featured and black-eyed. Blanchard said, "M. Duval?"

The man said "Yes."

"The celebrated collector of fishing rods?"

The man half-smiled and nodded at the password. He stepped aside to let Blanchard into the hall. Blanchard tripped on the threshold and the man took his arm. He drew in a sharp breath as he saw the blood, but said nothing. He led Blanchard down the hall into a shabby but spotless room.

Blanchard saw nothing in the room save the two men in Gestapo uniforms. He heard nothing but Duval's unctuous voice saying, "Messieurs, behold the American spy!" Then as they stepped forward he saw and heard nothing at all . . .

Oberleutnant Siegmund von Keller tapped nervously on his desk. "I do not see," he said, "why I was not informed directly of Colonel Linnaus' tour of inspection."

The thin bearded old Frenchman made a conciliatory gesture. "Misguided though they may be, the Underground is singularly efficient. Doubtless the Colonel's inspection is intended to catch you unawares; it is fortunate that I have been able to forewarn you through my . . . unorthodox channels."

Keller smiled stiffly. "You are invaluable, M. Lenormand. You are, if I may speak frankly, a higher caliber of individual than is often willing to assist us among a conquered people. Your training as one-time Chief of the Sûreté, your uncanny ability to nose out traitors, so often among those whom we have prized as our most loyal collaborators —"

M. Lenormand waved a deprecatory hand. "I have a duty to my country. I feel I can serve her best through my assistance to you."

"I could wish," said Keller, "that such good sense were more common. These stubborn dogs clinging to the past, listening to the empty mouthings of Moscow and Washington . . ."

M. Lenormand said, "You have the American spy now. He will be a fine exhibit to display to Colonel Linnaus."

The thought warmed Oberleutnant von Keller. He sat basking in it for some minutes after the local police chief had left him. He roused himself

and sat up stiffly when a guard entered to announce M. Duval.

Keller managed to be both stern and affable as he congratulated Duval upon his sensible heroism in betraying the local Underground station. He was somewhat more stern than affable as he went on to point out that Duval's life depended upon his future usefulness, which would best consist in maintaining that station as a trap.

"But monsieur . . ." Duval hesitated. "You do not know these men of the Underground. They are fierce and terrible. When they realize that travelers go no farther than my station. . . ."

"Do you think they can be more terrible than we?" The Oberleutenant's voice was quiet and deadly.

"It shall be as you wish, M. le lieutenant," Duval hastened to assure him. "I shall maintain the station."

"And you will give us complete information on all disloyal French when you know." A fine bag for Colonel Linnaus, he thought. "But wait. I am sure that your American friend will be interested in learning to what manner of man he trusted his life." He beckoned to a guard.

Max Blanchard had not been mistreated since he was brought to Gestapo headquarters. There was little need to mistreat a man with bleeding wounds and a soaring fever; neglect was simpler. Blanchard was conscious now, and dripping from the pail of cold water which had made him conscious. His legs buckled under him as the guards released their hold. One of

the guards struck him, and he stood wavering in front of Keller's desk.

"Oberleutenant von Keller," the officer identified himself. "And this is M. Duval, journalist and reformed traitor." He paused. "Well?" he snapped. "And your name, American?" He made the word an epithet beside which *Schweinehund* would have seemed endearing.

Blanchard said nothing.

Keller smiled. "We can take up your questioning later. At leisure. . . . Meanwhile I want you to hear what we know of your subversive plots, so that you may see how futile it is to oppose the Master Race. Go on, Duval."

Duval hesitated and looked about him.

"Your fierce terrible men are not here," Keller laughed. "You are safe — and I trust you remember the matter of the reward. Come: who is the local leader of your so-called Underground?"

"M . . . monsieur Lenormand," Duval stammered.

Keller started from his seat. "Lenormand? Impossible. You're lying, you French dog. The chief of police is our friend, our ally. He has been invaluable to us. He —"

A strange voice barked, "Guard! Go to the prefecture at once and arrest M. Lenormand. I want him here."

Max Blanchard's eyes turned to the doorway. A tall slender man stood there in a resplendent black uniform. His moustache was meticulously

waxed, and his waist could have resulted only from a corset. One even suspected a touch of makeup on the face; the fresh cheeks, scars and all, were so much younger than the shrewd old eyes.

"I give orders —" the Oberleutnant started to say.

The newcomer was drawing off his gloves with negligent grace. "Oberst Linnaus," he said tersely. "You were not expecting me?"

"I beg the Colonel's pardon. I —"

"I know. Oberleutnant von Keller. Standard brand. Devotion to duty, ninety-five per cent. Devotion to the Fatherland, one hundred. To the party, one hundred and five. Imagination, zero."

Keller stiffened, and visibly repressed his retort.

"Did I understand this Frenchman correctly?" Linnaus went on. "Did he tell you that you have been putting your trust in a traitor?"

"So he says, Herr Oberst."

"*He* says? God in heaven, Lieutenant, have you no flair for your own profession? You have been trusting, I gather, a police chief named Lenormand?"

"Yes, sir."

"An old man? Even older than I? Thin and stooped? Sparse gray goatee? Formerly chief of the Sûreté in Paris?"

Keller nodded *yes* to each of the questions. Colonel Linnaus threw his head back and laughed a harsh high laugh. "Within five minutes," he announced, "that guard will return to

tell us that M. Lenormand is not at the prefecture. He will not be found at his house either. You will search in vain for him for months, while he laughs at you."

Keller bridled. "I may not, as the Colonel says, have imagination; but I am efficient. Any man who lives I can arrest. What is this Lenormand? A ghost?"

The Colonel smiled. "A ghost? No . . . not quite . . ."

"Then why can I not arrest him?"

"Because," Colonel Linnaus said slowly, "no one has ever successfully arrested Arsène Lupin."

Max Blanchard blinked his fever-reddened eyes. He saw the startled face of M. Duval, the puzzlement of the Oberleutnant. "Arsène Lupin?" Keller asked.

"You may check the records in Paris," Linnaus said. "M. Lenormand² was indeed Chief of the Sûreté, in 1906 if my memory is correct. He was also one of the many avatars of that multifaceted genius whom we know as Lupin."

"But Arsène Lupin . . ." Keller protested. "He's not real. He's in a book."

"Our Fuehrer," the Colonel said gravely, "has been in many books, and shall figure in more till the end of the making of books."

"That's history. But Lupin is in novels."

"There is a worthy novel of Ewers'

² Maurice Leblanc's 813; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1911, first U. S. edition, orange cloth.

entitled *Horst Wessel*. Does that make you doubt the true life of our hero?"

"But even if he's real, he must be dead by now. You said 1906!"

Colonel Linnaus sighed lightly. "Let me explain, while we wait for the guard's report to confirm me. These French . . . they are a strange people. I do not understand them well. When I was working in Norway with Jonas Lie, I knew where I was. I am a collateral descendant of Linnaeus, and my Norse mother named me Peer to honor Ibsen's hero. Yes, I understand the Scandinavians, even those who most bitterly resist us, as I understand our own race, but these French . . .

"There is something in them that we cannot touch. Something that can be said only in their own language. *Esprit . . . élan . . . panache . . . gloire . . .* How can one translate a single one of those words into German? And all those words mean: Arsène Lupin. He is madness and wit and grace and moon-touched audacity. He is —"

The Colonel paused, coughed, and resumed more soberly: "He is the effrontery of the individual who dares oppose himself to the State. He is the outrage of anarchy, the fallacy of individualism. And he refuses to die.

"There was a French legend that in times of great peril the horn of Roland would sound and Charlemagne himself would return to save France. Well, the times of great peril came for the contemptible Third Republic. But the horn that sounded was the claxon of a Paris cab, and there

returned . . . Arsène Lupin."

For a moment there was silence in the room. Blanchard saw the Colonel's painted face lit with a half-admiration for the man he must pursue and destroy. Then a guard came in, heeled, and said, "Herr Oberst, M. Lenormand is nowhere to be found."

Keller looked convinced. Still he protested. "But he worked for us —"

"There is no limit," Linnaus snapped, "to the man's highfantastic enterprise. Did he not make himself head of the very *Sûreté* that had sworn his capture? Did he not once force our Kaiser himself to become his accomplice in an escape? Working 'for' us would suit his humor. And what did he do for you?"

"He betrayed de Gaullists, Underground workers —"

"— whom you had hitherto considered loyal collaborators? Of course. Ass! Cannot you see what he was doing? He simply turned genuine collaborators over to you and tricked you into executing them. Ah, the devil is sly. And he has never met his match. What was Ganimard?³ A plodding bourgeois. Herlock Sholmes?⁴ An Englishman. Never has he been faced with a detective of his own caliber . . . until now."

Colonel Linnaus' thin lips curved into a smile, twisting his saber scars

³ Maurice Leblanc's *THE EXPLOITS OF ARSÈNE LUPIN*; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1907, first U. S. edition, dark blue pictorial cloth.

⁴ Maurice Leblanc's *THE BLONDE LADY*; New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1910, first U. S. edition, dark brown cloth with illustration pasted on.

into the grimace of a sadistic clown. "First these," he said. "The American and your helpful betrayer of the Underground. And then . . . Arsène Lupin!"

Fever and all, Max Blanchard shuddered. There was a chill resolution about this ancient dandy that made his spine crawl.

"Shall I summon Grussmann?" Keller asked. "He has a skill all his own in extracting information."

"I am not without skill myself," Colonel Linnaus said coldly. "You may leave us, Herr Oberleutnant."

Keller's voice hardened. "Does not the Colonel presume upon his rank? May I remind him that these are my prisoners?"

Linnaus slapped his black glove against his palm. "May I remind the Lieutenant that these men should yield valuable information, and that one does not care to reveal that information before a self-avowed colleague of Arsène Lupin?"

Keller said stubbornly, "I stand upon my rights as senior in command of this station."

Linnaus began to draw on his gloves. "There will be time later to consider your proper reward. Poland, I imagine; the death rate will be high there — the Red Army draws near. At present I have no time to palter." He turned to the door and shouted a command outside. "These men go with me."

Max Blanchard saw Duval's face turn ashen and almost sympathized with the traitor. The evil efficiency of

Oberleutnant von Keller had been dangerous enough; but this rouged and scarred old man who added imagination to his evil . . .

There was only one solution. Blanchard knew too much to take chances on what he might reveal under torture or in the delirium of fever. He groped in his bloodstained rags for the capsule of cyanide, praying that his captors had overlooked it. If only he could somehow share it with Duval before that craven revealed all the secrets of the Underground. . . .

His fingers found the minute secret pocket and closed on something that was not a capsule. The cyanide had been removed, and in its place was a wad of paper. The two Gestapo men were too intent on their private duel to notice him closely. He unfolded the paper in his palm and glanced down at it. It bore two words:

Courage!

Lupin

Blanchard's head swam as the guards lifted him and bore him to Colonel Linnaus' waiting black automobile.

Oberleutnant Siegmund von Keller's eyes were bitter as he watched the car drive away. Already he was planning his revenge upon the high-handed Colonel. His brother Wölfling von Keller was excellently placed in the higher councils of the Party. A few words whispered in the proper ears. . . . But first he must put on record his own efficiency.

He phoned his immediate superior,

Colonel Grimmhausen, and made his report. The local police chief, M. Lenormand, had been unmasked (by Oberleutnant von Keller, of course) as that notorious criminal Arsène Lupin. A general alarm should be sent out at once for his capture. Meanwhile the Oberleutnant had secured the services of an invaluable traitor who could reveal all the facts and names of the Underground, and had trapped an American spy, the nature of whose mission one might surmise.

Colonel Grimmhausen was pleased. He said this was but brave. And then he asked, "The traitor. The American. You have them there?"

"Colonel Linnaus has undertaken their questioning himself, in a manner contrary to regulations. If the Colonel would authorize me —"

"Colonel who?"

"Linnaus."

