ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

An American Mercury AMM Publication

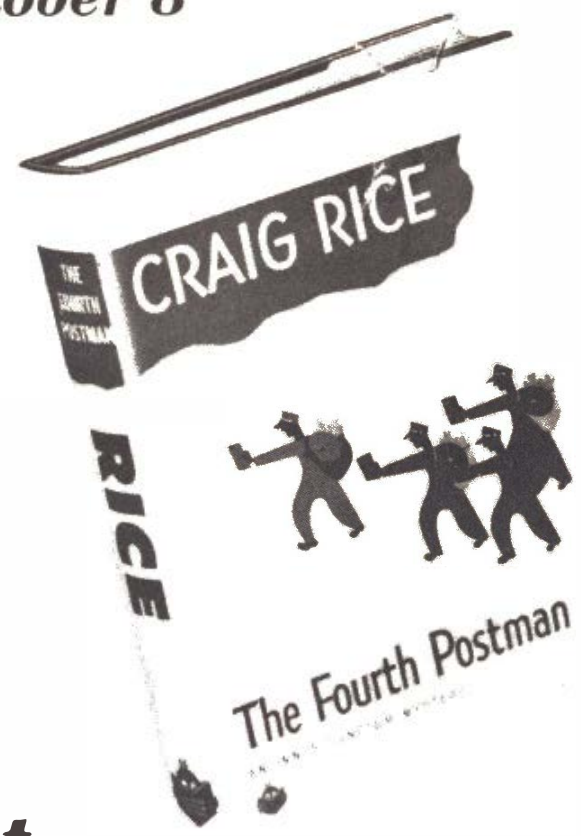
Salter

35 Cents

October, 1948

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

Coming October 8



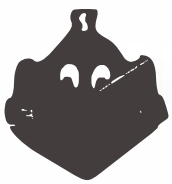
the first

CRAIG RICE

mystery novel in 3 years

ONE postman! Two postmen! Three postmen! All traveling through the same alley in the rich Chicago suburb. All hit on the head. All dead. "*Now who*," Captain von Flannagan of Homicide asked angrily, "*wants to go around murdering postmen?*"

You'll learn the answer when you follow your old friends, Jake, Helene, and Malone, on their first murder chase since 1945. The unfamiliar note you'll hear over the usual Craig Rice orchestration of screams and chortles is the barking of a new character — the only genuine Australian Beer Hound in America. Making his only personal appearance in



THE FOURTH POSTMAN

An Inner Sanctum Mystery $2.00

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

PUBLISHER: *Lawrence E. Spivak* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Vol. 12, No. 59, OCTOBER 1948. *Published monthly by The American Mercury, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U. S. and its possessions, and in the countries of the Pan-American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.*

Entered as second class matter August 28, 1941, at the post office at Concord, N. H., under the act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U.S.A.

Published also in Australian and French editions by affiliated companies. Published in a Talking-Record Edition by the American Printing House for the Blind, Louisville, Kentucky.

Cover and Typography by George Salter

ROBERT P. MILLS, *Managing Editor* JOSEPH W. FERMAN, *Business Manager*

CHARLOTTE R. SPIVAK, *Associate Editor*

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Invites you to enter its Fourth

$6,000 SHORT STORY CONTEST

($1,000 of the $6,000 will be contributed by Little, Brown & Co., publishers, of Boston)

First Prize $2,000

Second Prize $1,000

8 ADDITIONAL PRIZES

TOTALING $3,000

Conditions of the Contest

1. Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine offers a cash award of $2,000 as First Prize for the best original detective or crimeshort story. Inaddition, *EQMM* will award a Second Prize of $1,000,four (4) Third Prizes of $500 each, and four (4) Fourth Prizes of $250 each. All prizes include publication rights in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, subject to the provisions of paragraph 7. Other acceptable stories will be purchased at *EQMM's* regularrates.

2. Preferably, stories should not exceed 10,000 words.

3. Awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — that is, quality of writing and originality of plot. The contest is open to everyone except employees of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, The American Mercury, Inc., and their families. Stories are solicited from amateur as well as professional writers; from beginners as well as old-timers. All will have an equal chance to win the prizes.

4. The judges who will make the final decision in the contest will he Ellery Queen and theeditorial staff of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1948.

6. Prize winners will be announced and the prizes awarded by Christmas 1948. The prize-winning stories will appear in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazineduring 1949.

7. All prize winners and all other contestants whose stories are purchased agree to grant Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine first book-anthology rights, and when these rights are exercised, they will be paid for as follows: $50 for the original edition, $25 for cheap editions, and a pro rata share of 25% of the royalties if the anthology should be chosen by a book club. Authors of all stories bought through this contest agree to sell non-exclusiveforeign rights for $35 per story.

8. Everycare will be taken to return unsuitable manuscripts, but Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine cannot accept responsibility for them. Manuscripts shonld be typed or legibly written, accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope, and mailed by first-class mail to:

EQMM $6,000 Detective Short Story Contest
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

You don't need to buy Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine to enter the contest. But if you want it, and should find your newsdealer sold out, use this convenient coupon . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Please send me Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. I enclose . . . ☐ $7.00 for two years.
☐ $4.00 for one year.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....*Zone*.....

State.....Q59

SECOND PRIZE WINNER: PHILIP MACDONALD

Early in October 1947, about two weeks before EQMM'S Third Annual Contestclosed, your Editor received the following note from Philip MacDonald: "I have a contest story coming up which I think you're going to like. I actually believe I have done the near-impossible — created a really *new detective and a new technique." Well, you can imagine the anticipation which began to boil and bubble in your Editor's mind! A new type of detective and a new technical approach from a writer of such outstanding accomplishment as Philip MacDonald, who in the opinion of most critics has already produced two of the mightiest classics in the genre! We wrote to Mr. MacDonald, telling him how eagerly we looked forward to his manuscript, and waited — biting our nails. And on the final day of the contest the story arrived — the first recorded adventure of the esoteric Doctor Alcazar. Aficionados, there are thrills in this bloodhound business entirely apart from those to be found in the stories themselves — the suspense of observing a mailman fish a large manila envelope out of his bag, the excitement of reading an important and long expected manuscript — the feeling, on first looking into a writer's dream, of some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken . . . and the wild surprise that comes, silent, upon a peek into daring . . .*

Philip MacDonald wrote "The Green-and-Gold String" because Cortez-like he too recognizes the necessity of exploring, of discovering new horizons for the detective story. As Mr. MacDonald remarked in a later communication, the search for new basic forms "is quite a problem." Mr. MacDonald believes that the character of Doctor Alcazar might be one solution, because this clairvoyant extraordinary, this Olympian-browed charlatan, blends completely those two perennial favorites — the deductive sleuth and the debonair rogue; because Doctor Alcazar is, in effect, Sherlock Holmes and Arsène Lupin crammed simultaneously into the same pair of pants. He isn't merely a rogue who happens once to be a detective; or a rogue who reforms, giving up thieving for sleuthing. He isn't at one time a red-handed criminal and at another time a righteous manhunter. In Doctor Alcazar the two sides of the law, for and against, are fused in one and the same character: Doctor Alcazar can't detect without being a crook, and he can't be a crook without detecting.

Mr. MacDonald's got something; but the hybridization of good and

evil, producing the scoundrel-sleuth, the felonious-ferret, is not an altogether new idea. True, malefactors like Melville Davisson Post's Randolph Mason, Edgar Wallace's Four Just Men, James B. Hendryx's Black John Smith, and Leslie Charteris's The Saint have had a go at both straight detection and detection in reverse, though not usually as a combined operation. But in "The Red Silk Scarf" the great Arsène detected with criminal intent, and in "The Stickpin" Antonio Helú's Máximo Roldán duplicated Lupin's double-dealing with almost comparable finesse and éclat. Yes, it has been done — but not so frequently, we admit, as to invalidate Mr. MacDonald's theory. Nor should the fact that a phoney seer has already left his mark in 'tec history discourage Mr. MacDonald from pursuing his near-innovation: Gelett Burgess's Astro was Alcazar's spiritual forefather — Astro who also pretended to be a crystal-gazer, whose jeweled turban, flowing robes, silver-mounted water-pipe, and pet white lizard make Alcazar's props seem almost prosaic.

Now, meet Alcazar, the ratiocinative rogue. The very letters of his name, although Mr. MacDonald did not intend them to, tell us what manner of man he is. A *stands for Astro, his mind-reading ancestor;* l *is for Lupin, who blazed the double trail;* c *is undoubtedly for Cleek, who also burned the criminological candle from both ends — for Cleek was first the Vanishing Cracksman and then the Manhunter of Forty Faces;* a *is for a touch of Abû Tabâh, but an even greater helping of the Adjusters;* z *is a little of Zadig, a little more of Zambra, and a lot of Zaleski;* a *is for Ainsley, the gentleman crook; and* r *is for one part Raffles, one part Roldán, and a large dash of Rénine. Yes, there is a little bit of many blackguards and bloodhounds in Alcazar, but unlike the mathematical dictum, the whole is far greater than the sum of its parts — for there is always that part of Alcazar which is Alcazar — and Alcazar alone.*

THE GREEN-AND-GOLD STRING

by PHILIP MacDONALD

THE banner hung over the entrance of a small, square tent of pitch-black canvas, which was sandwiched between a shooting gallery and the beflagged pitch of the Weight-Guesser. The banner read, "DOCTOR ALCAZAR, *Clairvoyant Extraordinary — What Does the Future Hold For YOU? General Reading — 50¢. Special Delineation — $1.00.*"

All down the midway the lights blazed, and the evening air was heavy with the odd, distinctive odor which comes from the blending of humanity and peanuts, popcorn and circus.

In the doorway of the small black

tent, Doctor Alcazar — who had no right to the name and less to the title — was receiving his second client of the past twenty-four hours.

Doctor Alcazar was tall and graceful and lean. His face was of extraordinary pallor, his dark eyes large and lustrous and glowing. His black, well-tended hair, impressively gray at the temples, surmounted an Olympian brow and he wore, over evening clothes and a pleated shirt in whose faintly yellowish bosom sparkled an enormous ruby-red stud, a long black cloak which hung gracefully from his wide shoulders.

"Good evening, madame," said Doctor Alcazar in his rich and flexible voice. "You wish to consult me?"

He loomed over his visitor as he bowed, and his lustrous eyes took in every detail of her from head to foot.

Thirty-fivish. Doesn't look American. Expensive suit, hardly worn. Too tight. Too short. Not hers.

The woman was very nervous. She twisted her bag around in her hands and looked up at Doctor Alcazar.

She said, "Ow, well — maybe I do . . ."

Aha! British. Cockney. But lived some time in U. S. — hence "maybe" not "p'raps".

"Then step this way," said Doctor Alcazar, and having ushered his client into the tent, let fall the canvas doorway, upon the outside of which large white letters announced, IN CONSULTATION.

It was dark inside the tent, which was hung with dusty black draperies, but a nimbus of soft, orange-colored light came from a lamp over the table and chairs which were the only furnishings.

Doctor Alcazar seated his client at one side of the table, placing her chair with courtly precision. Throwing back his cloak, he then took the other chair to face her.

"And now, madame," said Doctor Alcazar, "do you wish a General Reading? Or — as I myself would recommend in your case — a Special Delineation?"

His visitor's nervousness seemed to be increasing. She sat on the edge of her chair (which disturbed Doctor Alcazar) and said:

"Well, now, I couldn't hardly sye." Her homely face was drawn and puckered with indecision. "Y'see, sir, it's a private matter — and — and —" Words failed her, and her hands fluttered nervously — to her hat, to her hair, to the cheap brooch at the throat of the ultra-expensive but over-tight blouse.

H'mm. Seamstress' fingers. "Sir." Possible housekeeper. More likely lady's maid.

"Madame," said Doctor Alcazar, "anything you tell me — anything I may discern about you — is in the highest degree confidential." He leaned forward, fixing his compelling gaze upon her. "May I first suggest that you relax, madame. Any undue tension or nervousness disturbs and obfuscates your aura."

An uncertain titter came from the woman. She said, "I know I'm all

upset-like — but I'll try," and she sat back in her chair and rested her hands on the arms, leaving her purse on the table.

Doctor Alcazar was relieved. He said, "Excellent!" and then, "We will begin, please, by your giving me some personal possession to hold." He reached out a hand, palm uppermost. "It is a matter of attaining close contact with your psyche."

She said, "Ow, I see," and put both hands up to her throat, as if to unpin the cheap brooch.

This would never do — and Doctor Alcazar said smoothly, "Anything except personal jewelry, madame. Its intrinsically counteractive density tends to adumbrate the necessary metaphysic radiations."

"Ow — I see —" she said again, and picked her purse off the table, set it on her lap, and opened it.