"Don't know him. Where did he come from?"

"He — Will the Colonel hold the

line a moment? — Yes?"

The guard heiled and said, "Colonel Linnaus asked me to give the Lieutenant this message."

Keller slit open the note and looked at the brief text and list of names.

"Shouldn't let valuable men like that out of your sight, Keller," Colonel Grimmhausen was growling into the phone. "Hello? Hello? Are you there, Keller?"

But Keller did not answer. He was staring at the message, which read:

Arsène Lupin was always fond of the anagrammatic nom de guerre.

Among his anagrams are Paul Sernine,⁵ Luis Perenna,⁶ and

Your servant,

PEER LINNAUS.

⁵ Maurice Leblanc's 813; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1911, first U. S. edition, orange cloth.

⁶ Maurice Leblanc's THE TEETH OF THE TIGER; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1914, first U. S. edition, dark blue pictorial cloth.



The first book of detective stories published on this planet was Edgar Allan Poe's TALES, which appeared in 1845 and contained the great Dupin trilogy. Incredible as it may seem today, Poe's experiments in fictional ratiocination fell on deaf ears: they were not popular with contemporary readers and they failed to impress contemporary writers. For consider: in the seventeen years that followed the first edition of Poe's TALES, not a single book was published in the United States that contained a detective story!

In the eighteenth year A.P. (After Poe) — in 1863 — two books finally appeared to crack the long silence. One was STRANGE STORIES OF A DETECTIVE; OR, CURIOSITIES OF CRIME, by "a retired member of the detective police," brought out by Dick & Fitzgerald of New York; the other was THE AMBER GODS AND OTHER STORIES, by Harriet Prescott (Spofford), issued by Ticknor and Fields of Boston, and containing one detective story called "In a Cellar." Two years later, in 1865, Dick & Fitzgerald published LEAVES FROM THE NOTE-BOOK OF A NEW YORK DETECTIVE: THE PRIVATE RECORD OF J.B., written by a Dr. John B. Williams, and containing no less than 22 exploits of detective James Brampton. This book has barely survived the years — have you ever even heard of sleuth James Brampton?

Three volumes in 20 years! Indeed, it may be said that the detective story was born with Poe and almost died with him.

In London the seed of Poe's noble experiment took firmer root, sprouted, and bore more abundant fruit. Jolted by the appearance in 1850 of four police articles in "Household Words," a magazine edited by Charles Dickens, English writers heard the knock of Opportunity on their door; for nearly half a century (1850-1890), they spewed forth a spate of detective "reminiscences." As John Carter has pointed out, most of these so-called real-life "diaries" were thinly disguised fiction, written by anonymous and pseudonymous hacks of the day. Immensely popular and literally read to death, these "revelations" vanished into limbo: less than half a hundred different titles remain with us. The survivors include the work of "Waters" (Thomas Russell), Andrew Forrester, Jr., Charles Martel (Thomas Delf), Alfred Hughes, and a few others. Rare today and extremely desirable for historical and collectival reasons, they are nevertheless a purple patch on the corpus detectivus.

But during the 50s and 60s in the United States there was no corresponding flood of pseudo "memoirs." Over here the "revelations" were to come later — in our lush Dime Novel Era; the first Dime Novel detective, Old Sleuth, did not appear until 1872. From 1845 to 1862 the American detective story lapsed (to coin a word) into bibliovion. In all those seventeen years not a single book of detective stories achieved the

immortality of cloth, wrappers, or pictorial boards. But what about the many "household" magazines that flourished so romantically in this period? Surely there must have been at least occasional appearances of the detective story in these embryonic "Females' Home Companions"?

*Working on this theory, your Editor determined to unearth a sample of the detective story as it was written between 1845 and 1862 — and at long last we found one! Here, with an appropriate ta-ra, is a slightly condensed version of "The Garnet Ring," by one M. Lindsay. It comes, foxed by the years, from Ballou's "Dollar Monthly Magazine" (slogan: *The Cheapest Magazine in the World*), published in Boston, issue of May 1861.*

Reader, peruse and compare. Compare this detective short story, vintage 1861, with the highly developed modern form which we take so much for granted these days that we are indifferent to its remarkable excellences. Only by going back into the past, into those vaunted "good old days," can we realize fully how superb in technique, how rich in imagination, are the offerings of our Hammetts, our Carrs, our Chestertons, our Christies, our Sayerses, in these "the good new days."

Poe, the Great Father of us all, died in 1849. He could not have read "The Garnet Ring." Had he lived long enough to stumble on it, he would have wept melancholy tears. But if in some celestial cottage Poe has been following the careers of Uncle Abner, Father Brown, Sam Spade, Dr. Gideon Fell, and all the others we take too much for granted, he will not regret having invented what is now the most fabulous literary form in the history of man's eternal search for les mots justes.

THE GARNET RING

by M. LINDSAY

DURING the first year of my practice as an attorney, clients and cases were so few with me, that I found it an agreeable change from the dullness of an almost unfurnished and unfrequented back office, to visit the court rooms, where I not only became familiar with the usages, arts and means of success employed by skilful lawyers, but where I could see human

nature in its perplexities and struggles, its feebleness and power, exciting in me an interest and sympathy that the drama has never equalled.

One freezing morning during the first week of December, my office having been wholly innocent for the season of all artificial warmth, was too cold and cheerless to be endured any longer. It was enough to quench the

light of hope and fire of courage in the most hot-headed and enthusiastic young man, so I determined to leave it for a while. I took down from its hook my old overcoat, the ever ready and unflinching friend of two or three winters, which, regardless of its dignity as an outsider, had never shrunk from the duties of frock-coat, dressing-gown, sick-gown and bedclothes. But alas! on this fireless cold morning, when it would have been so grateful to my poor heart and poorer purse to have found it transformed into one of the thickest beavers, fur-lined and fur trimmed, invincible to the fiercest northwester, it looked to me, spite of my old attachment to it, and my gratitude for its services, it looked quite *used up*, brown and rusty, thin and threadbare; its collar sadly soiled, its button-holes rent, its buttons lonesome, no two standing together.

I hurried away to the police courtroom, where the hopeless and frantic agony of crime makes us feel ourselves fortunate in innocence, however else unfortunate.

As I entered, a girl was put on trial for larceny; a common case, as that stated: yet I saw something in my first glance at her that made me forget lack of clients, cheerless office and tell-tale overcoat. She was about eighteen; fair and fresh-looking; with soft light hair brushed neatly over her ears; large blue eyes, the lids very much swollen by crying; and small, unmarked features. She was clad in a dark blue merino dress and a plain white collar. I felt that there was un-

doubtedly something wrong in the case; that decent looking young person, so neat and proper in dress, did not belong in a prisoner's dock.

I watched her and watched the trial. The clerk read the indictment. The girl stood up and heard herself, Selina White, charged with stealing a shawl and dress, the property of one Mary Wilson. The tears rolling in streams down her cheeks, and her voice scarcely audible from emotion, she pleaded "not guilty."

The first witness was the policeman who arrested her. His testimony amounted to nothing more than that he had found the clothes alleged to have been stolen in a carpet-bag marked with the prisoner's name, and claimed by her. The prisoner was told by the judge, whose sympathy she had evidently enlisted, that it was proper for her to ask any questions bearing on the case, and I now perceived that she had no one to defend her, or give her special advice and aid. She availed herself of the privilege with which the judge had made her acquainted, and endeavored to draw from the officer the admission that she had shown more surprise when the stolen articles were found in her carpet-bag than any one else present, but in this she failed. He was altogether incommunicative and evasive in his answers to her.

One Mary Wilson testified to the loss of some clothes which she described; some garments were shown her which she identified. In answer to questions she stated that they had been lying in a trunk; that she had not

laid eyes on them for three months or more till she found them in the prisoner's carpet-bag, and that one Mary Murray had suggested her looking there for them.

Mary Murray was now called. She was a very bold girl, showy in dress and airy in manners. Her fingers were loaded with cheap rings, the most conspicuous of which was a large garnet. While the stolen garments were being shown, I had observed a young man crowd as far forward as he could get to look at them. My eyes happened to be on him when he first caught sight of the witness's rings, and the expression which then covered his face excited my interest scarcely less than that of the prisoner had done. I approached him and inquired, "Do you know anything of this case?"

"Not much," he answered, coloring deeply.

"If you know anything that can be brought to bear in favor of the prisoner tell me forthwith," I said, "for she is innocent looking and I am afraid things will go hard with her."

"She never stole them things," he said.

"They were found in her possession; that is strong legal proof, and I am afraid it will decide the case against her."

"Are you *her* lawyer?" he asked.

"I am now going to offer to defend her; if you can tell me anything, there is not a moment to lose."

"Well, then, some of the same fuzz and trimmings that's on them stolen clothes is on this girl on the stand."

"Is that so? Are you sure?"

"Sure as can be. Then I know that big ring on her forefinger as well as I know my hand."

"Do you?"

"I'd swear to it."

"Well, we'll give you a chance to. What is your name?"

"Miles Allen."

"Keep on hand and we'll take care of this poor girl, if we can."

I sent up a line to the judge, in which I offered to defend the prisoner. He announced this fact, I took a seat beside her, and the trial went on. The interview with Allen and the note to the judge had prevented me from hearing much of Mary Murray's testimony; but the prisoner seemed to have lost nothing of it. She questioned her closely as to their personal relations, and from the answers she drew out, it was evident that Selina's pretty face had excited considerable admiration in a young man who boarded at Mrs. Wilson's, and whom Mary Murray chose to consider her beau; that Mary had shown ill-will towards Selina on making this discovery, and had even uttered a few threats for her warning. I permitted the prisoner to elicit these facts without interruption, and I must acknowledge she did it with a tact which surprised me, and which I could ascribe only to strong woman-wit quickened and urged on by the extremity of her circumstances. Mary Murray was leaving, when I detained her for further examination.

"Have you any employment?" I inquired.

She answered in the affirmative.

"What is it?"

"Cap-making."

"Do you work at the shop, or at your own lodgings?"

"Sometimes at the shop, and sometimes at my lodgings."

"Where have you worked during the last week?"

"At my lodgings."

"What kind of caps do you make?"

"Plush."

"Of what color?"

"Mostly brown."

"Was that bit of brown plush now hanging to your shawl-fringe from the caps?"

The witness did not answer, but impatiently catching up the end of her shawl, shook off the shred.

I turned to the judge. "Will your honor direct that that shred be secured? I shall have something to do with it."

It was picked up and handed to the clerk.

Mary Murray was still on the stand. I resumed my questions. "You board in the same house with Selina White?"

"Yes."

"Was Selina ever in your room?"

"No; she never was; I never had anything to do with her."

"Were you ever in Selina's room?"

"Not while she had it; except the day the policeman searched it."

"Did you then handle the clothes found in the carpet-bag?"

"No; the policeman allowed no one to touch them."

"When did you last see Mrs. Wilson

wear the delaine dress shown here?"

"I can't tell exactly; not for some months."

"Has it been in your room among the plush caps to your knowledge?"

"No, sir."

Mary Murray was dismissed.

I now called Miles Allen. At mention of this name, the little girl at my side started forward as if she had received an electric shock, then sank back and held her hands tightly together as if she was struggling with some powerful feeling. She looked steadily at this witness as she had done at those who preceded him, but her color kept coming and going, and she was excited and anxious. Miles Allen answered to his name and employment; he was a carpenter; came from New Jersey; had been here about six months.

"Do you know the prisoner?" I asked.

The girl's eyes were full of tears, but there was a look of hope, almost of triumph, on her face as he bluntly answered, "Yes, sir, I do."

"How long have you known her?"

"Ever since she was born. And I know her too well to believe she's a thief."

"Never mind your opinion of her character now," said the judge. "Do you know anything about this case?"

"I know that there's the same fuzz on the clothes they say Selina stole, as was hanging to that gay girl's shawl."

"Do you know the witness, Mary Murray?" I asked.

"No."

"Do you know the ring she wore on her finger this morning?"

"Yes, sir," with emphasis.

"What do you know about it?"

"I owned that ring once myself, and Selina White owns it now, for I give it to her, and she ain't the girl to give it away."

"How did you recognize it?"

"I'd know it anywhere as soon as I'd set my eyes on't; but if you're a mind to, I'll tell you how *anybody* may know that that ring don't belong to the girl that's got it. Inside on't you'll find my name 'Miles Allen' pretty plain and a little something else."

"Have you anything further to tell us with regard to this case?"

"Only that the gay girl proved plain that she never know'd or loved Selina enough to make her give her the ring, and so I'd like to ask how'd she get it? and then who's the thief?"

"Those points will be settled at a proper time," said the judge, and at my request he ordered Mary Murray to be re-called. She appeared, quite red with anger. I examined her as to where she obtained the garnet ring, and as I anticipated received only unsatisfactory and contradictory answers. The judge requested her to remove it from her finger. She refused. An officer in attendance soon relieved her of the ornament which he handed up to the bench. The judge looked at it carefully, and then read from the inside, "Miles Allen. To the girl I love best."

There was a general titter through the courtroom. I glanced at Miles.

He was smiling and blushing, but showed no shame or embarrassment. It was plain that he thought it no unmanly thing to give a ring to the girl he loved best.

"Now," said the judge, turning to the clerk, "I think we will look at those stolen clothes again." They were produced, and on being examined, there was found fastened to some bead trimming which ornamented the dress a bit of brown plush, the same in shade and fabric with that the clerk had secured. In the meantime an officer had returned from Mary Murray's lodgings (where he had gone at my suggestion) with a brown plush cap, which she had lately finished, and on comparison it was found that its material was the same with the shreds in court.

The testimony was now all in, and I rose to make the defence. I went over the evidence and showed that there was nothing against the prisoner but the one fact of possession, always a strong one, I admitted, but in this case outweighed by the too apparent malice and guilt of the girl Murray, who had not only hated and plotted to ruin her, but had stolen from her herself. In proof of this, I alluded to her jealousy, her threats, and her too great readiness in throwing suspicion upon Selina; I dwelt upon the circumstance that a bit of plush which appeared to be a cutting from Mary Murray's work was found upon the stolen dress although it had been packed away for a long time previous to being found in the prisoner's pos-

session. It had not been shown that Selina White ever had any plush or had ever been in Mary Murray's room to obtain it. "Then how," I asked, "did this detective shred find an opportunity to fasten itself upon the dress in a sudden transit from its owner's trunk to a stranger's traveling-bag? Perhaps," I suggested, "Mary Murray might tell us. She had a similar shred attached to her shawl, and is it not possible, nay probable, that she could tell how and where its fellow became attached to the trimming of the stolen dress? Might it not have been caught in a temporary lodgment in her room, or by contact with her own clothes? How else?" In view of all the circumstances proved, it was easier to believe that Mary Murray had stolen the clothes and then put them in Selina White's carpet-bag in order to ruin her than that Selina had stolen them.

I then touched upon the garnet ring, showing that it undoubtedly belonged to the prisoner, and had been taken from her carpet-bag when the stolen articles had been deposited there. The judge whispered a moment with one of the officers near him; then rose and pronounced Selina White innocent of the charge preferred against her. There was a loud burst of applause. I took Selina's little cold hand in mine and told her she had better leave with me at once. We had just reached the door when Miles Allen joined us, shaking hands and laughing and talking so fast that one

could hardly understand him. I learned this, however, that he and Selina loved each other too well to be far separated; that Selina had come to get work near Miles at his suggestion; that, owing to a series of blunders not so easily explained as frequently met with, she had failed to find him on her arrival, but that certain of meeting him soon she had spent her time in looking for employment till she was arrested for theft and lodged in jail. Miles declared himself to have been surprised beyond expression when on going to the court-room to make complaint of some wrong done to himself, he saw the very "girl he loved best" in the dock on trial.

But the lovers were happy now. And so was I, notwithstanding my old overcoat. I don't know whether or not Miles Allen noticed that I was thinly clad and that spite of a strong effort of will, I showed great sensitiveness to the cold on reaching the outer air, but this I know, that the warm-hearted fellow *gave* into my hand (I don't say *paid* for of course I never charged him or Selina anything) the price of one of the very best overcoats I ever wore.

There may be some who are desirous to know whatever more I can tell them about the garnet ring. I will therefore add that soon after the trial the morning papers reported Mary Murray to have been convicted of stealing a ring and fined twenty dollars, failing to pay which, she was sent to jail.

We welcome the first appearance in EQMM of Baynard Kendrick whose Captain Duncan Maclain is easily the best-known blind detective on the contemporary scene — a worthy successor to Ernest Bramah's Max Carrados, the first and most famous of all blind sleuths. Captain Maclain, you'll remember, crashed Hollywood in a Class A picture — "Eyes in the Dark," starring Edward Arnold as the blind detective whose assistant was a Seeing Eye dog.

Unfortunately Mr. Kendrick has never written a short story about Captain Maclain. Perhaps one of these days . . . But he has written shorts about Cliff Chandler who as a manhunting "type" is even more unusual than Captain Maclain. Indeed Cliff Chandler may actually be unique — your Editor knows of no other detective in fiction who specializes in protecting the welfare of transatlantic passengers on a giant ocean liner. Cliff Chandler is a ship's detective. Odd? Not a bit: if a hotel can have a house detective, why not a ship, which is a hotel afloat.

Tired? Need a vacation? We prescribe an exhilarating trip on the S. S. Moriander . . .

DEATH AT THE PORTHOLE

by BAYNARD KENDRICK

CLIFF CHANDLER, slim and debonair from crisp black hair to patent-leather pumps, stopped at the door of the Gold Lounge and looked inside. A delightful odor of expensive perfume drifted out into the corridor. Mingled with it was the soft laughter of many women.

The combination appealed to Cliff. In his capacity as ship's detective of the luxurious *S. S. Moriander*, he was beginning to feel that life was unbearably dull. She was on her tenth voyage from Southampton to New York, and even the usual run of petty cardsharps seemed to have deserted her.

Of course you couldn't expect trouble every time the *Moriander* shoved her flaring prow out into the Atlantic, but Cliff thrived on excite-

ment. The lure of it had taken him into a private agency after college. There, his quick grasp of languages, his natural good breeding, and his hard common sense had rapidly carried him to the top. After six exciting years abroad he found himself comfortably ensconced guarding the passengers' welfare on one of the largest ships afloat.

He leaned against the door of the Gold Lounge and looked inside. A long table had been set up near the center of the lounge. It was covered with a cloth of shimmering gold texture and topped with an array of cut-glass bottles and small ornate boxes of various shapes and sizes.

Presiding over the display was a dapper little Frenchman. Cliff recognized him from a previous trip as

M. Jean Martone, manufacturer extraordinary of a select line of cosmetics. Gurgling enthusiastically over his wares were a dozen or more of the best-looking women on board.

As Cliff watched, M. Martone came around from behind the table to stand in front of a modishly gowned girl. She was touching powder to her cheeks, aided by a small mirror in a gold vanity. The Frenchman cocked his head to one side, and gave vent to a couple of disapproving clucks.

"Non! Non! Non! Mademoiselle. Not that shade, I beg of you! It is too dark, by far!" With a quick motion he reached for an open box on the table, and applied a different shade to her cheeks, wielding the tiny powder rag with a delicate touch. "Voilà!" He stepped back to regard his handiwork, twisting a waist so slender that Cliff suspected corsets under the French-cut evening clothes.

A quick flush colored the girl's face at the Frenchman's familiarity. With lifted chin she turned and started from the lounge. As she faced Cliff, he suddenly remembered that he had seen her once before. It had only been a brief glimpse in Clonnet's jewelry shop in Paris, but the girl wasn't a type easily forgotten. Her white evening gown was fitted close. Under its smooth embrace her rounded figure was slim and graceful.

Cliff followed her toward the dining saloon. It was no part of his duties to police the passengers in social pastimes, but the girl had a winsomeness which was appealing.

Several men looked up from a table in the corner. The girl passed them by unseeingly and followed the steward to a small table on the far side of the room. Cliff was pleasantly surprised to see that it was his table, too; for the rest of the voyage they would eat together, at least. Two minutes later he had introduced himself.

The girl's name was Elsa Graves. She gave Cliff the kind of handclasp he liked, and said: "I'm such a dope at traveling. I'm scared to speak to people — and scared to tell them to go away when they speak to me."

"If you're traveling alone, I'd like to apply for the position of guardian for the voyage." Cliff gave her his disarming smile.

Her deep blue eyes, watchful at first, softened as she estimated the set of Cliff's shoulders and the cut of his evening clothes. Her answering smile started in her eyes and worked down to disclose even white teeth between parted red lips.

"That may be quite an order, Mr. Chandler, unless you can persuade this ship to stand on its own feet and behave!"

"You've been ill?" he asked sympathetically.

"Ill?" She wrinkled her nose delightfully. "For two days I've been trying to die in 115. I'm rooming with a French girl named Dorette Maupin. She's a dear. Only the fact that she's been worse than I have has helped me to survive. We've shared our lemon juice and —"

"You're in stateroom 115?" Cliff

asked, surprised. "We're neighbors. I'm in 114, right across the hall."

"I know!" Elsa laughed. "I spied on you once — when you came down last night. I hoped you'd be a motherly old soul who could look in on me if I were ill. I hated you desperately when you turned out to be a man."

"I trust that's diminished this evening — with the storm."

"This evening," said Elsa, "I've reached a point where I can enjoy my dinner."

Cliff signaled the steward, gave the order, and turned back to the girl. She was carrying a gold-trimmed white handbag. As Cliff turned back, she held it open in her hand and was busy with lipstick, using the open top of the bag for a mirror. Unexpectedly she raised her eyes and saw him watching her.

Cliff smiled quickly, but he was glad the steward appeared just then and saved his making any remark. Unless he was badly mistaken, the delightful Elsa Graves was packing a gun.

They talked desultorily over their soup, and Cliff's efforts failed to get him much information. All they brought forth was that she had been in Paris for two years studying art and was on her way home to some small town in the Middle West.

She was chattering on about her experience in the art schools when shouts from the deck outside brought them both to their feet.

"What is it?" Elsa asked, and briefly

her face was drawn with fear.

"You have nerves," Cliff told her. "You'd better stay right here. It's probably just a scuffle in the Second Class on the deck below. I'll find out and report if it's really exciting."

He stepped outside and was hurrying toward a group of passengers near the rail when the small form of a girl detached itself from the crowd and bumped violently into him.

Momentarily he stared down into troubled eyes, searching an olive-skinned piquant face, old beyond its years. The light from the saloon window obliquely touched over-red lips and errant blue-black hair.

"Pardon, M'sieu'. He fell overboard!" Her worried eyes swept Cliff's face. "I saw him run to the rail and I turned away. I thought him ill, M'sieu' — seasick. I had no wish to embarrass him. I walked part way down the deck — then I heard a yell. When I turned around, he was falling over the edge. I screamed for help. Oh, M'sieu', will they find him?"

Her question was so marked with anxiety that Cliff asked quickly, "Do you know him?"

"I have never seen him before. Oh, what's that?" She pointed toward the soft blackness of the sea.

The rhythmic cadence of the *Moriander's* turbines had died away while they were talking. On the port side, slipping swiftly astern, a splash of crimson fire dyed the ocean's hills and dales dull red.

"It's a flare," Cliff explained. "It's attached to a life ring. If the man's

still alive and can swim, they'll pick him up shortly. They're lowering a boat now."

"Oh, I am so relieve' for him," she breathed. "Now — I must go below. Thank you, M'sieu', for your kindness."