She was in perfect position beneath the mirror which hung above her, so unobtrusively, in the drapery festooned from the tent-top. Doctor Alcazar leaned back in his chair and through half-closed, mystic eyes saw the contents of the purse in the mirror as her fingers rummaged in it. There were, to his experienced gaze, several items of possible use among the usual feminine litter:

An open change-purse from which protruded the end of a long roll of stamps; half a candy bar with its wrappings carefully folded back; a crumpled, postmarked envelope addressed to Miss Lily Something-or-other-which-began-with-M; and a small neatly-folded piece of violet-colored wrapping-paper tied around with curious string of interwoven green-and-gold strands.

Doctor Alcazar's client picked out a compact and laid it in his still outstretched hand, and closed her bag.

Doctor Alcazar murmured, "Thank you . . . Thank you . . ." and as his long fingers caressed the small enameled case, he began to speak in a remote and vibrant monotone.

"You have," said Doctor Alcazar, "a most highly sensitized *anima*, and are therefore a sympathetic subject . . . You are named for a flower — yes, a *lily!* . . . You are a foreigner by birth, but have resided in this country for a considerable time . . . You have a generous, impulsive nature, but are somewhat handicapped by shyness . . . Your life is bound up with that of a person of wealth — I *think* a woman . . . A great deal of your time is taken up by the traditionally feminine occupation of sewing. . . ."

As the General Reading proceeded, its effect upon Doctor Alcazar's client grew more and more marked, and when he reached the point at which he informed her that she had "a fondness for candy, a sweet tooth," she could not contain her astonishment.

"Well I never!" she gasped.

Doctor Alcazar sat upright and fully opened his eyes. He said, "And that, madame, is the General Reading. . . . In the Special Delineation we can go deeper — much deeper. Do you wish to proceed?"

"Ow, *yes!*" said his client, and now Doctor Alcazar assumed a more expansive position, fixing his unusual gaze firmly upon her face.

"You are troubled about something," said Doctor Alcazar. "A matter about which you would like to consult me."

"That's right," breathed his client.

"Then, madame," said Doctor Alcazar, "tell me your problem."

But he had wrought too well.

"Do I 'ave to?" asked his client. "Don't you *knaow* what it is?"

"Hell!" said Doctor Alcazar to himself. "A boomer!" Aloud he said, with noticeable coldness, "I regret that madame feels it necessary to test me further. However. . . ."

He put one hand to his brow — and watched the woman from its shadow — and thought.

Stamps. Paper and string.

He said, "I seem to see letters — correspondence —"

No reaction.

He said, "— but then you are a great letter-writer. Ah! There is something else — a piece of material, is it? No. It's paper — wrapping-paper. And it's a strange color — almost violet —"

Ah! On the nose!

He said, ". . . Strange — I have lost sight of this paper . . . Something else is taking its place . . . I can't quite distinguish it — but there are two colors, interwoven . . . Green-and-gold, green-and-gold. . . ."

"Coo-*er!*" breathed his client, and Doctor Alcazar noted that her astonishment was mixed with something else — something very much like fear.

"Now, madame!" Doctor Alcazar was stern. "You have had proof of my powers — and my time is limited. If you wish my advice, state your problem."

The woman, intensely nervous, was on the edge of her chair again, but now it didn't matter. She said:

"It's abaout my mistr — my sister. . . ." Her tongue came out and moistened her lips. "It's abaout my sister — and her 'usband . . . Y'see, sir, I've jest found aout 'e's deceivin' 'er like, an' I'm the only person what knows." She gathered impetus now she was fairly launched. "But the funny thing is — an' it's why I don't rightly knaow what to do — the funny thing is that what 'e's doin' to deceive 'er is mykin' 'er 'appy . . . Naow, my problem, like you call it, is did I oughter tell my sister? Or did I oughter leave well alone. I'm fair bewildered-like, tryin' to think what to do. . . ."

"You are entangled, madame," said Doctor Alcazar, placing his elbows on the table and making an arch of his hands, "in a most unusual psychotic web. . . ." His hands slowly raised themselves and covered his eyes. His voice became the throbbing monotone again.

"There are widely differentiated *kamas* here," said the monotone. "There are twisted skeins ahead . . . Two paths before you . . . They are clouded . . . I see you taking one — then the other . . . But what is this?

At the end of each path is the same figure, awaiting you . . . And in this figure lies the solution . . . You need make no decision — you may follow either path — for the result is the same. . . ."

Doctor Alcazar took his hands from his eyes, sat back in his chair, and rested the hands on its arms. It was a decisive, final attitude, and hardly ever failed to denote the end of a delineation.

But this client was unusual. She stared at Doctor Alcazar, and her mouth began to tremble. She said, "Is that *all*, sir?" — and Doctor Alcazar, bowing in assent, rose to his feet.

He stepped to the entrance of the tent and raised the door-flap. He cast a glance outside — and saw two possibilities and allowed them to see him.

His current client rose slowly from her chair as he waited for her. She fumbled with her purse, pulling out a crumpled dollar bill. She said, "But couldn't you tell me what's going to '*appen*, sir. I mean each way-like. . . ."

There were tears in her eyes now and somewhat to his surprise Doctor Alcazar felt faintly sorry for her. He relieved her of the bill and led her to the entrance to the tent.

"Madame," he said, "I could advise you more fully if you told me the truth, instead of pretending your dilemma concerned your sister." He checked interruption with an up-raised hand. "No accurate reading of the future can be based upon falsehood. Why not return later for another consultation — after you have decided upon frankness?"

She continued to gaze up at him raptly, an excellent advertisement. She breathed, "Oh, thank you, sir! That's jest what I'll do!"

And then she said, "I'm sorry abaout not tellin' the truth, reely I am!" — and hurried away.

Doctor Alcazar looked after her. He wondered, idly, whether he would ever see her again.

He never did.

But three days later, and two hundred miles farther up the coast, he saw a picture of her.

It was a big photograph on the front page of the morning paper, and over it dark heavy letters spelled out MURDER VICTIM. Doctor Alcazar raised his eyebrows and read:

BEVERLY HILLS MURDER
NEW DEVELOPMENT
Gloria Druce Offers $5,000
Reward for Capture of Slayer

Gloria Druce, former luminary of stage and screen and now Mrs. Clinton de Vries, today expressed dissatisfaction with police progress in investigating the brutal murder last Saturday night of her personal maid, Lily Morton.

"The murderer *must* be brought to justice!" Miss Druce declared. "Lily had been with me for years, ever since my first visit to London. She was more than a maid, she was my constant friend and companion . . ."

It was at this point in his reading that Doctor Alcazar's friend and luncheon-host, the Weight-Guesser,

jogged him in the ribs and said, "Wanna 'nother barker, Doc?"

Doctor Alcazar didn't look up, but he said, "Thanks, Avvie," and devoured the remains on his plate and went on reading.

He came to an end several minutes later, and folded the paper and put it down on the counter by his coffee-cup. He stared at it vacantly.

The little man called Avvie could restrain himself no longer. He said, "What's eatin' you, Doc?" and reached out and picked up the paper and unfolded it. "Somep'n here?"

"Um-hmm!" said Doctor Alcazar. "To my ears, Avvie, has come a far-off, delightful crackling of moola. And," he added, "I mean moola."

"Huh?" Avvie's quick brown eyes scurried over the page. "This?" His finger pointed to "$5,000 Reward."

"Ye-es," said Doctor Alcazar. "Maybe. But it's a general scent I'm getting. . . ."

A frown wrinkled Avvie's small face, and he pointed to Lily Morton's picture. "Mean ya know who blotted this dame?"

"No," said Doctor Alcazar. "No, I don't. But — well, listen to me a minute. . . ."

They reached Los Angeles late that night and took up residence at the Hollyhock Motel. They had a working capital of eighty-two dollars and seventeen cents, seventy-five dollars of which had been supplied by Avvie and the balance by Doctor Alcazar.

They went to bed. They waked early, and made for Hollywood, where Avvie set out for the Public Library and the newspaper-files, and Doctor Alcazar went about other business. . .

By two in the afternoon they were on their way to Beverly Hills. They traveled in style this time — in a big, black, shiny, Cadillac sedan, the rental of which had grievously reduced their capital.

Avvie was driving, still in his nondescript gray suit, but with a dark-blue, shiny-visored cap surmounting his squirrel-like little face.

Doctor Alcazar sat in the back seat at regal ease, a credit to the Western Costume Company and a very different picture from the be-slacked and sport-shirted figure of the early morning. Doctor Alcazar, to whose lean cheeks the interesting pallor seemed to have returned, wore a loose, dark, expensive-looking suit of faintly old-fashioned cut; around his neck, in place of collar and tie, an elaborate stock of black silk pinned with a single pearl-like stone. And his unfathomable eyes looked out at the world from beneath a wide-brimmed hat of deep-napped black felt, indescribably dashing.

Turning into the quiet magnificence of Fairbanks Drive, Avvie slowed the pace, and leaned out of the window. The house he was looking for was Number 347 — but suddenly, opposite the neo-Spanish portico of Number 345, Doctor Alcazar leaned forward and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hold it," said Doctor Alcazar.

"This ain't it," Avvie said. "Next one up."

"Stop, will you!" said Doctor Alcazar and then, when Avvie obediently pulled into the curb, "Those notes you made at the Library? Still got 'em on you?"

"Sure." Avvie produced a small black notebook and handed it over. "The address is first — then the dope on this Druce —"

"No, no," said Doctor Alcazar, flipping over the pages. "I want the newspaper stuff — finding the body — all that . . . Ah! Here it is. . . ." He read rapidly, and then shook his head and looked at Avvie. He said, "I'm going to ask you once more. Are you *sure* there was nothing, anywhere, about what she had in her pocket-book?"

"Sure I'm sure!" Avvie was aggrieved. "All it said any place was it wasn't robbery because there was still dough in it."

Doctor Alcazar shrugged. "Okay," he said slowly. "Okay." And he gave the notebook back.

Avvie shrugged, and drove on to the entrance of Number 347, and through big, wrought-iron gates, and up to the front of a large, white, opulently haphazard house.

Doctor Alcazar descended from the car, looked around him with lordly approval, and ascended the steps. He pressed a bell and turned again to survey the gardens.

The door opened behind him, and he slowly revolved to impel the force of his presence upon a white-coated, vaguely European manservant.

"Mrs. de Vries?" said Doctor Alcazar, with Olympian glance. "Is she at home?" He produced a card, only slightly over-sized, one side of which bore in blackest copperplate the two words *Doctor Alcazar*. He took a pen from his pocket and wrote upon the reverse side of the card, *Concerning Lily Morton.*

He handed the card to the servant. He said, "If you would give this to Mrs. de Vries —"

The man looked at the card, then at Doctor Alcazar again. "Will you come in, sir," he said, and held the big door wider and led Doctor Alcazar across a hallway and ushered him into a long pleasant room, with French windows which looked out upon a flower-framed terrace and a tree-framed pool.

Left alone, he took it all in with a slow and comprehensive sweep of his eyes, and then, as the door opened again, turned to meet the woman who was coming towards him.

She was small and slim and straight, and in the slacks and shirt and sandals she was wearing, her body might have belonged to a girl. But the close-cut hair which lay in tight curls all over her small well-shaped head was iron-gray, and underneath it was a lined and impish little face which made no pretense of disguising what must have been its more than fifty years.

Doctor Alcazar bowed, and unobtrusively his eye swept over her.

H'mm. Friendly. Forceful. Intelli-

gent. But difficult to start. Watch it.

Doctor Alcazar straightened. He said, "Miss Druce —" and caught himself. "I beg your pardon — Mrs. de Vries."

The elfin face split in an enormous, delightful smile.

"Don't apologize," she said. "Please!" Her voice was surprisingly deep, and ever so slightly husky. "I like to be reminded. In fact, I *love* it."

Doctor Alcazar smiled gravely. "It is hard to think of Gloria Druce by any other name. . . ."

The smile began to fade, and Doctor Alcazar became aware that the blue eyes were regarding him shrewdly.

Oh-oh! Not so good. How to start? How to start?

She said, "Thank you, Doctor. You wanted to see me about poor Lily?"

Doctor Alcazar inclined his head.

She said, "What is it, then?" and her tone was changing, not auspiciously. "If you know anything that would help them, you should really have gone direct to the police."

Bad. Try something. Anything. Maybe —

Doctor Alcazar raised a deprecatory hand. "No, no," he said. "Please, Miss Dr— Mrs. de Vries! I'm afraid I'm not here to give help — but to ask for it!"

Aha! Jackpot!

There was a quick softening of the blue gaze, and she said, "Oh — I'm sorry . . . But I'm afraid I don't understand. . . ."