Cliff lingered to watch the heavy surfboat hauled up the side, and a limp bedraggled bundle of black and white removed from it. Then he turned back to the dining saloon.

"A man fell overboard," he reported gravely. "Yes, he was rescued. And who do you think it was? Our friend, M. Martone, the cosmetician."

"Poor fellow," Elsa murmured. "I don't like him — but he's such a helpless little man."

"All of us are rather helpless," Cliff said soberly, "when we're alone in the middle of the ocean."

They finished dinner, listened to the orchestra, and later sat through a movie in the lounge. The wind had abated somewhat when they went below after a late turn on deck.

Elsa offered her hand before she went into 115. "You're a swell guardian," she said. "Do try to make the weather respect your authority tomorrow."

"I'll see to it!" Cliff assured her. "I'm certainly not going to let it keep my ward out of circulation. Good night."

It was quarter to three by the luminous hands of his watch when he was roused by a tapping on his door. He sat up and swung his feet to the

floor. Clammy wetness made him draw them quickly up and switch on the reading light to find his slippers. Wisps of rain, which had started since he retired, were blowing in through the open port.

Still almost half-asleep, he searched around for his dressing gown. The tapping on the door continued, timid, but more insistent — conveying a hint of dread and fear by its stealthy staccato.

Elsa Graves was standing in the passageway pressed close to his door. Its unexpected opening flung her into the room. Cliff had a glimpse of dainty bare feet and black pajamas.

"Dorette!" she blurted out. "In there — in our cabin — dead! Dead — Cliff!"

"Listen to me, Elsa!" His voice was kind, but commanding enough to stave off her threatened hysterics. "You wait here. I'll be back shortly — and then you'll have to talk. Now try to compose yourself."

When he felt she was calm enough to be left alone, he stepped across the hallway to 115, closed the door and leaned against it, gazing down at the pajama-clad body of the girl he had met on deck so short a time before.

Death always saddened Cliff Chandler — and Dorette Maupin was far too young to die. Yet without its heavy make-up her face appeared older than it had on deck. Older and harder.

Cliff knelt down beside her and passed his hand over her dark, carefully waved hair. For a second or two

he squatted motionless, staring intently at his outstretched palm. Slowly he rubbed it down the side of his bathrobe, got to his feet, and turned his eyes toward the porthole.

The heavy, brassbound, circular glass was down, closed, but swinging loose and unfastened. Above it was a strong brass hook suspended from the ceiling — used to hold it up for ventilation. Quickly he turned back to the lifeless form beside him, lifting it slightly. There was no doubt about it. At the nape of the neck Dorette Maupin's hair was wet.

Cliff bit down tightly on his lower lip. Across the back of the dead girl's slender neck was an ugly bruise. Clotted blood seeped out from one side of it. Gently Cliff placed a hand on each side of her face and moved her head from side to side. He knew then why the head had lolled so limply when he raised the body. Dorette Maupin was dead with a broken neck.

He covered the body with a blanket, then straightened up and turned his attention to the cabin.

Both beds were mussed. On the head of one hung a pink net sleeping cap, one of those wisps women wear at night to protect their waves. Cliff touched it with a finger — it was slightly damp. On a chair were intimate feminine garments — and more on the lounge under the porthole.

Working swiftly, Cliff found a traveling bag with the initials "D. M." It yielded an identifying passport and more clothes. Under the chic

Paris underwear which cascaded from the traveling bag was an unopened box of face powder bearing the label "Chez Martone."

It was an ornate oval box, cellophane-wrapped and bright with printed flowers. Cliff carried it with him when he locked the door of 115 and stepped across the corridor to his own stateroom.

Elsa Graves was just where he had left her — sitting disconsolately on the lounge. He gave her hand a reassuring pat and spoke quietly.

"There are some things I must know without delay. I told you my name — but I didn't tell you this. I'm a detective employed by this line."

She paled.

"You're in a jam, Elsa," he continued, "but I can help you if you'll tell me the truth. Dorette Maupin was murdered."

"That's preposterous — impossible."

"Is it?" Cliff lighted a cigarette and asked through the smoke, "Did you know Dorette Maupin before you came on board?"

Elsa shook her head, and tears crept into her eyes again. "No. Accommodations were scarce. I had to share a cabin."

Friendliness left Cliff Chandler's voice. "That's a lie. You were carrying a gun in your handbag tonight, Elsa Graves. I checked up on you with the purser. You deliberately asked for half of 115. Now you're deliberately asking for trouble. You're facing a nasty murder. Isn't it time

to think fast and talk straight?"

"I guess you're on the level," Elsa said slowly. She leaned toward Cliff. "I did take that cabin with Dorette Maupin. You're a detective. So am I. Dorette Maupin was a diamond smuggler."

"And you are —" Cliff broke off, studying the box of powder in his hand.

"An employee of Clonnet et Cie, the Paris jewelers. A steady stream of uncut diamonds has been getting by the U. S. Customs — diamonds bought from Clonnet. I've traced two previous purchases indirectly to Monsieur Martone. Clonnet, like most of the fine houses, is determined to stamp out the smuggling of its gems."

Cliff gave a low whistle. "I was wondering about this extra box of powder in Dorette's suitcase. I noticed another one just like it in your cabin. Is that yours?"

Elsa shook her head. "It's Dorette's, too. And there's no doubt, Cliff," she declared earnestly, "that Dorette and Martone were working together. He makes lots of crossings taking samples of powder to the United States —"

Cliff's fingers swiftly dug under the cellophane wrapper of the powder box and tore it loose. The opened lid disclosed an inner wrapping of brittle paper. Cliff ripped it off while Elsa bent over to watch.

He spread a copy of the ship's newspaper and carefully dumped out the sweet pinkish contents of the box. Cliff smoothed it out thinly, then

turned his attention to the box again. There was an inner container of thin pasteboard which came away with a little effort. Underneath, wrapped in fine tissue, was a tiny stone.

Elsa took it from him and rolled it around on her palm.

"So that's how they've been running them in. I think a thorough search of M. Martone's suite might not be a waste of time."

Cliff was silent a moment, thinking of Dorette Maupin's frightened face when she had collided with him on deck a few hours before. "There are some things I must know, Elsa. Think hard. Was Dorette asleep when you came down with me tonight?"

"I don't believe so, but I'm not sure. She stirred restlessly — that was all."

"Was she wearing a sleeping cap in bed?"

She paused, thinking. "A pink net one, I believe."

"Was the porthole open when you went to bed?"

"Yes. It wasn't raining then."

"Now think, Elsa. This is vital. Was the porthole open when you left your room to call me a few minutes ago?"

"It was open when I found —" She stared at him wildly. "Don't look at me like that, Cliff. I know what you're thinking — that nobody would stop to close a porthole with a dead girl on the floor."

"Did you?"

"I didn't know she was dead! Listen, Cliff. I heard her fall. It woke me up

and I called — but she didn't answer. When I switched on the light she was lying there on the floor. I was half-asleep and thought she was ill. The rain was blowing in the porthole, so I unhooked it and let it down. Then I started to lift her into bed and saw there was something wrong." Her voice was husky, horrified, her cheeks white.

"Quit worrying," Cliff advised her. "Let me do that. They put M. Martone in the ship's infirmary after his ducking tonight. It's a good time to pay his suite a visit."

"But if he's in the infirmary —"

"He couldn't very well have killed that girl in there," Cliff concluded. "Yet he's public suspect No. 1. I met Dorette on deck during the excitement tonight. She was the only witness to Martone's ducking. If he and Dorette had quarreled — and she had pushed him overboard —"

"What makes you think that?"

"She was frightened and unstrung when I met her. But I can tell you more after I take a look through his things."

He put on slacks and a sports shirt over his pajamas. Elsa watched as he strapped a .38 under his arm. He slipped into a light overcoat and said, "I think you'd better wait in here."

"I certainly will not," she protested. "If you'll let me back into 115, I'll get into some clothes. I'm coming along!"

Cliff took Elsa's arm when they came out onto the broad promenade of "A" deck and guided her to a large

window. There he stopped, peering through slightly opened slats of a Venetian blind into a dimly lighted room.

"First," he said, "we'll locate Martone. This is the infirmary. Wait here. I'm going to speak to the night orderly."

He went inside, walked down a short narrow passage to a small office, but the orderly was not in sight. Cliff stepped cautiously into the ward.

The single occupant seemed to be sleeping quietly. Walking lightly, Cliff approached close enough to the bed to identify M. Martone. He was about to leave to rejoin Elsa when something unusual caught his eye. Each bed in the ward was flanked by a square table and all of the tables except one were topped with heavy squares of thick plate glass.

The table from which the glass was missing was nearest the door. Cliff looked at it thoughtfully. He was thinking of the nasty cut and bruise on the back of Dorette Maupin's soft neck.

He found Elsa Graves leaning against the rail staring down into the swirling black water below. Pancakes of light, marking the portholes of the few late-reading passengers, dotted the side of the *Moriander*. Two of the lighted ports, just below where they were standing, held Cliff's attention like the yellow eyes of some evil animal.

"Look, Elsa," he whispered, pointing, "those lights just underneath us are in my stateroom and yours. Can

you think of any way in which Dor-ette might have been killed — by someone standing right here?"

"Good heavens, Cliff!" She turned toward him. "You think something was dropped from here? But why would she put her head out of the porthole?"

"She might have been tricked into it."

"Yes, that's possible, but hard to prove." Hopelessness was in her tone.

"I doubt if it can be proved," said Cliff. "But sometimes the cleverest murderer will give himself away. Let's take a run down to Martone's suite."

Cliff's private passkey admitted them. His quick fingers pushed down the switch by the door. Two pink-shaded lamps glowed into life, revealing the long table he had seen earlier in the Gold Lounge.

The samples were set out on it in orderly array. Obviously M. Martone had returned to his cabin and arranged it before the trip on deck which had nearly been his last. The door to an inner stateroom was slightly ajar.

Cliff crossed the sitting-room and pushed the door wide, disclosing a bedroom containing two expensive wardrobe trunks.

"We can look around in there later," he told Elsa. "Right now I want to see about that powder. I don't imagine the opened sample boxes will show much. Let's have a look at this stack of unopened ones first."

Feverishly they set to work opening

boxes and emptying powder. At one end of the gold cloth a small pile of uncut diamonds began to grow.

There were thirty diamonds in the pile, and nearly a hundred empty boxes on the floor, when Elsa said: "I think that's all."

She straightened up from the table. As she did so Cliff caught the expression on her face. Forewarned by her dawning look of terror he cautiously turned around.

Jean Martone, slender as a girl, in striped silk pajamas, was leaning against the side of the bedroom door. He was smiling, but the smile stopped short of his eyes. In his right hand, resting nonchalantly against his hip, was an automatic pistol.

There was a quality about the effeminate Frenchman which was implacable as death itself. His utter lack of excitement, the skillful ease with which he nursed the automatic, were forcible proofs that Jean Martone was a killer. Cliff decided without hesitation that any rash move was out of the question. Martone would shoot, accurately and fast.

"Ah! The so charming mademoiselle who so persistently uses the wrong shade of powder!" Martone's gaze moved languidly from Elsa to Cliff. "I am force' to ask your help, Mademoiselle. You will take the cords from the window curtains and tie this impetuous monsieur, who has wasted ten thousand francs' worth of my powder."

"It's a good bluff, Martone, but I already know you." Cliff measured

his chances. "I know that you and Dorette Maupin were working together. I know you quarreled with her — and that she pushed you overboard tonight. I know how you sneaked out of the infirmary and killed her less than two hours ago."

"Your imagination, Monsieur, it is sublime!" Martone's slim body was erect in the doorway. "You will hurry Mademoiselle." Moving slowly, as though in a daze, Elsa began to remove the cords from the heavy silk portieres at the windows.

"You took the plate-glass top from a table in the infirmary," Cliff went on flatly. "Then, when the orderly went to his supper, you sneaked out onto the deserted promenade deck. Leaning over the rail you lowered something attached to a string, and let it tap against the porthole of 115. When Dorette Maupin, wakeful and upset, reached for it, you pulled it away. Then she did what you hoped for — stuck her head out of the porthole to see what was going on. It wasn't hard, Martone, to drop that heavy glass table-top down on the back of her neck!"

Elsa was coming toward him, the heavy cords dangling from her hand. "Hold out your wrists, Monsieur," said Martone, without a change of voice.

Cliff stood rigid, his back toward the Frenchman. Elsa's slim hand was creeping under his coat. Slowly he extended his wrists, and at the same moment Martone guessed what the girl was up to.

Martone's automatic cracked, but its sound was lost in the blast of Cliff's own .38 which Elsa snatched from under Cliff's arm and fired twice. When he swung around M. Martone was dead on the floor with a bullet between his eyes.

"You know," said Elsa, "it's a crying shame to waste all that beautiful powder. I think I'll collect it and take it home with me. I'll never have to buy any more."

Cliff divided his time the following day between phoning the New York and Paris police, messing about with test tubes in Dr. Knott's private laboratory, and arranging a place on the top deck where he and Elsa could spend a quiet evening.

They were stretched out in deck chairs in a sheltered spot between two lifeboats when Cliff reached out through the darkness and secured her slim hand. "This is one of the privileges of a ship's detective," he said with a note of affection.

"Holding the passengers' hands?"

"No." He gave a quick laugh. "Using the top deck, forbidden to passengers."

She offered no resistance. "You're a handsome devil, Cliff Chandler — and a smart one. I still don't see how you solved the way Dorette was killed."

"That was easy," he assured her, "compared to some of the things I've had to work out today."

"Today?"

"Listen, Elsa. The purser appraised

those diamonds we found last night. The duty on the entire lot is only \$2,500."

For a moment he was silent, then he said, "Don't you think \$2,500 is a small amount to force Martone into a murder?"

"I thought they quarreled — and he killed her because she pushed him overboard."

"I changed my mind today. Martone fell overboard, Elsa — fell overboard in an attempt he made to push Dorette into the sea. She was a strong girl, on guard, and too quick for him. His stake was high — a quarter of a million dollars —"

"You found more gems?"

"Those diamonds were a plant, a red herring, Elsa, designed to cover the really valuable part of M. Martone's samples — the powder you collected last night and took to your cabin."

"The *loose* powder? But that's preposterous — impossible."

"You said the same thing about Dorette's being killed last night, yet it was true. I analyzed a sample of that powder. M. Martone would gladly have paid duty on smuggled diamonds — if the customs had concentrated on the diamonds and let his powder through. That product of "Chez Martone" is sixty per cent heroin!"

"Heroin," Elsa breathed. "So that's why Dorette was killed."

"Exactly," said Cliff. "Just one more thing and I'm through. You said that Dorette was wearing her pink net sleeping cap in bed — yet she

didn't have it on when you found her on the floor?"

"That's right."

"Then she must have been getting dressed for some reason. Otherwise, why would she have removed the cap which she wore to protect her hair?"

Elsa sat up slightly in her chair and leaned closer to him. Her hand in his had grown cold. "Do you think she had planned to go up to the infirmary and kill Martone? Just as she took off her cap she saw something dangling in front of her porthole. She stuck out her head and —"

"That's perfect," said Cliff, "except for one thing. When I went into your cabin and examined the room, Dorette Maupin's pink sleeping cap, hanging away from the porthole on the head of the bed, was wet!"

Their chairs were close to the edge of the top deck, without a protective rail. Elsa jerked her hand loose from Cliff's hold and attacked him with the fury of a tigress. Throwing her whole weight against his chest, she shoved his light chair toward the void which marked a drop into the sea.

Cliff's powerful hands closed about her wrists. She tore one loose, scratched at his face, and pushed again. The chair slid back a few inches, then stopped, for Cliff had taken great care in the afternoon to see that it was firmly secured. From behind a nearby lifeboat three husky deckhands materialized and pinioned the frantic girl.

"You damned flatfoot!" she screamed. "You can't put this over

on me! I'll —"

Cutting into her hysterics, Cliff said calmly, "Elsa Graves, you're under arrest for the murders of Dorette Maupin, agent of the French Sûreté, and Jean Martone, your accomplice in an international traffic of narcotics!"

"Of course Martone and the Graves girl were working together," Cliff told Captain Jordan a short while later. "They were running heroin in the 'Chez Martone' powder, when they discovered that Dorette Maupin of the French Sûreté was on their trail."

"And the diamonds?"

"Were a screen. If anything broke badly, Martone would admit petty smuggling — and take a small rap at the worst. Who's going to bother with face powder when there are diamonds in the boxes?"

"Who, indeed?" asked Captain Jordan.

"The gentle Elsa hit on a scheme to double-cross Martone, and get rid of Dorette at the same time. Somehow she tricked Dorette into looking out of the porthole — then dropped the heavy brass-bound window of the port down on Dorette's neck.

"Then she made a mistake. She took off the dead girl's sleeping cap and hung it on the head of the bed to make it look as though Dorette was about to get dressed. That sleeping cap was wet, Captain, and so were Dorette's neck and hair, from the

rain. The girl must have had that cap on when she stuck her head out of the port and was killed — and Elsa must have taken it off her. That sewed Elsa up in the bag."

The Captain rubbed his chin. "What about the table-top missing from the infirmary? And that yarn about Martone dropping it down on Dorette's neck?"

"Hooey!" said Cliff. "That's what Elsa wanted me to think — and I'm an obliging sort of cuss when I want to please a lady. She went up to the infirmary, got that table top, and threw it overboard herself before she called me. She figured — and cleverly, too — that would hang the job on Martone. She got a nice break when Martone broke in on us searching his quarters. He thought she was still on his side. It must have been a surprise when she took my gun and shot him. She couldn't have done it if he'd been suspicious of her.

"Then she made a daring move. She took the powder which we'd dumped on the gold tablecloth. That tipped me off to the real game. You can put that powder in alcohol. The talc precipitates, and you have a nice tincture of heroin. I tried it in doctor's lab today — and the thought of it makes me very dry."

"Is that so?" said Captain Jordan, hastily moving his Scotch out of reach. "Sometime, Cliff, why don't you take a great big jump into the sea."

"Pat Hand" wrote your Editor that pending the birth of another Careful Jones exploit, he had dashed off a short-short about twenty cents' worth of cannel coal and how it played a strange role in a murder case. Here is a peep into Bagdad-on-the-Hudson's eternal "human comedy" — Second Ave. vs. Park Ave., with Nick Sforzak carrying on the O. Henry tradition.

THE ALIBI

by "PAT HAND"

HIS NAME was Nick Sforzak and he did business in a twelve-by-twelve cellar under the least appetizing looking butcher shop in all Manhattan. Nick's line was coal, firewood and ice, purveyed in small quantities and at a minute profit. He was short and chunky and the expression on his face made one think of a lost dog.

His favorite customer was Miss Martie Allen, who was young and red-headed and pretty but who, in spite of these desirable assets, was finding it hard to make a place for herself in show business. She did not hold this spot in his esteem because her business was profitable to him. Her purchases, in fact, were always small and more often than not had to be put on the cuff. It was because she was usually at home when Nick made his deliveries, being at liberty so much, and was always ready to talk to him as though he were really a human being. She called him Keed and would ask him if he thought Shicklegruber could keep the lid on much longer. She would say things like: "Keed, I'm going to set you up in business with a

shop and a truck of your own when He crashes through with a platinum circlet, which ought to be any day now," or "Lissen, if *he* doesn't get down to cases soon, you and I will run away and set ourselves up in business together in Philly or Dog Lake, Kan., or some such place."

Nick always went away chuckling. It helped a lot, for most of his customers were like Mr. Cyrus Hubbard Cleve in the next block. Mr. Cleve had been a small executive once in a large corporation and he kept saying that if the Mayor would forget about blackouts and establish compulsory municipal baths for coal merchants, it would be a better thing for the city.

One morning Nick delivered a small order of cannel coal to Martie Allen and saw that her eyes were redder even than her hair. Her one room, without bath, was littered with newspapers telling about the murder the night before of Ramsay Hames III in his Park Avenue apartment. Ramsay Hames III, she explained, had been *he* and it was certain his intentions could never have been honest, for the papers

made it clear he had been putting his chips down on a lot of numbers. One of them had rewarded his failure to produce a platinum circlet by shooting him through the head.

"He had me kidded to the ears, Nick," she said, with a gulp. "I don't think life's so hot, do you?"

She had been at liberty a much longer time than usual, but she insisted on paying him from a purse containing three one-dollar bills and eighty cents in silver. He went away feeling very sorry for her.

Two days later he felt still more sorry for her. Her name had been dragged into the case. The day after that he felt very sorry for her indeed. Detectives had taken Martie Allen away in a taxi and had booked her on a charge of murder.

Nick did not read Manhattanese very well, but he worked through the newspapers with two bulging eyes and a dirty thumb, and his heart nearly stopped with fright when he found what a strong case the police had on Martie Allen. It seemed she had visited Ramsay Hames III on the evening of the murder and had taken part in an argument which had disturbed the people in the next apartment. She claimed she had left by eight-thirty, which would have made everything all right, the doctors having fixed the time of the killing at nine-thirty or shortly thereafter. Unfortunately she could not remember what she did on leaving, except that she went home, and the doorman of Hames's Park Avenue apartment-house was sure it

was nine-thirty when she left. As no other clues had been found, it looked very bad even to Nick.

Nick did a lot of worrying about her. He also worried about his business which seemed to be falling off some. It could not fall off much, being so small to begin with. A week or so after Martie's arrest he met Mr. Cyrus Hubbard Cleve on the street and stopped him to ask why he had not been receiving any more orders.

"Sforzak," said Mr. Cleve, frowning in his minor executive manner, "the last business I put your way was a rush order for kindling wood. I did not get it until noon the next day. That's why I am no longer a customer of yours."

Nick prided himself on being prompt and businesslike in his dealings. He checked over his records to find why he had been slow in delivering the last Cleve order. It took a lot of thumbing of sheets to arrive at the reason. He had gone first, he found, to Martie Allen's apartment and had learned there about the murder, after which he had been so disturbed over the blighting of her romance he had bought a paper of his own and had read it through. This had made him late in his deliveries. He was wondering how he could square himself with Mr. Cleve when his eye happened to go back to the sheet containing the order.

Twenty minutes later the district police station was disrupted by the entrance of a highly excited Nick with Mr. Cyrus Hubbard Cleve in tow.

Mr. Cleve, collarless and in carpet slippers, did not seem to know what it was all about.

"She's not guilty, Mr. Officer, she's not guilty!" Nick kept repeating. He was waving a dirty sheet of foolscap in the air.

"Lissen," said the sergeant, shoving him back from the desk. "Who's not guilty? And who in hell are you?"

"I am Nick Sforzak, merchant, Second Avenue. Mr. Officer, see, I have system. I keep sheets at door so customers can write down orders when I'm not there. Mr. Cleve, who is prominent citizen, will swear he write his order down at quarter to nine."

"So what?" demanded the law impatiently.

"So this, Mr. Officer. It was night

of Mr. Hames's murder. Officer, please, I close always nine o'clock sharp. I swear to that. So order after Mr. Cleve's was written on sheet *between quarter to nine and nine sharp*. Can be no mistake. Here, see, plain as day."

The sergeant, beginning to feel that he might have his hands on something after all, took the sheet and studied the last two entries. He read first what the retired executive had written in his neat Spencerian hand:

C. H. Cleve, kindling wood, 25 cents worth. Don't skimp and make it snappy.

The entry beneath was in a large and sprawling hand:

Miss M. Allen. 20 cents worth cannell coal. You never skimp and you can take your time.