"How could you?" said Doctor Alcazar. "And it is I who should apologize. For imposing on your kindness —"

The big smile was completely friendly again as she waved him to a chair and perched herself on the arm of a settee and said, "Why not sit down and tell me all about it?"

"Thank you," said Doctor Alcazar. "Thank you." He folded his length into the chair and began.

"I should perhaps explain, Mrs. de Vries," said Doctor Alcazar, "that I am what is sometimes called a Metaphysician — a sort of Professor of the Occult. . . ."

It was a fine story and confident now, he did every word of it justice. It gave his listener several firm impressions, and an extraordinary but (to her, at least) entirely believable history of the events which were supposed to have brought him here. The impressions were, first, that Doctor Alcazar was a genuine and expert prober into the *Arcana*, second, that he was not now (and never had been) one to turn his gifts and knowledge to financial gain; third, that he himself was much moved and excited over the strange happenstance which had brought him here.

The story itself, freed from its bravura embellishments, ran thus:

Doctor Alcazar, while engaged on "a simple little experiment in behalf of a pupil," had received a "most unusual interruption to the *Kamic* stream." The crystal he had been using at the time had become, sud-

denly and disturbingly, a battleground between the images from the stream he had deliberately tapped and other images "from a stream unknown." The battle had been extraordinary, and had lasted for one crowded hour before the "outside, unknown, interrupting force" had been victorious. The images it projected were strong and persistent, and they summed up (really Doctor Alcazar must not waste more of Mrs. de Vries' time than he could help!) to the total picture of a woman in distress. A woman who was in dire danger, and seeking help. . . .

All that, ran the story, had been two weeks ago; to be precise, fifteen days. Eleven days before Lily Morton's death. Doctor Alcazar had made a full notation of the singular occurrence in his files and had then put the matter from his mind until yesterday when, at the home of friends in Del Monte, he had chanced to glance at the newspaper and had seen Lily Morton's photograph upon the front page. . . .

It was at this point that his listener interrupted Doctor Alcazar for the first time.

"And it was the same face!" she said, more in statement than question. "It was Lily's — Lily's image you'd seen in the crystal!"

Doctor Alcazar spread his hands. "That is the question, Miss Druce," he said, "which has brought me four hundred miles to see you." He paused. "My first impression, on seeing the picture, was that I had seen the same face as that in the crystal. But then —" he smiled a grave smile — "first impressions, after all, are often unreliable. And a true Metaphysician must be as sure of his facts as any Scientist. . . ."

Mrs. Clinton de Vries looked at Doctor Alcazar with wide blue eyes.

"This," she declared, "is *terribly* interesting! Absolutely fascinating!" Her gaze clouded, and a look of distress puckered the impish face. "Poor Lily!" She sighed, then gave her straight shoulders an impatient little shake and said briskly, "Well, then, Doctor, what you want are photographs of the poor girl." She stood up. "I'll go and —"

"Please!" Doctor Alcazar checked her. "What I would like to do — if you will permit me — is to recount to you, from my memory, a description of the face I saw in the crystal. Then, if I chance to hit upon some — ah — factor or factors known to you but not registered by the camera — well, then we shall be entitled to assume that it was indeed Lily Morton's Kamic stream which so astonishingly obtruded upon my own."

"Oh! . . . Oh, I see!" The blue eyes were concentrated, absorbed. "That's — wonderful! There couldn't be any mistake that way, could there? . . . Yes. Yes. Please do that, Doctor."

Doctor Alcazar covered his eyes with one graceful hand and said, slowly and in a dim, faraway sort of voice which was first cousin to the booming monotone that so frequently

was heard in the small black tent:

"I saw in the crystal — a woman . . . Part of her form, but dimly. But I saw her features clearly. Clearly. . . ."

Drawing upon his memory, which was indeed prodigious, Doctor Alcazar gave a minute and detailed description, suitably intoned and punctuated for this semi-mystic occasion, of the homely English face he remembered staring at him across his table. When he had finished, he slowly lowered the hand from his eyes, shook his head slightly as if to clear it, and looked interrogatively at Mrs. Clinton de Vries.

She was staring at him, rapt and intent. She said, in a curiously low voice, "Lily! That's Lily! I think I was sure before you started, Doctor, but when you remembered things like the little mole under her ear, and the gold filling in that tooth —"

She didn't trouble to finish the sentence. She just went on staring at Doctor Alcazar.

Who now played the card — the dangerous, all-powerful or all-ruinous card — which he had suddenly realized was in his hand.

Doctor Alcazar slowly rose to his feet. He stood towering above the small woman, and bowed over her, and smiled his grave smile, and picked up his hat from the table where it lay.

"Miss Druce," he said simply, "you have set my mind at rest."

He said, "I cannot thank you enough for having so graciously given me your time." He bowed again. She rose slowly, but he pretended not to notice she was rising. He was already turning away, already crossing towards the door with long deliberate strides.

It was an unpleasant moment. It was a series of unpleasant moments.

His hand was actually on the door-latch before she spoke.

She said, from somewhere much closer behind him than he had thought her to be, "Oh, Doctor —"

He turned, his hand still on the latch, and waited with stately courtesy.

She came nearer. She tilted the gray head to one side, looked up at him and said, "Doctor, will you be — what will you — I mean, aren't you going to try and find out more?"

Aha! The winner and still champion. . . .

Doctor Alcazar permitted a slightly puzzled expression to show upon his face.

He said, "'Find out?' . . . I'm afraid I don't quite follow, Mrs. de Vries."

She said, "What I really mean —" and broke off and went on looking up at Doctor Alcazar, smiling her enormous smile again.

"Now, you give *me* some time," she said. "Come back and sit down, please."

Doctor Alcazar did as he was bidden. He chose a chair nearer the French windows, and his hostess leaned against the edge of the desk nearby and looked down at him.

"Now look," she said with a sort

of bright-eyed bluntness, "although I've always *wanted* to believe what Hamlet said to Horatio was right, I've met so many phoneys in my time I haven't had a chance. . . ."

She came away from the desk and crossed to Doctor Alcazar's chair. There was a tremendous earnestness about her. "They're always trying to chisel," she said. "And they never *prove* anything! . . . But you've done something in ten minutes none of them ever did — you've convinced me!"

"I am honored," murmured Doctor Alcazar.

"Suppose," she said, "suppose you deliberately worked at — what would you call it? — *getting in touch* with Lily again! And suppose you succeeded! . . . Don't you think it's possible you might be able to find out who killed her?"

"H'mm . . ." Doctor Alcazar pondered this apparently startling question. He said, "But surely the police —"

"*Pah!*" said Gloria Druce. "They haven't got anywhere — and they never will!" She sighed. "I don't suppose we can blame them really, though. God knows this must be outside their ken! I tell you, Doctor, that poor girl didn't have an enemy in the world. Her whole life's been wrapped up in mine ever since I first employed her in London umpteen years ago. That may sound conceited, but it's true."

She stopped again, abruptly, and fixed Doctor Alcazar with a penetrating eye. She said, "Well — will you try?"

Doctor Alcazar's long white hand rubbed reflectively at his long white jaw. He said slowly, after due interval:

"It's an interesting idea, Miss Druce. . . ." He permitted a twinkle to come into the dark eyes. "In its way, too, it's a sort of challenge. . . ." He thought some more. "But I think I should warn you — it is most unlikely to succeed."

"But you'll *try!*" She beamed at him and then said briskly, "Wonderful! When do we start? And where?"

"Well," he said, "before I could attempt to get in touch, I should require some — some personal belonging, constantly used, of the unfortunate Miss Morton's. Some —"

"*I* know." She couldn't wait for him to finish his sentence. "And all her things are upstairs. What would you like?"

Doctor Alcazar was still reflective. He said, "Something she used recently — the more recently the better. . . ."

"That's easy! I've got everything she had when — when it happened. The police sent them back because there weren't any fingerprints or anything."

"Oh — really?" Doctor Alcazar sternly repressed eagerness. "Would her purse — her handbag — be among these effects?"

The pretty gray head nodded vigorously. "With everything in it — even her money, poor girl."

"Then," said Doctor Alcazar, "if I could have something out of it . . . Anything. . . ." And then he said, as if in afterthought, "No, no. Perhaps it would be better if I could have the bag itself. . . ."

She said, "Of course you can!"

It was, actually, only fifty seconds before she was back, holding out to Doctor Alcazar, as he rose to meet her, a purse of imitation crocodile — a purse which he remembered.

He took it in his hands and said, "Thank you . . . thank you. . . ." His eyes closed, he turned it over and over, his long fingers seeming to sense its texture.

He shook his head. He murmured, "No — no —" and opened his eyes. He said, "You permit me —?" and crossed to the desk and opened the bag and gently tipped its contents out onto the blotter.

He stood staring down at the heterogeneous litter and picked out with his eye, first the candy-bar, a good bite or two smaller than when he had last seen it; next the change purse, still with the roll of stamps projecting from it; next the envelope addressed (he could see now) to Miss Lily Morton. . . .

String and paper gone. As expected. As hoped. Something to work on. Get busy.

Doctor Alcazar picked out the small enameled compact. He said, "This might do very well," in a low, murmuring voice, and stood upright with the little case in his hand, his fingers moving constantly over its smooth surface. His remarkable eyes were closed, and his striking head flung back.

He came to, as it were. He opened his eyes, and he looked down at the compact in his hand. He said, "Yes . . . Yes . . . With your permission, Mrs. de Vries, I will take this with me," and slid it into a side-pocket of his coat.

She said, "Oh! Aren't you going to stay and — No. You'll have to have your crystal, of course."

Her face had fallen like a disappointed child's — which made matters even simpler than Doctor Alcazar had expected.

"I will indeed," said Doctor Alcazar, with one of his gravest smiles. "However, I happen to have it in my car; so I could, if you wish, make preliminary studies here and now."

"Oh — *won*derful!" She was alight again. "I'll ring for Josef."

Doctor Alcazar raised a gently protesting hand. "If you don't mind," he said, "I will go myself. I don't allow anyone else to handle it — even my own man. . . ." With a little bow he strode to the door, and opened it, and passed out of the room.

He crossed the hall, and opened the big door, and went quickly down the steps towards the Cadillac. He called, "Dupois! Dupois!" — and Avvie jumped out of the driver's seat, and said, "Yes sir?"

Doctor Alcazar came up to the car and while Avvie held the door, leaned in and fumbled with the glove compartment.

Doctor Alcazar said softly, out of the side of his mobile mouth, "I'll see you get inside. I want dope on Clinton," and then straightened and stood away from the car, holding something wrapped in a chamois-leather bag.

He returned to the house. As he stepped into the hallway, he saw the man servant entering the long room with a tray upon which were glasses and decanters.

His hostess came to meet Doctor Alcazar. "Suppose we have a drink?" she said.

"That," said Doctor Alcazar, "would be delightful." And then he added, with graceful hesitance, "I wonder whether I might impose still more on your kindness, Miss Druce? On behalf of my chauffeur. He has been driving all day, and —"

"But of *course!*" She turned quickly and said, "Josef will you see that Doctor Alcazar's man has anything he wants?"

"Yes, Madam," Josef said, and very soon was seen through the window by Doctor Alcazar, leading Avvie away around the corner of the house.

Much gratified with the course of events, Doctor Alcazar, having handed his hostess her glass, took a big and grateful draught from his own. . . .

It was nearly an hour later when he pushed his chair back from the desk, sighed wearily, and peered at Gloria de Vries through the bluish dusk they had produced in the room by lowering all the blinds.

In front of him on the desk, glittering softly in the light of the single lamp, was the small crystal globe which the chamois leather had covered. He drew a hand wearily across his brow. He said, "There's nothing — nothing. . . ."

He opened his other hand and laid down Lily Morton's compact. He said, "I am wasting your time, my dear lady . . . wasting your time. . . ."

She said, in a kind of vehement whisper, "Oh, don't give up yet! Please don't!"

"As you wish," said Doctor Alcazar bravely. He turned in his chair, picked up the compact in his left hand, shaded his eyes with his right hand, and hunched once more over the glittering ball of the crystal. . . .

And once more there was silence. . . .

But not for long this time. Suddenly, Doctor Alcazar's whole body seemed to grow tense and he said, in a hushed yet urgent voice:

"Ah! Here is something! . . . The crystal is clouding. . . ."

His left hand, gripping the dead woman's compact, raised itself from the table, seemed to hover close to his temple. He said:

"Ah! The mists are clearing . . . I see — is it a figure, a woman's figure? I cannot be sure . . . No — it is gone . . . All I see is — a big post standing in the ground. There is something coiling around the post — a serpent, is it? . . . No. It is something *being* coiled around the post, by

unseen hands . . . Ah! It is a rope — a strange rope — oddly colored — with interwoven strands of green and gold. . . ."

No reaction. But keep on trying.

". . . The mists are clearing, clearing . . . The colors of the rope are vivid, very vivid . . . There is a strange light over everything . . . The post itself is colored — a peculiar, almost violet shade . . . The contrast between the violet of the post and the green-and-gold of the rope is striking. . . ."

A small, quickly stifled "Oh!" of astonishment came from the shadows to Doctor Alcazar's left. He bent lower over the crystal.

"The image is growing brighter. The mists have gone . . . But still I see only the rope and the post . . . Wait — wait! There is something strange about the post. It doesn't look like timber at all now. It looks — it looks — But I cannot see — the light is fading. The mists are closing in again. . . ."

Doctor Alcazar sat back in his chair, his shoulders sagging.

"I am sorry," he said wearily. "The image has faded. . . ." He smiled sadly. "But I feel impelled to tell you, Mrs. de Vries, that I think we were being — misled, shall I say?"

"Misled?" The small woman was staring at Doctor Alcazar with extraordinary intentness. "Because what you saw wasn't anything to do with Lily?"

"Exactly." Doctor Alcazar sighed again.

She jumped to her feet and came close to him. She said, "It was wonderful, all the same! It wasn't about Lily — but it *was* about me!"

Doctor Alcazar frowned. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

She said, "Wait!" — and went quickly across to a corner and flipped on another light, bent down and opened a cupboard beneath a bookshelf, and took something from it which she held behind her back as she marched towards him again.

"Look!" she said, and whipped her hand from behind her and held under Doctor Alcazar's eyes a roll made up of many sheets, obviously smoothed-out after use, of violet-colored wrapping-paper tied around with multiple windings of green-and-gold string.

Doctor Alcazar sat straight in his chair. He took the roll of paper from her with a murmured, "Permit me," and held it under the light of the desk-lamp where he studied it with wondering concentration.

Doctor Alcazar said, "Yes . . . Yes . . ." and looked at her. He said, "Your psychic projection must be strong — enormously strong!" He eyed the paper and string again. "Has this any particular significance, Mrs. de Vries? Any — emotional meaning?" He reached out and switched on the other desk-lamp, so that he could see her face.

An odd change came over it. She smiled — but it was a different sort of smile. A shy smile, like the smile of an embarrassed girl. She said, "Well — yes, I suppose it has. In a way. . . ."

And then she said, "I'm going to tell you all about it. It's nothing to do with poor Lily — but it's so amazing, so extraordinary the way it — it sort of popped in! . . . It's all to do with George."

"George?" said Doctor Alcazar. "That is your husband's name — middle name?"

"No, no! George is — an old admirer of mine. Of Gloria Druce's — not Gloria de Vries'. . . ."

Doctor Alcazar smiled — and waited.

"But — I've never seen him! I don't even know his name. 'George' is just what I call him." She took the roll from Doctor Alcazar's hand. "This paper and string is what he always wraps my presents in. . . . It's really quite romantic — that's all I get from him, gifts. There's no note with them, ever; no address; nothing! Except in the very first one — that was about two years ago — there was an old program for *The Green And The Gold*, with a picture of me on the front when I first played it in New York . . . That's how I knew he was an admirer. . . ."

She looked at Doctor Alcazar and her smile faded, and she said, almost somberly, "You don't know how much it means to an old actress, Doctor, when someone remembers. . . ."

"Yes," said Doctor Alcazar. "Yes. . . . " He said, "What sort of gifts does he send you?"

"Oh. . . ." She made a little gesture. "All sorts. Books — and perfume — and odd little knick-knacks — everything! And they're always delightful!"

"No candy?" said Doctor Alcazar, smiling a smile which, in the circumstances, cost him effort to produce.

"Oh, *yes!* Every third or fourth package. Heavenly liqueur chocolates!" She put the paper down on the desk again and said, in quite a different voice, "But all this is keeping us from poor Lily. . . ."

Doctor Alcazar rose to his feet. He said, "I'm afraid, Mrs. de Vries, that it would be useless just now." He picked Lily Morton's compact from the table. "But I will take this, if I may — and resume my efforts tonight, alone. . . ."

In spite of his hostess' disappointment, he took his leave. He had to.

Doctor Alcazar had detected still more death in the air — and he wanted to think. . . .

It was five thirty when the Cadillac rolled out of the imposing gates and onto Fairbanks Drive.

At five thirty-five, in obedience to directions from Doctor Alcazar, it pulled up only two blocks away, at the far end of a road which petered out in unexpected trees and heathland.

Doctor Alcazar got out of the car, and so did Avvie who looked around him and said, "Where's this — and what gives?"

"And you're the one who read the papers," said Doctor Alcazar. He took Avvie by the shoulder and pointed to illustrate his words. "*That* is the back

fence of the de Vries property. This road, *here*, is part of the short-cut Lily Morton took from Sunset Boulevard the night she was killed. *This* vacant lot, between us and the de Vries', is the rest of the short-cut. And *that* tree —" he pointed to a lone, tall, twisted eucalyptus — "marks the spot where she was killed! . . . Now clam up — and let me alone."

Doctor Alcazar then strode away from Avvie and the car. His eyes turning this way and that, he walked all around the little strip of barren earth — and then, making his way to the tree, stood underneath it, looking up as if he were studying its branches.

And then he came back to the car. He got into it and said, "Okay," to Avvie and leaned back on the cushions.

"That's great!" Avvie turned to regard him sourly. "Where to now — the morgue?"

Doctor Alcazar seemed deep in thought. He said vaguely, "No — to eat. There used to be a little place on Pisanta Street. Mexican. Good. Very reasonable. . . ."

The little place was still there and an hour later Avvie finished his last tortilla, refilled his coffee-cup, and leaned back in his chair.

"Well, Doc," he said, "when d'ya start talkin'?"

Doctor Alcazar lit a cigarette. He said, "After *you* have," and grinned at Avvie. "So — what gives with Clinton de Vries, Esquire?"

Avvie said, "Gotta lotta stuff — but I don't know if it helps. Clint's around forty — forty-five. From a picture I seen, he goes around a hundred an' sixty-two. Bin married to the dame around five years. Makes like a playboy some — but a right guy by the general concentrus. Him and the missus rub along okay, but no heartthrobs: he's got the polo horses, she's got the dough."

Avvie picked up a fork and began to probe at a hindmost molar. But he put the fork down almost at once and looked at Doctor Alcazar again.

"Somep'n I forgot," he said. "The guy's got the varicose vein in his leg. Wears one o' them rubber socks. I seen a spare on the line an' ast about it." He began to ply the fork again. "For what it's worth," he mumbled.

Doctor Alcazar regarded him with almost avuncular pride. He said, "Avvie, you did a very nice job in the time. But," he added, "I must ask you one or two questions."

Avvie finished with the fork and set it down. He said, "Hold it, hold it — I ain't through yet. Now, as to said Clint's recent movements: he's got a cabin up to Big Bear. Went up there the morninga the day this Lily got blotted. The missus called him when they found her next day an' he come right down to help. It eventuates there's nothin' he can do — so he goes right back. Comin' home tomorra, time for dinner."

Avvie had finished now. He leaned over the table and took a cigarette from Doctor Alcazar's pack, lit it, and said through smoke:

"*Now* make with the questions."

"Avvie," said Doctor Alcazar, "I don't have a one! You've really covered the ground. But covered it!"

Avvie smiled, a trifle grimly. "It's your turn, brother," he said.

Doctor Alcazar had been smiling, but now his face was set and somber. He said, "We came down here to try and horn in on a five grand reward for finding who killed Lily Morton. . . ."

He said, "Well, I've found that out. But I've found out some more too. The same guy's going to kill somebody else. He didn't want to kill Lily Morton. But he had to. Because Lily Morton had tumbled onto something which might have stopped him getting away with the murder he was really trying for. . . ."

He said, "This guy's been working on this other woman for a couple of years — sending her presents. She doesn't think they come from him; she thinks they come from somebody who used to have a yen for her when she was ace-high on Broadway. . . ."

He said, "The guy's *established* the present-sender. The woman's even made up a name for him. She feels quite safe with anything 'George' sends her — especially candy! . . ."

He said, "But some day, Avvie, she won't be safe with that candy. Some day that candy'll be the death of her. . . ."

Doctor Alcazar paused and Avvie looked at him and said, "Aw! Quit talkin' in riddles, will ya! So the dame's the de Vries dame —"

"And," said Doctor Alcazar, "the guy's the de Vries guy!"

Avvie stared. Avvie shook his head. "Couldn'ta been," Avvie said. "He was up to Big Bear like I told you."

Doctor Alcazar regarded him with displeasure. "He couldn't have been. Because he was around that vacant lot at night, killing Lily Morton. It's easy. He starts in the morning — and then stashes his car — and lies low — and when it's dark hangs around that dead-end and waits for Lily. *He* knows the way she always comes in. And after he's killed her, off he goes to the mountains, and wakes up in Big Bear in the morning."

Avvie wriggled in his chair. "How come you're so surea yourself?" His lip curled. "Get it outa the crystal, did ya?"

"I got it," said Doctor Alcazar, "from Lily Morton herself. About two hours, I figure, *before* she was killed." He stubbed out his cigarette, and lit another.

Avvie stared at him. "How's that again?" he said.

Doctor Alcazar said, "Lily Morton wanted some advice, Avvie. She knew a woman —" now a very fair replica of the dead woman's voice came from his mouth — " 'whose 'usband was deceivin' 'er like — on'y what 'e was doin' to deceive 'er was mykin' 'er 'appy' . . . And Lily Morton was the 'on'y person what knew' . . . And Lily Morton was 'fair bewildered-like tryin' to think what she oughter do' — tell the woman, or leave well alone. . . ."

Doctor Alcazar said, "She tried to tell me the woman was her sister — but she slipped up at the beginning and started to say 'my mistress,' which is what maids in England call the women they work for."

He paused, and Avvie said, "Doc, you're reachin'!" and shook his head.

Doctor Alcazar frowned. He said, "No. Listen to this: in her purse, Lily Morton had a peculiar piece of violet-colored wrapping-paper — new — tied up with a bit of peculiar string, green-and-gold. I sprung this on her — and her reaction was worried, maybe frightened. Now, what do I find this afternoon, with Druce? I work on the paper and string because it's the only real lead I've got — and pretty soon I get the whole story of 'George,' because this peculiar paper and string is the same as the kind he always uses on the presents. . . ."

He said, "And that's not all. I found out the paper and string were the only things missing from Lily's purse when they found her!"

Avvie wasn't scornful any more. "Goes somep'n like this, huh? 'George' must be Clint; when Lily found out he was, Clint blotted her. Which means he must be gonna use 'George' to blot the missus — else he wouldn'ta gone to them lengths."

He looked at Doctor Alcazar, his small brown eyes bright like a bird's.

Doctor Alcazar beamed. "Terse," he said. "And concise. And absolutely right. You've got a grasp, Avvie — definitely a grasp."

Avvie drank some coffee in silence. Then he said, "Trouble is, you got nothin' to pin on Clint. This Lily knew he was 'George' — but *she* ain't talkin'! You got no *proof!*"

"Avvie," said Doctor Alcazar, "you get better and better."

"And from where I sit," said Avvie, "we're looking worse an' worse." He put a hand in his pocket and pulled out silver and some crumpled bills, looked at them, and shook his head.

"Lay off," said Doctor Alcazar reprovingly. "What are you getting at? We couldn't quit if we wanted to. In the first place, there's the paramount question of cabbage. We're surrounded by it, my boy — and we have to pick some. . . . And what about the little Druce? You know, there's something about her, Avvie."

"So whatta we do?" Avvie was belligerent. "Pick us a park bench and sit around gettin' corns; waitin' for 'George' to make up his mind it's time to send the old lady a strychnine-flavored Popsicle!"

"No," said Doctor Alcazar slowly. "No. That's not my idea at all. . . ."

Whatever this idea may have been, it worked so well in its preliminary stages (which were conducted by telephone the next afternoon) that within twenty-four hours Doctor Alcazar was dining at Number 347 Fairbanks Drive, the only guest of Mr. and Mrs. Clinton de Vries.

Mrs. de Vries, who had no idea she had been jockeyed into the position, was plainly delighted to be Doctor

Alcazar's hostess again. And Mr. de Vries, though he made no secret of the fact that he was skeptical of his wife's attempt to "trail a killer with spooks," was nevertheless a bland and genial host who, despite the fact that he seemed himself a trifle on the jumpy side, obviously did his charming best to put his visitor at ease.

Mr. de Vries was much younger-seeming than his forty-odd years might have been thought to warrant. He had a fine figure, excellent clothes, a pleasing and forthright manner — and a Rhodes' Scholar's charming, amorphic accent. He had drunk, with no visible effect, an astonishing quantity of martinis before dinner, and at the meal was constantly having his wineglass refilled. Towards his wife his manner was courteous and comradely — and (thought Doctor Alcazar) rather carefully rehearsed.