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Graham Greene, as you know, is the author of THIS GUN FOR HIRE and THE MINISTRY OF FEAR. It has been said that his literary preoccupation is with abnormal psychology — remember Alan Ladd in the moving picture version of THIS GUN FOR HIRE? Phyllis Bentley once wrote that Graham Greene “seems able to investigate sinister psychologies without sentimentalizing them.”

And yet the story we bring you by Graham Greene is not one of abnormal psychology at all. Quite the contrary, it illustrates an heroic form of normal psychology. Nor does this story avoid sentimentality. Quite the contrary, it illustrates an heroic form of sentimentality. It illustrates something else too — what William Rose Benét meant when he said of Mr. Greene that “no man writing today is more a master of suspense.”

“The News in English” is one of the finest secret service stories to come out of The War of Liberation.

THE NEWS IN ENGLISH

by GRAHAM GREENE

LORD HAW-HAW of Zeesen was off the air.

All over England the new voice was noticed: precise and rather lifeless, it was the voice of a typical English don.

In his first broadcast he referred to himself as a man young enough to sympathize with what he called “the resurgence of youth all over the new Germany,” and that was the reason — combined with the pedantic tone — he was at once nicknamed Dr. Funkhole.

It is the tragedy of such men that they are never alone in the world.

Old Mrs. Bishop was knitting by the fire at her house in Crowborough when young Mrs. Bishop tuned in to Zeesen. The sock was khaki: it was as if she had picked up at the point where she had dropped a stitch in 1918. The grim comfortable house stood in one of the long avenues, all

spruce and laurel and a coating of snow, which are used to nothing but the footsteps of old retired people. Young Mrs. Bishop never forgot that moment: the wind beating up across Ashdown Forest against the blacked-out window, and her mother-in-law happily knitting, and the sense of everything waiting for this moment. Then the voice came into the room from Zeesen in the middle of a sentence, and old Mrs. Bishop said firmly, “That’s David.”

Young Mary Bishop made a hopeless protest — “It can’t be,” but she knew.

“I know my son if you don’t know your husband.”

It seemed incredible that the man speaking couldn’t hear them, that he should just go on, reiterating for the hundredth time the old lies, as if there

were nobody anywhere in the world who knew him — a wife or a mother.

Old Mrs. Bishop had stopped knitting. She said, "Is that the man they've been writing about — Doctor Funkhole?"

"It must be."

"It's David."

The voice was extraordinarily convincing: he was going into exact engineering details — David Bishop had been a mathematics don at Oxford. Mary Bishop twisted the wireless off and sat down beside her mother-in-law. "They'll want to know who it is," Mrs. Bishop said.

"We mustn't tell them," said Mary.

The old fingers had begun again on the khaki sock. She said, "It's our duty." Duty, it seemed to Mary Bishop, was a disease you caught with age: you ceased to feel the tug tug of personal ties; you gave yourself up to the great tides of patriotism and hate. She said, "They must have made him do it. We don't know what threats . . ."

"That's neither here nor there."

She gave weakly in to hopeless wishes. "If only he'd got away in time. I never wanted him to give that lecture course."

"He always was stubborn," said old Mrs. Bishop.

"He said there wouldn't be a war."

"Give me the telephone."

"But you see what it means," said Mary Bishop. "He may be tried for treason if we win."

"When we win," old Mrs. Bishop said.

The nickname was not altered, even after the interviews with the two Mrs. Bishops, even after the sub-acid derogatory little article about David Bishop's previous career. It was suggested now that he had known all along that war was coming, that he had gone to Germany to evade military service, leaving his wife and his mother to be bombed. Mary Bishop fought, almost in vain, with the reporters for some recognition that he might have been forced . . . by threats or even physical violence. The most one paper would admit was that if threats had been used David Bishop had taken a very unheroic way out. We praise heroes as though they are rare, and yet we are always ready to blame another man for lack of heroism. The name Dr. Funkhole stuck.

But the worst of it to Mary Bishop was old Mrs. Bishop's attitude. She turned a knife in the wound every evening at 9.15. The radio set must be tuned in to Zeesen, and there she sat listening to her son's voice and knitting socks for some unknown soldier on the Maginot Line. To young Mrs. Bishop none of it made sense — least of all that flat, pedantic voice with its smooth, well-thought-out elaborate lies. She was afraid to go out now into Crowborough: the whispers in the post office, the old faces watching her covertly in the library. Sometimes she thought almost with hatred, why has David done this to me? Why?

Then suddenly she got her answer.

The voice for once broke new ground. It said, "Somewhere back in

England my wife may be listening to me. I am a stranger to the rest of you, but she knows that I am not in the habit of lying."

A personal appeal was too much. Mary Bishop had faced her mother-in-law and the reporters: she couldn't face her husband. She began to cry, sitting close beside the radio set like a child beside its doll's house when something has been broken in it which nobody can repair. She heard the voice of her husband speaking as if he were at her elbow from a country which was now as distant and as inaccessible as another planet.

"The fact of the matter is . . ."

The words came slowly out as if he were emphasizing a point in a lecture, and then he went on — to what would concern a wife. The low price of food, the quantity of meat in the shops: he went into great detail, giving figures, picking out odd, irrelevant things — like Mandarin oranges and toy zebras — perhaps to give an effect of richness and variety.

Suddenly Mary Bishop sat up with a jerk as if she had been asleep. She said "Oh, God, where's that pencil?" and upset one of the too many ornaments looking for one. Then she began to write, but in no time at all the voice was saying, "Thank you for having listened to me so attentively," and Zeesen had died out on the air. She said, "Too late."

"What's too late?" said old Mrs. Bishop sharply. "Why did you want a pencil?"

"Just an idea," Mary Bishop said.

She was led next day up and down the cold, unheated corridors of a War Office in which half the rooms were empty, evacuated. Oddly enough, her relationship to David Bishop was of use to her now, if only because it evoked some curiosity and a little pity. But she no longer wanted the pity, and at last she reached the right man.

He listened to her with great politeness. He was not in uniform: his rather good tweeds made him look as if he had just come up from the country for a day or two, to attend to the war. When she had finished he said, "It's rather a tall story, you know, Mrs. Bishop. Of course it's been a great shock to you — this — well — action of your husband's."

"I'm proud of it."

"Just because in the old days you had this — scheme, you really believe . . . ?"

"If he was away from me and he telephoned 'The fact of the matter is' it always meant, 'this is all lies, but take the initial letters which follow. . . . ?' Oh, Colonel, if you only knew the number of unhappy week-ends I've saved him from — because, you see, he could always telephone to me, even in front of his host." She said with tears in her voice, "Then I'd send him a telegram. . . ."

"Yes. But still . . . you didn't get anything this time, did you?"

"I was too late. I hadn't a pencil. I only got this — I know it doesn't seem to make sense." She pushed the paper across. SOSPIC. "I know it might easily be coincidence — that it does

seem to make a kind of word."

"An odd word."

"Mightn't it be a man's name?"

The officer in tweeds was looking at it, she suddenly realized, with real interest — as if it was a rare kind of pheasant. He said, "Excuse me a moment," and left her. She could hear him telephoning to somebody from another room: the little ting of the bell, silence, and then a low voice she couldn't overhear. Then he returned, and she could tell at once from his face that all was well.

He sat down and fiddled with a fountain-pen: he was obviously embarrassed. He started a sentence and stopped it. Then he brought out in an embarrassed gulp, "We'll all have to apologize to your husband."

"It meant something?"

He was obviously making his mind up about something difficult and out of the way: he was not in the habit of confiding in members of the public. But she had ceased to be a member of the public.

"My dear Mrs. Bishop," he said, "I've got to ask a great deal from you."

"Of course. Anything."

He seemed to reach a decision and stopped fiddling. "A neutral ship called the *Pic* was sunk this morning at 4 A.M., with a loss of two hundred lives. S.O.S. *Pic*. If we'd had your husband's warning, we could have got destroyers to her in time. I've been speaking to the Admiralty."

Mary Bishop said in a tone of fury, "The things they are writing about

David. Is there one of them who'd have the courage . . . ?"

"That's the worst part of it, Mrs. Bishop. They must go on writing. Nobody must know, except my department and yourself."

"His mother?"

"You mustn't even tell her."

"But can't you make them just leave him alone?"

"This afternoon I shall ask them to intensify their campaign — in order to discourage others. An article on the legal aspect of treason."

"And if I refuse to keep quiet?"

"Your husband's life won't be worth much, will it?"

"So he's just got to go on?"

"Yes. Just go on."

He went on for four weeks. Every night now she tuned in to Zeesen with a new horror — that he would be off the air. The code was a child's code. How could they fail to detect it? But they did fail. Men with complicated minds can be deceived by simplicity. And every night, too, she had to listen to her mother-in-law's indictment; every episode which she thought discreditable out of a child's past was brought out — the tiniest incident. Women in the last war had found a kind of pride in "giving" their sons: this, too, was a gift on the altar of a warped patriotism. But now young Mrs. Bishop didn't cry: she just held on — it was relief enough to hear his voice.

It wasn't often that he had information to give — the phrase "the fact of

the matter is" was a rare one in his talks: sometimes there were the numbers of the regiments passing through Berlin, or of men on leave: very small details, which might be of value to military intelligence, but to her seemed hardly worth the risk of a life. If this was all he could do, why, why hadn't he allowed them simply to intern him?

At last she could bear it no longer. She visited the War Office again. The man in tweeds was still there, but this time for some reason he was wearing a black tail coat and a black stock as if he had been to a funeral: he must have been to a funeral, and she thought with more fear than ever of her husband.

"He's a brave man, Mrs. Bishop," he said.

"You needn't tell me that," she cried bitterly.

"We shall see that he gets the highest possible decoration. . . ."

"Decorations!"

"What do you want, Mrs. Bishop? He's doing his duty."

"So are other men. But they come home on leave. Sometime. He can't go on for ever. Soon they are bound to find out."

"What can we do?"

"You can get him out of there. Hasn't he done enough for you?"

He said gently: "It's beyond our power. How can we communicate with him?"

"Surely you have agents."

"Two lives would be lost. Can't you imagine how they watch him?"

Yes. She could imagine all that clearly. She had spent too many holidays in Germany — as the Press had not failed to discover — not to know how men were watched, telephone lines tapped, table companions scrutinized.

He said, "If there was some way we could get a message to him, it *might* be managed. We do owe him that."

Young Mrs. Bishop said quickly before he could change his mind: "Well, the code works both ways. The fact of the matter is . . . We have news broadcast in German. He might one day listen in."

"Yes. There's a chance."

She became privy to the plan because again they needed her help. They wanted to attract his notice first by some phrase peculiar to her. For years they had spoken German together on their annual holiday. That phrase was to be varied in every broadcast, and elaborately they worked out a series of messages which would convey to him the same instructions — to go to a certain station on the Cologne-Wesel line and contact there a railway worker who had already helped five men and two women to escape from Germany.

Mary Bishop felt she knew the place well — the small country station which probably served only a few dozen houses and a big hotel where people went in the old days for cures. The opportunity was offered him, if he could only take it, by an elaborate account of a railway accident at that point — so many people killed —

sabotage — arrests. It was plugged in the news as relentlessly as the Germans repeated the news of false sinkings, and they answered indignantly back that there had been no accident.

It seemed more horrible than ever to Mary Bishop — those nightly broadcasts from Zeesen. The voice was in the room with her, and yet he couldn't know whether any message for which he risked his life reached home, and she couldn't know whether their messages to him just petered out unheard or unrecognized.

Old Mrs. Bishop said, "Well, we can do without David to-night, I should hope." It was a new turn in her bitterness: now she would simply wipe him off the air. Mary Bishop protested. She said she must hear — then at least she would know that he was well.

"It serves him right if he's not well."

"I'm going to listen," Mary Bishop persisted.

"Then I'll go out of the room. I'm tired of his lies."