Dinner was nearly over before Mrs. de Vries said, suddenly and with emphasis, "I can't stand all this *chattery!* I want to talk about Lily!" She looked across the table at her husband. "Clinton, I can't help it if you think it's silly: all I ask is that you don't try and be *funny!*" She looked at Doctor Alcazar. "Doctor," she said, "I can't wait any longer. You sounded so excited on the phone, I have to know what's happened!"

Doctor Alcazar smiled blandly at her and then glanced at his host.

"Perhaps Mr. de Vries," began Doctor Alcazar, and was stopped by a snort from his hostess.

"If Clinton doesn't like it," she said, "he can go talk to a horse!" She smiled her wide smile suddenly at her husband. "Sorry, Clint," she said. "But I did sort of mean it. . . ."

"My dear Gloria," said Mr. de Vries, "go ahead. Talk about anything you like. Do anything you like." He smiled at Doctor Alcazar — the merest trifle too friendly a smile. He said, "*You* understand, Doctor, I'm sure." He raised his glass to his mouth but went on looking at Doctor Alcazar over its rim — the merest trifle too steadily. "You've met plenty of skeptics in your time, I'm sure." He laughed — the merest trifle too loudly.

Doctor Alcazar laughed too — a rich and muted and mellow laugh. He said, "Mr. de Vries, skeptics are — if I may be permitted the phrase — just my meat. . . ."

He raised his own glass and sipped at it, studying Mr. de Vries.

Nervous. Might be really scared. Hopes I'm a phoney but isn't sure. Keep at him.

"May I ask," said Doctor Alcazar, looking at his hostess, "how much you have told Mr. de Vries of our experiment?"

"As much as he'd listen to. About you seeing Lily — and describing her; and then about the paper and string. . . ."

"Ah!" said Doctor Alcazar. "That string! That green-and-gold string!" He looked at Clinton de Vries, as if waiting his opinion.

De Vries hesitated. He played with his wineglass. He said, "Yes — very

int'resting. Very int'resting. But —" He didn't go on.

He doesn't like it. Keep close, keep punching.

"Indeed, yes," said Doctor Alcazar. "*Very* interesting!" His voice had taken on a subtle shade of mysticism, and the eyes he turned on Mrs. de Vries wore the far-off look of a visionary. He said:

"You say I seemed excited when I telephoned you. I was. I had been at work on our problem and I had seen —" he paused, most effectively — "the most extraordinary thing! I had seen — perhaps to you I should say *sensed* — I had sensed something which made me realize that the green-and-gold string, and the violet paper, were *not* obtrusions of your psychotic stream, Mrs. de Vries — but truly part of Lily Morton's!"

Doctor Alcazar sat back in his chair, rested his hands on the table, and turned his striking eyes and their faraway look on his host again.

"I believe," said Doctor Alcazar, "that the unknown 'George' is the murderer of Lily Morton. . . ."

From the end of the table, the little gray-headed woman stared at him with wide, horrified eyes. She was about to speak — but her husband spoke first.

He said, "Good *God!*" very sharply — and then, too smoothly, "Now *that* is the most preposterous notion!"

"*Clinton!*" said Gloria de Vries. She turned to Doctor Alcazar. "But — but — are you *sure*, Doctor?"

Smiling, Clinton de Vries lifted his glass. But something happened — something went wrong with the movement. The glass slipped from his hand and fell to the table, tilting out a pool of wine and snapping its fragile stem.

"Oh — too bad, too bad!" said Doctor Alcazar, and was busily helpful with his napkin.

Keep close; keep punching.

Doctor Alcazar, his labors over, looked again at Mrs. de Vries. He said, "You ask, am I sure of this strange union of 'George' and Lily Morton's murderer? . . . To be frank, Miss Dru — Mrs. de Vries, I am not. Not yet. But I do feel convinced that one more evocation of the psychomantic waves will bring —" he shrugged — "either confirmation or the reverse."

"Oh, Doctor!" She leaned towards him eagerly. "Is there — can you — I mean, couldn't you do it here? . . ."

It worked — it worked!

"If you would like that," said Doctor Alcazar benignly, "I'm sure it could be arranged. . . . Unless, of course, Mr. de Vries has any objection. . . ."

Hold your breath!

"Go ahead, go ahead!" said Clinton de Vries. "Matter of fact, I think I'll sit in — if you don't mind."

A-aah!

"No, no. In fact, quite the contrary," said Doctor Alcazar.

And less than twenty minutes later, in the long and pleasant room where he had first met Mrs. de Vries,

he was once again seated before the desk near the French windows, raptly concentrating upon the small crystal globe before him. Again, the only lighted lamp in the room was the one upon the desk beside him. But this time it was night, and the darkness was real darkness instead of simulated dusk. To each side of him, only just within the faintest outer fringes of the light, sat Mrs. de Vries, to his right — and Mr. de Vries, to his left.

As he sat, Doctor Alcazar's whole body seemed to grow tense, and he said, in a hushed yet urgent voice:

"Ah! Here is something! . . . The crystal is clouding. . . ."

His voice grew lower, thicker. It said, slowly, dragging out the words:

"In the mist — a tree. A eucalyptus, bent and gnarled and twisted. Its branches look like hands reaching down . . . It stands in a patch of wasteland . . . The mist is closing in and I cannot see . . . Ah! The crystal is clearing again — but the tree is changing. It is not a tree, it is a post standing upright from the ground. The post that I saw before — violet-colored, and with green-and-gold rope coiling around it . . . A figure comes up to the post, creeping and furtive. A man's figure. I can only see his back — the back of the man I have seen in the crystal before. The back of the unknown 'George'. . . ."

Doctor Alcazar paused, drawing in a deep and sighing breath. He listened, but heard nothing. No sound. No movement.

"The figure is uncoiling the rope from the post. In his hands the rope becomes cord . . . He is tearing down the post, and in his hands it becomes paper — sheet upon sheet of wrapping-paper, violet-colored. As he folds it, his shoulders shake. I cannot see his face, but I know that he is laughing. An evil, gloating, malevolent laugh. He is planning evil; evil to someone associated with this strangely-colored string and paper. . .

"The image is changing again. It is a room — a familiar room — *this* room! The morning sun streams through the windows. There is no one here. But on the desk — on *this* desk! — is a package. A package wrapped in violet paper and tied with green-and-gold string. . . ."

Again Doctor Alcazar paused, and now he heard movements from his audience. Little shiftings and twitchings.

He bowed lower over the glittering little globe in front of him and said, the eerie monotone deepening:

"Someone is entering the room. A woman. Gloria. She comes to the desk. She examines the package. She tears off the wrappings, delighted.

"Ah! be careful, Gloria! You think this is a gift sent with love — but it is a gift sent with cold and deadly purpose . . . A gift which is meant, like all its forerunners, to lull you into a sense of false security . . . There is a mordant, miasmic aura surrounding that package, Gloria! One day — some day, any day — a package like this will come, and you will be happy

about it, and trustful — but it will spell your death. . . ."

From the shadows on the right came the sound of a woman's voice; a startled formless little sound.

". . . The image changes . . . Another room — and Lily is here, Lily Morton . . . She is staring in amazement at something she has found. String — green-and-gold string. And paper — violet-colored paper . . . They are unused; that is why she is astonished. Finding them here has shown her the identity of 'George'. . . .

"The knowledge troubles her. She doesn't know what to do. She takes a small piece of the paper, a little coil of the string. . . .

"She is gone . . . But now comes the image of 'George' again . . . Still I cannot see his face. He is staring after Lily. He knows she has discovered him. . . .

"Now he is beneath the twisted tree again. It is stark and gaunt against the night sky. He is waiting . . . He hears approaching footsteps. Lily's footsteps. He tenses. Lily approaches. He leaps at her, strikes. . . .

"Lily is motionless — a lifeless, crumpled heap upon the ground. He bends over her body, searching. He finds her handbag. He opens it — takes something from it with his gloved hands . . . What has he taken? I cannot see . . . Yes — it is the little roll of violet-colored paper, bound with the green-and-gold string."

Doctor Alcazar stopped. And waited. He had heard another movement — a sharp rustle — from his left. And a hissing intake of breath.

He's going. He's back on his heels. What to use for the knockout? . . . Ah!

Doctor Alcazar shifted in his chair. Growing excitement appeared to have seized him. His hands gripped the desk-top as his eyes stared down at the globe.

". . . He is stealing away . . . If *only* I could see his face! . . . He is limping a little. His leg is paining him, aching. He puts his hand down to it, seeming to adjust something beneath his trouser-leg. . . ."

An odd little cry from the right, a strangled cry of panic-stricken astonishment.

No sound from the left.

". . . Ah! He is turning! At last we are going to see his face! He —"

The click of a switch — and the room was flooded with light.

"All right, that's enough!" The voice that came out of Clinton de Vries was harsh and high-pitched. "Stay where you are. Both of you. Don't move."

He was standing — and there was a gun in his hand, squat and black and ugly. His face was a dirty gray color, and his eyes were glazed and bright. He looked at Doctor Alcazar and said, "You heard me. Keep *still*." He looked at the hunched, frozen immobility of his wife and said, "You. Get up. Open the safe and take out the money you put there this morning."

Doctor Alcazar looked at the French windows. The curtains over them billowed and Avvie stepped into the room. The coat of his non-commital gray suit was tightly buttoned, and his brown felt hat was pulled low on his forehead. His right hand was in his side pocket, grasping a gun.

As de Vries wheeled, Avvie moved forward. "Okay, de Vries," he snapped. "That'll do. You'd better drop the pistol."

He moved steadily across the room, a courageous little man. He said, "I got a warrant for you here," in the same dry, crackling voice, and then stopped abruptly.

An extraordinary sound had come from the throat of de Vries — an insane, animal sound. His lips rolled back from his teeth and his mouth opened, wide.

His hand flashed up and thrust the muzzle of his gun into his mouth, pointing upwards.

There was an oddly muffled report — and a mess — and no more Clinton de Vries. . . .

Avvie sat in the dimmest corner of the little bar-room. His fingers drummed incessantly on the stained table top, and he kept glancing at the door. . . .

It opened for the twentieth time — and admitted the tall and lean and imposing form of Doctor Alcazar, who paced slowly towards his friend, drew up a chair, sat down, put a hand inside his coat, and slowly pulled out his wallet.

From the wallet he drew an oblong, blue-tinted slip of paper, and turned it so that Avvie could see its face.

Avvie's eyes opened, very wide. He swallowed. He said, "Ten G's!" without knowing he'd spoken.

Doctor Alcazar folded the check, put it back in his wallet, and turned and called an order to the barman. An impressive order.

Avvie said, "What we gonna do?" His voice was still hoarse with shock. "Split an' quit?"

Doctor Alcazar eyed him reprovingly. "My dear Avvie!" he said. "Our hard-gotten gains *might*, of course, be used to found The Alcazar College of Psychic Research. . . .

"On the other hand," said Doctor Alcazar, "they *could* be used to set us up in business. . . ."

"Howzat?" Avvie said. "Whaddya mean — business?"

"The business," said Doctor Alcazar, "of Private Investigation. . . . You type a report and they give you a century — but you look in the crystal and they give you ten grand!"

THE LADY AT THE KEYHOLE

Vera Caspary . . . in the mystery field the name of Vera Caspary evokes another name — LAURA, *the title of Miss Caspary's first detective novel and one of the major successes of this decade.* LAURA *began as a magazine serial, was then published in book form, later became a sensational motion picture, and finally toured as a play. Indeed,* LAURA *was so popular in all its processings that one is tempted to think of the author as Laura Caspary . . . In the course of her varied writing career — advertising copywriter, editor, novelist, playwright, screen-play writer, even correspondence-school teacher — Vera Caspary has proved herself an explorer of the "aberrations of society." Her early work was ambitiously serious. In her first book,* THE WHITE GIRL *(1929), she dealt vividly, harshly, and realistically with the problem of a Negress who left the South for Chicago and posed as white. At that period in her literary growth Vera Caspary wrote "in the hard, materialistic style of Fannie Hurst and Edna Ferber." Subsequent novels showed her still probing social backgrounds, and in 1932 her novel,* THICKER THAN WATER, *depicted the family life of Portuguese Jews in Chicago, describing "the subtle alterations . . . and the slow fading of orthodox observances."*

After an interval of scripting for the films Miss Caspary created LAURA *— "Something different from the run-of-the-mill detective story" and "done with a novel twist and much skill," according to Will Cuppy's review.* BEDELIA *followed — a "curious and clever" tale in which Miss Caspary "ably presented a pathological case history without so much as once finding it necessary to indulge in the special terminology of the psychiatric clinic." Completing a trio of so-called "psycho-thrillers," her next book,* STRANGER THAN THE TRUTH, *was compared by some critics with Kenneth Fearing's* THE BIG CLOCK.

But now, Vera Caspary is "through with it." She will write no more detective stories. Perhaps that is why Miss Caspary feels so strongly that she is "not properly a mystery story writer at all." She has always maintained that murder is only "a dramatic device which heightens the emotion and action, and sharpens character drawing." Does Miss Caspary really mean that? Merely a dramatic device? What else does Miss Caspary think of the writing craft? Well, she believes that "to be a writer you must have a point of view in what you experience. You need to keep an ear and an eye

always at the keyhole, without malice. After you have observed, and listened at keyholes, all you need is a will of iron to ride the beam."

Taking Miss Caspary at her own word, let us now watch her peeping through the keyhole, looking into the lives of two women and a man, hearing what they say, imagining what they think, observing what they do; let us pin down, throughout the story, Miss Caspary's own point of view, using that as the catalyst (without malice, remember) which reveals the dissolution of a human soul — for surely that is precisely what the act of murder is . . .

SUGAR AND SPICE

by VERA CASPARY

I HAVE never known a murderer, a murder victim, nor anyone involved in a murder case. I admit that I am a snob, but to my mind crime is sordid and inevitably associated with gangsters, frustrated choir singers in dusty suburban towns, and starving old ladies supposed to have hidden vast fortunes in the bedsprings. I once remarked to a friend that people of our sort were not in the homicide set, and three weeks later heard that her brother-in-law had been arrested as a suspect in the shooting of his rich uncle. It was proved, however, that this was a hunting accident and the brother-in-law exonerated. But it gave me quite a jolt.

Jolt number two came when Mike Jordan, sitting on my patio on a Sunday afternoon, told me a story which proved that well-bred, middle-class girls can commit murder as calmly as I knit a sock, and with fewer lumps in the finished product. Mike had arrived that morning for an eleven o'clock breakfast, and after the briefest greeting had sat silent until the bells of San Miguel started tolling twelve.

This was unusual. Mike was not the taciturn type. But he was independent almost to a point of arrogance and disliked asking favors. This I learned was the cause of the brooding silence. There is no greater favor you can ask a California hostess than the use of her telephone for a New York call.

I sat without speaking until the bells were still. Mike pulled out a roll of bills that reminded me of the old movie gangsters.

"Let me pay you now, Lissa. I don't want to make this call from the Officers Club. It may take two or three hours to get through, and there are always too many fellows waiting to use the phones. Believe me, this is a case of life and death."

When he put the call through I disappeared. A few minutes later Mike found me on the patio with the

watering can in my discreet hands. It was a brilliant day, the wind high, the air sweet with the scent of sage and mimosa. Bees floated above the geraniums, and the cactus was coated with a film of silver dust. Loathing sunshine, Mike pulled a canopied chair into the shade of the pepper tree. He had the light skin that burns easily and a thick crop of flaming hair.

"Would you like to know who killed Gilbert Jones?"

My watering can clattered on the flagged floor of the patio. According to the latest reports, Gilbert Jones's death was still baffling the New York police. It was one of those conspicuous murders that take up front-page space usually reserved for the biggest war news. Gilbert Jones had been a leading New York actor who had also played in a few pictures, and there were two women involved in the case, one beautiful, the other a millionaire. They were cousins, and had both been in love with Gilbert Jones.

"How do *you* know who killed him?"

We were alone that Sunday afternoon. My husband was on duty at the Post and an eighth of a mile separated us from the nearest neighbor. Although there was no one closer than the passengers in the pygmy cars on the highway below our hill, Mike spoke softly. This story was close to his heart. . . .

Mike Jordan's mother was the sort of woman who, when she learned she was to have a child, looked at beautiful pictures and listened to great music. As a result, Mike grew up to make family gatherings more than usually hideous by his renditions of *The Melody in F* and Rachmaninoff's *Prelude*. His first music teacher had been a German, the local professor; when he died Mike took lessons from Mrs. Coles, a faded blonde with brown eyes, crimped hair, and a pair of pearl-button earrings which Mike was certain she wore when she bathed and slept.

Everybody in town felt sorry for Mrs. Coles because her husband had deserted her, and admired her because she supported herself when she might easily have depended upon rich relations. To Mike her independence seemed a bit rueful. At every lesson the piano students were made aware that she had been bred for better things than the career of music teacher. She had a lovely daughter to whom her gallant laments must have been as much part of the daily routine as the students' finger exercises.

One day — Mike was about sixteen at the time — Mrs. Coles interrupted a Chopin *Nocturne* by announcing, "Phyllis is so fond of you, Michael. She looks up to you with the greatest respect."

Mike's fingers crashed down upon the keyboard as though he were working on Liszt's *Second Hungarian Rhapsody*. He had always admired the piano teacher's daughter. She was very fair, with great, glowing dark eyes.

"She has something to ask you," Mrs. Coles continued. "But she's shy and has asked me to approach you first. I reminded her of the *Courtship of Miles Standish* and said, 'Why don't you speak for yourself, Phyllis?' but she said the tables were turned because John Alden was a man. A clever child, don't you think? So I wonder, Michael" — Mrs. Coles hesitated, adjusting a pearl earring — "if you'd like to escort Phyllis to Nancy Miller's party. It's to be at the club, a bit ostentatious, in my opinion, for such young people, but Nancy's mother, although she is my own sister, likes show. Perhaps you will enjoy it."

The invitation flattered and puzzled him. Nancy Miller was almost a legend in the town, a girl who went to fashionable boarding schools and spent her summers in Europe or at seashore resorts. There was hardly a profitable industry in the town that did not belong in some fashion to her father. They had a big place — an estate, the town called it — a couple of miles out on the river.

Mike's mother suggested that he might have been invited because he had won an interstate essay contest, and had his picture in a Chicago newspaper. Mike laughed scornfully. Phyllis Coles might have had as her escort the senior class president or the captain of the football team. The prize essay had provided him with a sporty new outfit, white ducks and a blue Norfolk jacket. He was reading Schnitzler at the time, fancied himself a man of the world, and wondered if he dared appear with a carnation in his buttonhole.

On the day of the party he got as far as the door of Nick Scarpas's flower store on Main Street, but there his courage failed. He arrived at the Coles house just as if he had come for a music lesson and, as the door was always open, walked in. Through yellow silk portieres he heard shrillness and sobbing. What, he asked himself, would a man of the world do in the circumstances? He trifled with the idea of sneaking away, returning, and announcing himself with a dignified knock. Then an inspiration visited him. He struck a pose beside the piano and began playing with one hand carelessly. No man of the world could have done it better.

The yellow drapes parted, Mrs. Coles skipped into the room, adjusted an earring. "How prompt, Michael! Phyllis isn't quite ready. Will you wait?"

Presently Phyllis came out. Her nostrils and the edges of her eyes, Mike noticed, were faintly pink. As they walked to the club she seemed more remote than ever. The month was June, the twilight fragrant. In every yard roses and iris bloomed, and bushes were garlanded with bridal wreath. Phyllis seemed as frail as a flower in a cloudy blue dress embroidered all over with small pink nosegays.

They walked timidly up the path that led to the club's great door and entered slowly. As they crossed the lobby a swarthy crone seized Phyllis

and shouted, "Isn't she lovely?" Mike saw a witch's face rouged to the eyes, which were as black and hard as the jet pendants that dangled from her ears. "Pity," she muttered, "pity the party isn't given for her."

Another woman, ruffled and jeweled, peered at Phyllis through a rimless pince-nez. "Sweet child, I'm so glad you've come. How well you look in that dress."

Phyllis turned away. Her enchanting pallor was lost in a rose-pink blush. Mike rubbed his left shoe against his right leg, embarrassed because Phyllis had neglected to present him to the ladies, who he knew must be old Mrs. Hulbert and her daughter, Mrs. Ulysses S. Miller.

It was a grand party. Sophisticated, the local paper called it. The ballroom was decorated in silver and black velvet, its tall columns twined with silver-leaved garlands, the bandstand draped with velvet and dripping with tinsel. Mike was about to express awe when he became aware of scorn in the tilt of Phyllis's nose and the slight smile curving her lips.

"Come along, Mike; Nancy will want to meet you."

He had last seen Nancy Miller when she was a fat little girl riding in a wicker basket behind a fat pony. Now that she was fifteen years old, he had imagined that she would have come to look like an heiress. If she had been merely homely, he would have been less disappointed than in this commonplace girl, still fat, and as lumpy as back-yard soil.

"Is this the *famous* Mike Jordan?" She had one of those insincere, heavily inflected, finishing-school voices, hideously unbecoming to a fleshy girl with big bones. Her enthusiasm, her synthetic charm, her schooled graces contrasted painfully with her cousin's pretty reticence. "I've heard *so much* about *you*."

"I guess you mean a couple of other fellows," he replied wittily. "I'm just the Mike Jordan nobody knows."

She smiled coyly. "A famous man shouldn't be so modest."

As Mike danced with Phyllis he noticed that Nancy's dark eyes were following them. Phyllis noticed, too, and smiled. Later, of course, Mike had to dance with his hostess. She was too heavy for him, too self-assertive, the sort of girl who had to control her instinct to lead.

"I read your essay," she said. "I think it was wonderful. It reminded me of Thomas Paine or Patrick Henry."

He accepted the tribute grudgingly.

"I was curious to meet the man who wrote such inspired words," Nancy added. And Mike actually felt himself blush as she went on, "That's why I asked Phyllis to bring you tonight. And" — she looked into his face brazenly — "I'm not disappointed in the writer, either."

When the music stopped he tried to break away, but Nancy clung to him, accompanying him in his search for Phyllis.

They found her on the porch, sur-

rounded by boys. "Isn't my cousin the most popular thing?" Nancy squealed. "Men are always wild about her." She broke through the circle of Phyllis's admirers, encircled her cousin's waist with a strong, swarthy arm. "You're absolutely bewitching in that dress."

Phyllis froze. Muttering a sullen thanks, she went off to dance with Johnnie Elder. Nancy giggled, and later, at supper, attempted again to flatter her cousin: "Isn't Phyllis just too sweet in blue? That dress looks as if it were designed for her."

A couple of Nancy's girl-friends giggled. The significance of the scene was lost upon Mike then, and it was not until years later, when Nancy, herself, explained its peculiar agony, that he understood that certain traits of character are called feminine because they are implanted early in girl-children.

"Well, Mike, how did you like the party?" Phyllis asked, as they walked home in the moonlight.

He dared not show how thin was his lacquer of sophistication, so he answered dryly, "It was all right."

"It was ghastly. All that silver and velvet; just showy ostentation."

Johnnie Elder honked past them, waving from his brother's roadster.

Phyllis watched the vanishing taillights. Abruptly gripping Mike's arm, she whispered, "She hates me, Mike, she hates me desperately; she wishes I was dead."

"Who?"

"Don't be stupid. Didn't you notice anything? She's hated me ever since we were little kids, because they could buy her everything except looks. Her hair's as straight as an Indian's. And Grandma always felt sorry for me because my mother was poor and had to support us, so she always made a fuss over me instead. Once my grandmother gave me a big doll" — Phyllis's hands measured the height of this wondrous memory — "it was bigger than any doll Nancy got that Christmas. And it was only that I was poor and didn't have so many toys that Grandma gave me this big doll. Nancy was so jealous that she grabbed the doll out of my arms and deliberately smashed it. There's still a chip in the fireplace where she broke it. The head was in pieces. She hates me."

She stood quite still. Moonlight, shining through the catalpa tree, fell upon her so that half of her face, lighted in silver, was clear-cut and exquisite, while the other half was scarred by a shadow as jagged and irregular as a birthmark. Mike took her arm and jerked her out of the shadows.

As they walked through the shabbier streets to her mother's house, Phyllis told him of her ambitions: "I'm going to be an actress. I mean to be very successful and rich, and then I'll laugh at everyone."

The gate creaked as they walked up the untidy path. Phyllis looked at the moon and laughed. . . .

The next season she joined the Dramatic Club. Mike Jordan thought her the best actress in the high school,

and when, in his senior year, he became a member of the club's executive board, he promoted Phyllis at every opportunity, just as though he were a silly old manager in love with a pretty actress.

Every year the club gave a show. Mike was then trying to write like O'Neill, and he wanted them to do *The Straw*, with Phyllis as the tubercular heroine. But Nancy had come to the high school that year. Her mother was ill and she was spending the winter in town. She had the whole school imitating her, fawning upon her, copying her attitudes. No elderly opportunist is ever so slavish as a youngster who finds that he can skate on a private pond, play tennis on fine courts, and be treated to quantities of pop and ice cream.