"You're his mother, aren't you?"

"That's not my fault. I didn't choose — like you did. I tell you I won't listen to it."

Mary Bishop turned the knob. "Then stop your ears," she cried in a sudden fury, and heard David's voice coming over.

"The lies," he was saying, "put over by the British capitalist Press. There has not even been a railway accident — leave alone any sabotage — at the place so persistently mentioned in the

broadcasts from England. To-morrow I am leaving myself for the so-called scene of the accident, and I propose in my broadcast the day after to-morrow to give you an impartial observer's report, with records of the very railwaymen who are said to have been shot for sabotage. To-morrow, therefore, I shall not be on the air. . . ."

"Oh, thank God, thank God," Mary Bishop said.

The old woman grumbled by the fire. "You haven't much to thank Him for."

"You don't know how much."

All next day she found herself praying, although she didn't much believe in prayer. She visualized that station "on the Rhine not far from Wesel": and not far either from the Dutch frontier. There must be some method of getting across — with the help of that unknown worker — possibly in a refrigerating van — no idea was too fantastic to be true: others had succeeded before him.

All through the day she tried to keep pace with him — he would have to leave early, and she imagined his cup of *ersatz* coffee and the slow war-time train taking him south and west: she thought of his fear and of his excitement — he was coming home to her. Ah, when he landed safely, what a day that would be! The papers then would have to eat their words: no more Dr. Funkhole and no more of this place, side by side with his unloving mother.

At midday, she thought, he has ar-

rived: he has his black discs with him to record the men's voices, he is probably watched, but he will find his chance — and now he is not alone. He has someone with him helping him. In one way or another he will miss his train home. The freight train will draw in — perhaps a signal will stop it outside the station. She saw it all so vividly, as the early winter dark came down and she blacked the windows out, that she found herself thankful he possessed, as she knew, a white mackintosh. He would be less visible waiting there in the snow.

Her imagination took wings, and by dinnertime she felt sure that he was already on the way to the frontier. That night there was no broadcast from Dr. Funkhole, and she sang as she bathed and old Mrs. Bishop beat furiously on her bedroom floor above.

In bed she could almost feel herself vibrating with the heavy movement of *his* train. She saw the landscape going by outside — there must be a crack in any van in which he lay hid, so that he could mark the distances. It was very much the landscape of Crowborough — spruces powdered with snow, the wide dreary waste they called a forest, dark avenues — she fell asleep.

When she woke she was still happy. Perhaps before night she would receive a cable from Holland, but if it didn't come she would not be anxious because so many things in war-time might delay it. It didn't come.

That night she made no attempt to turn on the radio, so old Mrs. Bishop

changed her tactics again. "Well," she said, "aren't you going to listen to your husband?"

"He won't be broadcasting." Very soon now she could turn on his mother in triumph and say — there, I knew it all the time, my husband's a hero.

"That was last night."

"He won't be broadcasting again."

"What do you mean? Turn it on and let me hear."

There was no harm in proving that she knew — she turned it on.

A voice was talking in German — something about an accident and English lies, she didn't bother to listen. She felt too happy. "There," she said, "I told you. It's not David."

And then David spoke.

He said, "You have been listening to the actual voices of the men your English broadcasters have told you were shot by the German police. Perhaps now you will be less inclined to believe the exaggerated stories you hear of life inside Germany to-day."

"There," old Mrs. Bishop said, "I told you."

And all the world, she thought, will go on telling me now, for ever . . . Dr. Funkhole. He never got those messages. He's there for keeps. David's voice said with curious haste and harshness: "The fact of the matter is —"

He spoke rapidly for about two minutes as if he were afraid they would fade him at any moment, and yet it sounded harmless enough — the old stories about plentiful food and how much you could buy for an English

pound — figures. But some of the examples this time, she thought with dread, are surely so fantastic that even the German brain will realize something is wrong. How had he ever dared to show up *this* copy to his chiefs?

She could hardly keep pace with her pencil, so rapidly did he speak. The words grouped themselves on her pad: "Five U's refuelling hodie noon 53.23 by 10.5. News reliable source Wesel so returned. Talk unauthorized. The end."

"This order. Many young wives I feel enjoy giving one" — he hesitated — "one day's butter in every dozen . . ." the voice faded, gave out altogether. She saw on her pad: "To my wife, goodbie d . . ."

The end, good-bye, the end . . . the words rang on like funeral bells. She began to cry, sitting as she had done before, close up against the radio set. Old Mrs. Bishop said with a kind of delight: "He ought never to have been born. I never wanted him. The coward," and now Mary Bishop could stand no more of it.

"Oh," she cried to her mother-in-law across the little over-heated, over-furnished Crowborough room, "if only he were a coward, if only he were. But he's a hero, a damned hero, a hero, a hero . . ." she cried hopelessly on, feeling the room reel round her, and dimly supposing behind all the pain and horror that one day she would have to feel, like other women, pride.



It seems that, at the time of this writing, 75 copies of every issue of EQMM find their way to a bookstore in Mexico City which specializes in American books and magazines; and that one of these 75 copies is reserved in the name of Antonio Helú. But Antonio Helú is more than a South-of-the-Border fan: he is also a writer of detective stories. Result (of our Good Neighbor policy): Señor Helú selected some of his own stories and mailed them to your Editor. Further result: your Editor forwarded the stories, in their original Spanish, to Anthony Boucher (our favorite translator). Final result: we hereby inaugurate a series of Mexican detective-crime stories — the first series of its kind ever to appear in the English language.

Meet Máximo Roldán, Mexican manhunter. Roldán is that rare type of detective who in addition to being a fluent and ingenious sleuth is also a thief of extraordinary ability. Like Arsène Lupin, Máximo Roldán will solve the most intricate and baffling murder if by so doing he can pick up a pocketful of pesos. In fact, the more you read of Roldán's audacious adventures, the more you'll think of him as the Mexican Lupin — a bouquet, not a brickbat, since Roldán has executed some roguish-detectival coups brilliant enough to be ascribed to the immortal Arsène himself.

For one of the most interesting parallels in detective-story plot and counter-plot, compare Antonio Helú's "The Stickpin" with Maurice Leblanc's "The Red Silk Scarf." The Lupin story first appeared in 1912, the Roldán story in 1928. Alike in basic conception, they are continents apart in execution; alike in spirit, they are nevertheless wholly individual. As Sherlock Holmes drew on Dupin, so Roldán derives from Lupin; but like Holmes, Roldán (especially when you get to know him better) achieves a stature all his own.

And now, blaze a trail with the first great detective-thief out of Mexico.

THE STICKPIN

by ANTONIO HELÚ

IT WAS, of course, those two details that gave Máximo Roldán the key to the whole affair: the garter that belonged to the nephew and the stickpin that didn't belong to anyone. But, as he so often asked himself afterwards, if it hadn't been for those 10,000 pesos in jewels, would he ever have paid any attention to either garter or stickpin?

If the reader has ever passed along the Calle de los Millones, the Street of Millions, in that district of Mexico

City known as the Colonia Roma, he may have observed that it is composed of no less than twenty houses all nearly identical. He may have seen the gardens that surround each of them on all four sides. And he may have noticed that only one of these homes violates the uniformity of gardens and façades — one house which has, instead of the railings that surround the others, a very high and thick wall which hides it almost completely from the street. He may have

been astonished, not so much because this house is protected by such a wall but because the others, all belonging to millionaires, are surrounded only by easily climbed railings. And most of all he may have been startled to learn that the house with the wall is perhaps the only one on the Calle de los Millones which is not inhabited by a millionaire.

But it is unlikely that the reader knows the street at all. It is reserved exclusively for millionaires (always excepting the house with the wall), and millionaires avoid social intercourse with anyone below their financial level. And the reader, so far as I know, has something less than a million on hand at the moment.

Thus when the crime in the Calle de los Millones became the talk of the town, there were few men who had a clear idea of the locale or of the circumstances in which it was committed. You had to be content with the details which the afternoon papers brought out on the very day of the crime. And these were hardly detailed enough.

This is roughly what the papers said:

In the house with the wall (a wall five meters high, crowned with steel spikes another meter long, spaced ten centimeters apart) the man of the house had been found dead. His household consisted of his sister, his daughter Isabel, his nephew, a housekeeper, and his chauffeur Alfredo. The nephew and the chauffeur occasionally spent the night away from home; this had been

one of those nights. The man of the house was found in his bed, his heart pierced by a knife. There were no signs of a struggle in the room. The knife belonged to the victim, who habitually placed it on his night-table before retiring. Besides the knife, the following articles were found in the room: A pair of cuff-links, belonging to the nephew; a pair of gloves and a garter, also belonging to the nephew; a belt and a necktie, belonging to the chauffeur; and a stick-pin which did not belong to the nephew, the chauffeur, nor the victim. Finally, the old man kept 10,000 pesos in jewels in his night-table; they were still there, proving that robbery had not been the motive of the crime.

That was all.

But among these facts were two items which aroused Máximo Roldán's attention as soon as he had read the details. Two items which caused him to seize the telephone, call the victim's home, ask for the Chief of the Security Commission, and say (at the risk of being taken for a madman):

"Hello? . . . The Chief of the Security Commission? . . . If you please, sir, do they have a dog in the house? . . . I said, is there in the dog in the house where the murder took place? . . . Yes, a dog. . . . No, this is *not* a gag; I'm completely serious. Is there a dog in the house? . . . Hello? . . . Hello?"

The Chief had hung up. Máximo Roldán called back.

"Chief of the Commission? . . .

Please listen, sir; if I am to discover the murderer, you must tell me if there is a dog in the house . . . No, you don't know me. . . . Indeed, you don't. . . . Please! It all depends on this. Because *there must NOT be a dog*, don't you see? . . . I tell you no, you don't know me. . . . Yes, of course I can tell you who the murderer is — *providing there is no dog*. . . . I'll come over in person and tell you. . . . Right away. . . . Now: is there a dog? . . . No? Bravo! I'll be right over to tell you the murderer's name."

And Máximo Roldán left at once for the scene of the crime.

In one of the rooms in the upper story of the murder house, the Chief of the Security Commission was listening to Máximo Roldán:

"Of course, Chief, you will have noticed the curious thing about your discovery: a garter has no logical reason for appearing as an incriminating clue on the scene of a crime. Generally speaking, incriminating clues are left as the result of a struggle, or forgetfulness, or of the nervous excitement of the moment. You might forget your gloves, your cuff-links might come loose or even your necktie; but there is no reason whatsoever that you should lose a garter. There's only one explanation: it was left here intentionally. And if the garter is a deliberate plant, so probably are the other clues. You follow, Chief?"

"Yes. Go on."

"But the garter is the only one of

the clues that is definitely and conclusively masculine. The gloves, the cuff-links, the necktie, the stickpin — a woman might possibly wear any or all of these in certain ensembles; but she could never wear a man's garter. These clues were planted here to distract suspicion from the real murderer; the others seemed insufficient proof of sex, so the murderer added the indisputably male garter to prove that the criminal must have been a man."

"But there are only two men in the household; it would have to incriminate one of them."

"I'm coming to that. Now we have the murderer trying to avert suspicion, planting various objects chosen at random, belonging to the nephew or the chauffeur or, like the stickpin, to neither of them, but always masculine objects — never feminine. At first glance these objects seem to incriminate their owners. But their mute accusation is so weak and confused that the police would never make an arrest on the strength of them. The murderer, then, was not trying to frame an individual. He was trying *to frame a sex*. A man in the same position would have scattered earrings and bobby pins. You understand?"

"Yes. . . ."

"It leaps to the eye, then, that the murderer is a woman."

"A woman?"

"A woman, Chief."

"Hm." The Chief of the Commission meditated for a moment. Then

he said, "A woman who had ready access to the rooms of the nephew and the chauffeur."

"Perhaps."

"Or, of course, the housekeeper. She does the daily cleaning in their rooms."