Nancy's word was law, her whims undisputed fashion, and when she said *Romance* was her favorite play, more than half the club board was willing to vote her ticket. Mike was too much the politician to tell them he thought it a bad play, so he argued that they could never afford the elaborate costumes and sets. He was voted down.

At the next board meeting he heard the proposal that they give Nancy the part so that her father would pay for their props and scenery.

Phyllis was her mother's gallant child. She uttered not a word of self-pity. Mike took her to the show, and as he sat beside her, studying her fine profile, he admired the dignity with which she hid her disappointment. After the final curtain she asked him to go backstage with her. Nancy's dressing-room was filled with extravagant floral offerings, tribute from her father's business associates.

Phyllis broke through the crowd of chattering girl-friends, kissed Nancy's rouged cheek, and cried sincerely, "You were wonderful, darling, simply wonderful."

That swarthy old lady whom Mike had seen at the party rose from a small chair beside Nancy's dressing table. She was dressed in rich, musty black silk. "You could have done it better," she told Phyllis.

"But Nancy has real talent and temperament, Grandma."

"You have beauty."

This was in May. At the end of June, Mike finished high school. He spent the summer as a counselor in a boys' camp, and in September went to New Haven. Mike's father was the editor of a small newspaper, and it was enough of a struggle to send his son to Yale without providing money for holiday trips.

During the next two summers Mike worked in Connecticut, but he never lost touch with the home town. His father sent him the newspaper, and he was still sufficiently interested in his old friends to read the society columns. Nancy Miller, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Ulysses S. Miller, "came out" and was thereafter entitled to silver tinsel and black velvet decorations at her parties. Shortly afterward Mr. and Mrs. Ulysses S. Miller an-

nounced the engagement of their daughter to John Price Elder II.

The Roman numeralsamused Mike. Johnnie Elder's father had come to the town as a laborer, had worked himself up to foreman and then to plant manager in one of the mills. During a strike he had done the dirty work for the owners, dealing with scabs and gunmen brought to town to break the strike. Mike's father had nicknamed him "Judas Elder" and made him the butt of scathing editorials which were never noticed by the people who elected J. P. Elder to the City Council. The son Johnnie was a big, thick-skinned fellow, ruddy and good-looking, fullback on his college football team, and a god to the town girls.

To Mike he seemed a natural mate for Nancy.

Mrs. Coles died that same October. She had lived only a few hours after an emergency operation. Phyllis was nineteen years old and quite alone in the world. Her aunt persuaded her to sell her mother's furniture and come to live at their house until she decided what she wanted to do with her life.

Mike sold a story to a small magazine that year, and he had enough money to travel home for Christmas. On his first afternoon in the town, he borrowed his father's old car and drove it through the massive gates of the Miller place. A Negro butler opened the door and led him to the library, where Phyllis greeted him.

The room was staid, and Phyllis's black dress and pale hair, worn in a knot, seemed part of the dignified atmosphere.

Phyllis gave Mike her cold hand. They talked for a while about his work and his ambitions, and then he asked about her plans.

"I'm taking a secretarial course."

"What! You said in your letter that you wanted to come to New York and study dramatic art. I've looked up some schools for you."

She dismissed the notion with a weary gesture. "Uncle Ulie's had enough of my mother's family."

"He's got plenty of money."

"I can't take any more." Her hands were like carved ivory hands clasping the oaken apples carved into the arm of the chair.

The telephone rang. Phyllis answered it, and when she had learned who was calling, her voice betrayed her. What she said, however, was quite casual: "She's not here. . . . I think she went to have some fittings, lingerie and things. . . . I don't know when she'll be back. . . . Oh, do! . . . Yes, Yes!"

She hung up the receiver and, without a word of excuse, hurried out of the room.

When she returned, Mike saw that that she had rouged her lips and combed her hair. The smell of burning coal and the flat odor of steam were drowned by her perfume. She kneeled on the cushioned window seat that overlooked the drive. Wheels sounded on the gravel. A car door slammed; the bell rang; the butler walked slowly

down the hall. Phyllis's cheeks had become rosy and her eyes were dancing.

Johnnie Elder came in. "Hello —" He tossed the greeting at Phyllis smoothly. His big fist crushed Mike's hand. The enthusiasm of his greeting was all out of proportion to his regard for Mike. While they talked of colleges and football teams, Johnnie's eyes were fixed on Phyllis. Mike felt like a man who has wandered by mistake into a peep show. He muttered something about having to leave. Just as Johnnie was crushing his hand for a second time, the door opened, and there was Nancy.

"Sorry to be late, dear. I didn't know you were coming over." She offered Johnnie her cheek.

"It's good to see you again, Mike." Nancy's face was flushed and wet with snow, and snowflakes glistened in her dark hair. She had grown slimmer, but she was still a big girl. "You can't leave now, Mike. Stay and have a drink with us."

The butler wheeled in a cart filled with glasses and bottles. Johnnie made Martinis, and Mike proposed a toast to the engaged couple. Phyllis merely touched her lips to the glass.

"Will you do me a favor, Mike?" Nancy asked.

"Anything I can."

"You've always had a lot of influence with Phyllis. Make her come to my New Year's Eve party."

"But I don't think I'd want to," Phyllis said. "After all, it's not two months since my mother . . ."

"Don't be so old-fashioned. Mourning's an obsolete custom."

"I knew your mother well, Phyllis." This was Mike's contribution to the argument, and later, when he saw the results, he was sorry he hadn't kept his opinion to himself. "There was nothing she liked better than your having a good time. She wouldn't want you to sit and mope on New Year's Eve."

"Do you really think so?" Phyllis brightened.

Because Mike felt sorry for her he embroidered on the idea.

Presently Phyllis said, "If you really think Mother would want me to, Mike . . ."

"Attaboy, Mike!" Nancy clapped him on the shoulder. To Phyllis she said, "I'll call Fred tonight."

Phyllis frowned. "So that's why you were so anxious?"

"Who's Fred?" Mike asked.

"Nancy's cousin on the other side. Fred Miller. Maybe you don't remember him, Mike; he was out of school before we got in. He went with an older crowd."

"They're in insurance," Johnnie said.

"I wouldn't have used my influence quite so freely if I'd known I was fixing it up for another fellow," Mike said.

"Don't worry, Mike. You're invited to my party, too, and we'll all dance with you," Nancy promised.

Johnnie, Nancy, and Mike drank another round of cocktails. Phyllis sat on the window seat, self-contained and

aloof from their banter and their plans. Johnnie and Nancy chattered about the wedding, the ushers, the honeymoon, the bicycling in Bermuda, and tackle for deep-sea fishing. They seemed less like lovers than a pair of kids planning a holiday. Later Mike's father told him that the elder Elder had lost almost everything during the depression, and that a union with the Ulysses Miller interests would probably save him from bankruptcy. . . .

Nancy's party was, as usual, lavish. She wore a dress of some stiff gold material which made her look rather like a statue of Civic Virtue. Phyllis had left off her mourning, but showed, by fastening those same pearl buttons in her ears, that her mother had not been forgotten.

Whenever he looked at her, Fred Miller panted. He was the most unprepossessing man Mike had ever seen in tails and white tie. Sandy hair parted in the center tended to elongate his narrow head. He had a heavy cold, and every five minutes, or so it seemed to Mike Jordan, he drew out a miraculously clean handkerchief (he must have had dozens of them in his pockets) and blew a trumpeting note. "Sorry," he'd say each time.

Johnnie Elder tried to make Phyllis drink champagne.

"You know I never drink."

"You will tonight."

"What makes you think so?"

"Don't be a fool." Nancy's voice was rough. Their persiflage, commonplace as it was, annoyed her. "After all, this is New Year's Eve and you've been feeling sort of low lately. Champagne's just what you need. Tell her, Mike; you've got a lot of influence."

"If she doesn't want to drink, you can't make her." This was Johnnie Elder, suddenly belligerent.

Nancy sniffed. "Who was just trying to make her drink, Mr. Elder?"

"I can manage my women without your help," Johnnie snapped.

Evidently he had been celebrating with a few early cocktails, otherwise he could not have been so careless. The lids dropped over Nancy's dark eyes and her mouth was a narrow line.

Phyllis asked for a taste of the champagne. "If my refusing to drink makes people quarrel, I'd better have one."

Johnnie watched her from under his long lashes.

She sipped it, cried, "Why, it's not bad at all," and drained her glass.

"Phyllis can take it," Johnnie boasted.

"She's remarkable," Nancy said coldly.

Mike took her arm. "Come on, Nancy, let's dance."

Nancy and Mike were better partners than they had been at the other party, for Nancy had learned to follow a man. But there was no life in her dancing. She tried not to stare too obviously through the arched doorway that led to the bar, but whenever they approached that end of the ballroom, her eyes were drawn to the table where Fred Miller and Johnnie were competing for Phyllis's attention.

When the dance was over, Mike said, "Let's go up to the balcony and have a cigarette."

By the time he finished the sentence Nancy was at the bar. Johnnie pulled out a chair for her, the waiter brought another bottle of champagne, and Phyllis said, "The orchestra's good, isn't it?"

"Have a drink and catch up with Phyllis," Johnnie said. "She's going to town tonight. Here's to a girl who can take her liquor."

"I'm glad Phyllis is having such a good time."

Phyllis smiled. Her decorum was like a thin curtain before a flame. When the music began again she was off like a streak of lightning with Johnnie. Nancy danced dutifully with Fred Miller.

At midnight bells rang, the dancers flung serpentines and filled the air with the multi-colored rain of confetti. They sang, drank toasts, kissed their friends. Mike felt the heat of Nancy's bruised mouth against his cheek and the sweet quivering of Phyllis's lips.

When she came to Johnnie Elder, Phyllis flung herself into his arms, buried her mouth in his lips, then cried, "Let's have a happy year. Please let it be a good one, Johnnie, please!"

Dance music started again. The party grew wilder. Only a conventional crowd can become so thoroughly abandoned.

Phyllis caught the fever. Unless he had seen her that night Mike would never have believed that a girl so decorous as she could so completely abandon herself to a mood and a man. She and Johnnie danced like a pair of Siamese twins, joined for life.

Evidently the electrician had taken one too many, for in the middle of a fox trot the lights went out. Nobody cared. Lights from the bar and balconies fell in stripes across sections of the writhing crowd. The music was hot, slow, and sensual, with a rolling, savage beat. Mike had gone up to the balcony for a cigarette. There he found Nancy bent over the rail, squinting down into the darkness.

A roll of drums announced supper. Nancy ran down the stairs, holding her golden skirt high above her ankles. The brilliant lights of the dining-room, after the dusk of the ball-room, was like a cold shock. At flower-decked tables men and women in paper caps blew horns and whirled steel-tongued clappers. A man blew a whistle in Nancy's ear and another tickled her with a feather-tipped wand.

She neither heard nor saw these antic attempts to capture her attention. Friends invited her to eat at their tables. She was as deaf to kindness as to jests.

"Drunk," someone said, "drunk as a lady."

She was unhappily sober.

To Mike Jordan the party had become unendurable. He knew then that he hated the town and its smug best people. Since Fred Miller was there to look out for Nancy, he left.

As he walked down the ash-strewn icy path, he saw the glint of a gold gown among the automobiles. There was Nancy, her shoulders bare, peeking into parked cars.

He hurried after her, begged her to go in, warned her of the danger of catching cold. He even offered her his coat, thinking, as he peeled it off, of Sir Walter Raleigh and Queen Elizabeth. All he got for his gallantry was a sullen glance.

The next day he felt it was his duty to telephone Nick Scarpas, and order flowers to be sent with a note of thanks to Miss Miller. At ten o'clock that night his father and mother took Mike to the railroad station. He was not displeased at leaving the town and did not think he would soon return.

The train whistled and rushed through darkness. The sleeping car was quiet, berths made up, passengers hidden behind swaying green curtains. The porter, groaning aloud, carried heavy bags toward the drawing-room at the end of the car. As Mike came from the men's room, drawing his flannel robe tight about him and clutching at his leather toilet case, he saw the conductor and the Pullman man tap at the drawing-room door. It opened, and for a moment, in the greenish sleeping-car light, he caught a glimpse of Nancy Miller's sullen face and her dark, fierce eyes. . . .

The telephone rang with that insistent clamor which announces a long-distance call. Mike went to answer it, and I sat on the retaining wall, watching a parade of army trucks on the highway. In a few minutes Mike came out again. The operator had reported an hour's delay in his New York call.

"Your story doesn't sound like a mystery," I said. "It sounds like something that might have happened in my own crowd at college. I can't believe that people of their sort, girls like Phyllis and Nancy, could commit murder."

"I daresay any crime story, if you told it biographically, would sound normal. Except in cases of insanity and early criminal tendencies."