"Possibly."

"'Possibly'! Can't you be sure?"

"If you'll let me examine the room, by myself with no one to bother me, and let me question the three women who live in the house — then I'll tell you which is the murderess."

The Chief stared at Máximo Roldán, dubiously weighing the irregularity of his intervention against the convincing clarity of his logic. He began to pace meditatively around the room. At last he made his decision.

"You may do as you please."

"Thanks, Chief. I'll be right back."

Máximo Roldán opened the door and left. "Señoral!" he called to the housekeeper who was passing in the hall. "Where is the young lady? Quick! Take me to her. Matter of life and death!"

The housekeeper stood gaping at him. She whispered in a tremulous voice, "Come along. This way." She traversed the length of the hall and stopped before the last door. "In here."

"Thanks a lot. You may go now." The old woman did not budge. "Don't be afraid, señora. It's for her best interests. I swear it."

The housekeeper withdrew somewhat distrustfully. When she had vanished, Máximo Roldán knocked

on the door and without waiting for an answer turned the knob and entered. Isabel stood in the center of the room, her eyes fixed on the opening door.

"What do you want?" she asked. Her voice shook a little.

Máximo Roldán took a card from his wallet, proffered it to the girl, and said, "Here is my address. If you trust me, go to my house and show this card. They'll let you in. Lie low until I get there."

The girl turned pale. She stared at Máximo Roldán, trying to penetrate to the depths of his character.

"Run along. *Flee*, I believe, is the proper word in this situation. Here's a note for a hundred pesos. You have your choice: my card or the banknote. Either way you can make a safe getaway. But flee you must, and at once."

Isabel made no answer. She kept her eyes fixed on those of Máximo Roldán. His gaze did not waver. She extended her hand and took the card.

"Thank you. I trust you."

The young man bowed and brushed Isabel's hand with his lips. He murmured, "Why? Because you did it?"

The girl came slowly toward him, took both his hands in hers, and closed them over a bulky object.

"A notebook. Written by me. Read it. Goodbye."

Máximo Roldán left the room on the run and entered the bedroom where the murder had taken place. There was no one there. He went to the night-table, opened the drawer,

and took out the jewels. He wrapped them in a handkerchief and tied it up by its four corners. He thrust the small bundle into the rear pocket of his trousers, left the bedroom, and returned to the room where he had talked to the Chief of the Security Commission.

"Well?" the Chief demanded as soon as Máximo Roldán appeared. "Did you manage to learn anything?"

"I think so," Máximo Roldán answered. He stood by the window, from which he could see the street door in the wall. "I think I can tell you who the murderer is."

"All right," the other said impatiently. "Let's have it."

Máximo Roldán kept his eyes on the garden. "You will recall, Chief, that in addition to the clues which belonged to the nephew and the chauffeur, there was one — the stickpin — which belonged to neither. You remember?"

"Yes."

"Very well," Máximo Roldán went on. His fingers drummed nervously against the windowpane. "The stickpin did not belong to the victim either."

"So. . . ?"

"So, since it did not belong to any of the three men in the household, the stickpin —"

"— must have come from outside," the other interrupted.

A woman's figure scurried across the garden, opened the street door, and disappeared. Máximo Roldán gave a little sigh and turned to the Chief of

the Security Commission. "Exactly; it must have come from outside."

"Then it *was* an outside job, and the murderer *is* a man after all."

"Not at all. We established that it is a woman; I don't need to go over that. There are three women here: the victim's sister, his daughter Isabel, and the housekeeper. On the night of the murder all three had ready access to the rooms of the two men, since all three knew that the nephew and the chauffeur would be out all night. One of them is guilty. That one had in her possession a stickpin — an article of jewelry generally affected by young men who dandify themselves for one purpose: to please the girls."

"Caramba! Then —"

"Yes, Chief. Neither the dead man's sister nor the housekeeper is young enough to be in touch with such a youth, who might, say, give a girl such a stickpin as a memento or let her take it in a playful moment. There is only one woman in this house who fulfils the conditions: the youngest."

"The daughter Isabel?"

"Excellent, Chief. *The daughter Isabel*, exactly."

An impressive silence followed this announcement. The Chief had no comment. He seemed to balance the enormity of the unknown's accusation against the inevitability of his reasoning. At last he opened the door, cast a glance along the empty hall, took a whistle from his pocket, and blew three blasts. Then he closed the door and returned to Máximo Roldán.

"There's something I still don't

understand. Will you tell me why you asked me on the telephone if there was a dog in the house?"

"It's very simple. The existence of a dog would have torn down all my structure of logic. Who could be sure that a playful puppy might not have dragged to the scene of the crime the garter, the necktie, the gloves, and even a stranger's stickpin? This may seem a childish-hypothesis; but it had to be disproved. Once it could be struck out, my deductions were established as certain."

The door opened and a man in uniform came in. "You want something, Chief?" he asked.

"Yes. Call together all the women in the house."

"Very well."

"Put a man on the street door with orders to stop any woman who tries to leave."

"Very well."

"That's all."

"Very well, chief." The policeman left.

The Chief of the Security Commission walked up to Máximo Roldán. He contemplated him for a moment. Then he put his hands on Máximo Roldán's shoulders and asked, "You still insist on not giving me your name?"

"No use, Chief. It won't do you any good — at the moment."

"And later?"

"Later. . . ? You'll know some day."

"It's up to you. But I should like to know now."

They were silent a moment. Suddenly Máximo Roldán said, "Doesn't it strike you as strange, Chief, that the daughter Isabel should be the murderer? Have you any idea what the motive could have been for . . . paricide?"

The Chief thought a moment. "You're right," he said, with a certain astonishment. "It's terrible!" Then after another pause for thought, "It's impossible!"

Máximo Roldán smiled. "I thought my reasoning seemed logical to you."

"Yes, but. . ."

"But now you're beginning to have your doubts. Is that it?"

"All right," the Chief of the Security Commission demanded brusquely.

"Can you explain the motive?"

"If you'll allow me, I think I can."

"I'm listening," said the other.

Máximo Roldán took from his pocket the notebook which the girl had given him. "Always, at all times, from every source — in the newspaper articles, in the statement of the housekeeper, in the sister's statement — you have heard that girl called *the daughter Isabel*, until finally you've grown so used to it that you call her that yourself; never once has she been mentioned as *the daughter of the murdered man* or simply *his daughter*. Everyone, including the newspapers, influenced by the manner in which the witnesses made their statements, has referred to the household as the sister, the nephew, and added: *the daughter Isabel, the Chauffeur Alfredo*. This omission of names in the first group,

dealing with indisputable relatives — remember, this is all from the point of view of those who, like the housekeeper, knew the dead man and his relationships intimately — this omission of names in the first group indicates the necessity, in the second group, of adding their names to the title of the position which they held in the household: Alfredo held *the position of chauffeur*, Isabel held *the position of daughter*. The housekeeper, referring to each of them, says, 'This lady is the dead man's sister, this gentleman is his nephew,' just like that, without having to add a name; but she comes to the others and says, 'This man is *the chauffeur Alfredo*, this young lady is *the daughter Isabel*.'

The Chief of the Security Commission listened attentively. He neither moved nor breathed. He drank in the words that flowed from the lips of Máximo Roldán.

"The dead man himself calls our attention to it. Take a careful look at the account book which you found in his room and which you showed me when I arrived here. There he writes, to quote from memory, 'Daily allowance to my sister. . .', 'Monthly allowance to my nephew. . .', 'Expenses of *my daughter Isabel*.' And observe that he did not do so to distinguish between one daughter and another, because we know of no daughter other than the girl who passed as such, Isabel. You follow me, Chief?"

"Yes. But I still don't see —"

"— the motive?"

"Yes. I should think, on the contrary, that Isabel would be deeply grateful to the dead man. Didn't he take her in and educate her and love her as though she were his own daughter?"

"But that was not the case. Isabel was not taken in by the old man, nor did she have any cause for gratitude. The surface picture was simply contrived to conceal the true facts."

"I don't understand."

"Here the true drama begins, Chief. Some ten or twelve years ago a certain Procurator of Justice issued an edict authorizing *crimes passionels* as 'the legitimate defense of honor.' In accordance with this edict, a man could kill his wife and her lover with impunity. He was not punished, he was not even tried. Rather he was all but urged to commit the crime. And murderers, in the name of 'the legitimate defense of honor' increased. You remember?"

"Perfectly. But why should you? Surely you were only a little boy then."

"I was indeed. But of late I've been looking through the newspapers of those days for reports of famous crimes. And around that time there occurred one of these *crimes passionels*, endorsed by the edict of the honorable Procurator. It was on this street, in this house. Instead of the large wall there was then a railing around the garden. The master of the house came home one night unexpectedly and found his wife in the arms of another man, under one of those orange trees

in the garden. He did not lose his equanimity, he did not get excited. With complete control of his nerves, with astonishing sangfroid, he took a revolver from his pocket and fired. The first to fall was his wife. The lover tried to climb the railing and flee, but a second shot brought him down. Later the master of the house had the railing torn down and this wall erected to protect him from the curiosity-seekers who gathered around the place to make their comments on the site where the lovers fell.

"That's as much of the story as you can learn from the newspapers. But it seems that the husband managed to find out that the little girl, whom he had always considered his daughter, was not his. Partly to avoid even more scandal than he was already enduring, partly to continue his revenge, he kept this fact secret from the public. And thus it was that he had living at his side *the daughter Isabel*, whom he humiliated and tortured, little by little slaking his thirst for revenge."

"Anyone would say you'd seen it all happen," the Chief of Security observed.

"The girl slowly became aware that that man was not her father. She began to hate him. Even when she was a child she felt that she was unjustly treated. And once she knew that she was not obliged to feel for him the natural affection which a child owes its father, she was filled with such a fierce joy that she could find only one means of expressing her emotion without

danger: she wrote over and over again in her little notebook:

My daddy isn't my daddy

as when children discover a particular way of jumping that delights them and go on jumping until they're exhausted."

The Chief of the Commission of Security fixed his gaze on the little notebook which Máximo Roldán had taken out of his pocket when he began to talk.

Máximo Roldán nodded. "This is the notebook, Chief. You may observe the development that was going on in the girl as the years went by. That first phrase was followed by another:

*I don't love him because
he's not my daddy*

and then others that indicate progressively the state of her spirit:

*He is not my father
That man is not my father
Not my father*

and later on these others, still more terrible, marking a new discovery:

*He killed my father
and mother*

I must hate him

until we reach the last, which decided the old man's fate:

I must kill him

All these phrases constantly reiterated, taking possession of the girl, flowing through her very being, ever feeding her hatred and intensifying her decision to kill the man who had murdered her parents and was mistreating her — And then came the dénouement."

"Where did you find this note-

book?" the Chief asked.

"In the girl's room, when I went to question her."

"You managed to take it without her noticing?"

"She wasn't there."

"What?" the Chief of the Security Commission exclaimed.

"She wasn't there," Máximo Roldán repeated.

The Chief of the Security Commission leaped for the door. Máximo Roldán held him back for a moment.

"Just a minute, Chief. I meant to tell you something else: the jewels have disappeared."

"What!"

"Yes. They aren't in the night-table any more."

This time the Chief of the Commission waited no longer. He opened the door and started running down the hall.

Máximo Roldán left in his turn.

Tranquilly he descended the stairs, reached the garden, strolled across it, and stopped before the policeman who was stationed at the street door.

"The Chief says you're not to leave this spot for a single moment."

"Very well, sir."

"Under penalty of arrest, you're not to let any woman leave, for any reason."

"Yes, sir."

"Good. And if you need it, call for help. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Fine. Oh — as soon as you see the Chief, tell him not to worry."

"Not to worry, sir?"

"Everything's all right. I have the jewels with me."

"Oh. Yes, sir."

"See you later."

And Máximo Roldán went on to the corner, turned it, and vanished.



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