"Did Phyllis marry Johnnie Elder?"

Mike Jordan settled himself in the canopied chair, polished his dark glasses, and went on in his own deliberate way with the story. . . .

It was impossible for Phyllis to go on living with her aunt and uncle. Even her grandmother's efforts could not win back their affection. The poor girl sat patiently on the window seat, waiting for Johnnie Elder's car to roll through the iron gates. But Johnnie was in no position to marry a penniless girl.

For Phyllis there was only one refuge. She had not been trained to earn a living. In spite of her own sorry experience, Cinderella's mother had gone to her death believing that marriage is a girl's only way of security. For a girl with Phyllis's beauty a good marriage seemed almost guaranteed. But Phyllis was not able to

wait. She had to get out of that gloomy castle.

She and Fred Miller eloped.

Mike Jordan found the news distasteful. Fred was only eight years older than Phyllis, but he seemed of another generation and was as dull as an insurance policy. He worked in his father's office on Main Street.

Theirs was a Sunday-dinner household — grapefruit before the soup, two kinds of dessert, and everybody falling asleep afterward. They furnished Phyllis's house in solid walnut, hung drapes of satin damask at her windows, and covered her bed with filet lace.

Once a week, when Phyllis's grandmother was driven to their house by Ulysses S. Miller's chauffeur, they heard about Nancy, who had gone to live in France. Her grandmother's reports were catalogs of glamour, lush with descriptions of Paris openings, week-end parties at historic châteaux, holidays at Biarritz and Monte Carlo.

Black, jet eyes peered at Fred Miller from under a scowling forehead thick with rice powder. "That's the life Phyllis ought to be having. She's wasted in this town."

"I'm going to take her abroad some day," Fred promised. "Just as soon as we've put away a little money, we're going to take that trip."

Phyllis took no part in these conversations. While her grandmother insulted her husband and poor Fred tried to defend himself, she was wrapped in a dream of glory wherein celebrated heads turned and noble hearts beat swiftly as Lady Phyllis, in a Paris creation which had been photographed for the fifty-cent fashion magazines, entered The Casino. . . .

Mike finished college and went to New York, where he worked as copywriter in an advertising agency until he was able to get a job at half the salary on a morning newspaper. Then he became assistant dramatic critic on the *Globe-Telegram.*

His boss had chronic indigestion, and when he was laid up Mike covered the openings. On a first night, while he was gossiping in the lobby during intermission, he was confronted by a stranger who called him by his first name.

"So you don't remember me, Mike?"

Mike was puzzled. He had met a great many people in New York, but he remembered names and faces, and it seemed unlikely that he should have forgotten this vivid, cadaverous girl.

"The last time you saw me I was hunting bones in a graveyard. You were gallant and offered me your coat." Even her voice had changed. The finishing-school shrillness had been replaced by a pleasant huskiness.

A gong announced the rising of the curtain. The crowd pushed them back into the theater. "Come up for cocktails," she called across several heads and shoulders. "I'll leave my phone number at your office."

Her place was magnificent, two

penthouses made into a single apartment with a four-way view of Manhattan. It was modern in the best sense, simple, and without excess decoration.

It was a warm evening. They sat on the terrace, Nancy perched on the ledge, her back against the iron rail. The scene had the quality of an Italian primitive, in which foreground figures are large and solid, and in the background every minute object sharply outlined. Nancy had become so thin that her bones showed. This was not unbecoming, for she was well constructed and her face cut into interesting planes. She wore blue trousers and a white blouse with the sleeves rolled up, and on her right hand an enormous star sapphire.

"How handsome you are," Mike said.

Nancy's smile was cynical. "Don't kid me."

"Who's kidding? You're a handsome wench."

She flipped her cigarette stub over the iron rail. "I don't kid myself, Mike. I've survived so far without being beautiful and I guess I can get along for the rest of my life." He was about to remonstrate, when she said, "Have you seen Phyllis lately?"

There was a sudden crash of thunder.

"She's all right," Mike said. "Happily married to your cousin."

"Grandma thinks she's wasting her life. Fred isn't half good enough for her, Grandma says. He's a stick, according to Grandma."

"I disapprove of your grandmother," Mike said.

"She's always been mad about Phyllis. When I was a little girl, a horrid, fat child with bushy eyebrows, I'd get dressed up in a starched dress and sash, and Grandma would look at me and say, 'You'll have to be good, Nancy; you'll never be beautiful.' Mamma bought me the most exquisite things, handmade, imported, designed by children's couturiers, but Grandma would never forgive me for having these things while Phyllis, who was so lovely, was poor. Even when we were tiny children she made Phyllis hate me."

"Phyllis hate you?" Mike remembered how Phyllis's face had been scarred by the catalpa tree's shadow.

"I don't blame her. It was Grandma's fault; she instigated it and kept it alive. Even today she's resentful because Phyl's beauty deserves the luxury and I, who am homely and unworthy, get it all. I do think Phyllis hates me so much that she's often wished me dead."

Nancy walked to the opposite end of the terrace and stared down at the toy boats and bridges on the East River.

Thunder rolled above their heads and a bright arrow of lightning pierced the sky.

"Don't you hate Phyllis?" Mike asked.

Nancy wheeled around. "Why should I? She's always seemed a poor, pathetic little thing. If she didn't hate me so horribly, I'd be fond of her. But

she's always been so resentful, I could feel her bitterness. She'd look at me with those big, soft eyes as if I were a monstrosity. Once at a party — it was my first big party and I had a beautiful silver dress, but whenever Phyllis looked at me, I felt like a big, ugly pig and my dress seemed hideous, and the evening was ruined."

"Do you remember what Phyllis wore that night?"

Nancy shook her head.

"It was blue, I think. Blue thin stuff with flowers on it."

Nancy stiffened. "Yes, of course I remember now. It was a dress of mine. Mother had given it to her."

"Phyllis cried before the party. I always wondered why."

Nancy came across the terrace slowly, looking down at her tanned feet in rope sandals. "I teased her about the dress. Most of the girls knew it had been mine. We giggled."

Drops of rain, as big as pennies, spattered the terrace. Mike and Nancy gathered up the cocktail things and went inside. Nancy threw herself upon the yellow couch.

"She paid me out with Johnnie Elder." Nancy rolled over, picked up her glass, drank, and rolled on her back again.

"Were you in love with him?"

"He was the handsomest boy in town, all the girls were mad about his eyelashes, and I felt that it didn't matter that I wasn't pretty if he loved me. When a man proposes, you think he's in love with you." Nancy shuddered. "Women often call their own feelings love, Mike, when it's just balm for sore pride. Or fear that they'll be left behind. Probably I ought to be grateful to Phyllis, because Johnnie and I'd never have gotten along. But it was hell while it lasted."

Mike lit the fire. The room was cozy. And that was the last time, for many months, that they spoke of Phyllis.

They became close friends. Mike went with the sleek Broadway and prosperous Greenwich Village crowds. These people, after her life in France, were the sort Nancy liked. She had no talent of her own, but an enormous appreciation and excellent taste. Along with the boarding-school inflection had gone her admiration for romance and rococo. She was a realist, a product of the period, yet sufficiently independent to disagree, when it pleased her, with popular taste.

Mike soon fell into the habit of bringing her his short stories, asking for criticism and, more often than not, accepting it. They quarreled a lot, but these clashes were tonic to their friendship.

They had other quarrels which were not so healthy. Nancy pretended to be tough, but she was actually as thin-skinned as an adolescent. The old wounds had never healed. The scar tissue was frail. Some careless word, forgotten as soon as Mike had spoken it, would cause her to turn upon him cruelly.

Often Mike vowed never to see her again. But as suddenly as she had be-

gun to brood, she relaxed, was herself again, tough, critical, merry, and tireless when there was any chance for fun.

When Nancy was called away by her grandmother's last illness, Mike realized that he had begun to depend upon her companionship. He wrote long letters, confessed that he found New York dull without her, outlined the plots of his new stories.

The day her grandmother was buried, she called Mike and told him she'd arrive at Grand Central the next afternoon. She promised a surprise. Knowing Nancy, he thought she'd bought a Great Dane or dyed her hair. He bought himself a new suit, filled her apartment with flowers, and decided that he'd bury the hardboiled act and tell her sentimentally how much he had missed her.

The surprise was Phyllis. Arm in arm, the girls confronted Mike. "She thought I ought to warn you," Nancy told him, "but I wanted a glimpse of your face when you saw us together."

Both kissed him.

Phyllis said, "I'm so happy, Mike. It's like old times again, almost as if we were kids."

"It's new times," Nancy laughed. "Grandma always set us against each other, but, now she's gone, the spell's broken and we can be friends."

Mike felt that he did not understand women at all. He could not believe that their grandmother's death had turned the girls' lifelong loathing into love. "Whence springs this sudden affection for your dear cousin?" he asked Nancy when they arrived at the apartment and Phyllis had gone off to change her clothes.

"Oh, Mike! If you only realized how deadly life is in that town. Fred and Fred's family would drive me to arsenic if I had to dine with them more than once every five years, and poor Phyllis has to have dinner there every Sunday."

"Are you sure it wasn't because you want to show her how much better your life is than if you'd married Johnnie Elder?"

Nancy turned scarlet. Mike was immediately remorseful. During her absence he had resolved to guard his tongue and her sensitivity. Instead of sulking, Nancy slapped his face.

For the rest of that season there was little emotion in their relationship. They fell back into an easygoing camaraderie, and gave themselves to the pleasure of entertaining Phyllis.

Mike used his newspaper connections so that she could meet people whose names she had read in magazines about New York life.

It was never difficult to find an extra man for Phyllis, and it was inevitable that she made conquests. But she never forgot that she was a married woman. That remote, untouchable quality, more than her beauty, was Phyllis's greatest charm. Men felt that she was a prize almost beyond reach, that her favors were few, but, if given, would lead to ecstasy beyond imagining.

To Mike Jordan the happiest nights were those when they dined at Nancy's, sipped liqueurs or brandy, and he read aloud from the works of Jordan. He was at the dreary stage then, writing morbid little pieces about unpleasant people involved in sordid conflicts. Nancy listened attentively, a pencil and notebook beside her.

Much of his later success, Mike admitted, he owed to her frankness and clarity. Phyllis never uttered a word except praise. Mike was an author, his work sacred.

Phyllis had planned to stay in New York for two weeks. Her holiday stretched on and on, until Mike quit asking when she intended to go home. Fred Miller wrote and wired, and went so far in extravagance as to telephone twice a week. Phyllis had always a new excuse — the opening of a play, a fitting, a concert the like of which she would never have another chance to hear; and, finally, the Beaux Arts Ball.

Phyllis was going with Mike, and his friend, Horace Tate, was taking Nancy. They had planned to go as characters out of Greek mythology. When Mike and Horace rang the bell of Nancy's apartment that night, they were admitted by a masked Diana.

Mike looked Nancy over critically, "You're too skinny to be classical. Zeus would have exiled you."

Phyllis came in, unmasked, but dressed in a white tunic, bound in gold and with a bunch of golden grapes in her hair. Fred Miller followed, blowing his nose lustily.

He grasped Mike's hand. "Glad to see you again, Jordan. A lot of water's flowed under the bridge since the last time we met. Getting to be quite famous, aren't you?"

"Fred surprised us," Phyllis explained to him. "We were totally unprepared. I'm terribly sorry, Mike, that I can't go with you."

"Haven't time," said Fred. "One of my clients has moved up to Boston but I'm still handling his business. Want to show him that I appreciate his loyalty."

Mike did not particularly like Fred nor care to see more of him, but he could not believe that anyone who lived in a dull, small town could be so indifferent to New York. He tried to persuade Fred to postpone his Boston engagement and let Phyllis go to the ball.

"A businessman can't do just as he pleases. You artists and Bohemians don't seem to understand that we've got responsibilities. Sure, I could get a kick out of the city, too, but I've got to think of others, not just myself."

"Think of Phyllis," Nancy said sulkily. "She's been planning on this party for weeks."

Phyllis took Fred's arm. "I'm going with my husband. But it won't be for long. I'm coming back; I'm going to live in New York some day."

And she did. The following September Fred drove their sedan, filled with suitcases and hatboxes, to New York. Phyllis must have worked hard to uproot a man whose life was woven

so deeply into the life of his home town. What emotion she must have spent, what tears, artifices, pleadings, and reproaches it must have cost her. Fred tried to make a brave show, as though the move had been forced upon him by the insurance company for which he worked. Since his father had represented the company for thirty-two years, they decently gave Fred a job in their New York office.

At Phyllis's cocktail parties Fred was always busy, filling glasses, passing hors d'oeuvres, fetching ice from the kitchen. Whenever he had a moment between duties, he would corner some unfortunate guest and try to prove that an insurance man was no less interesting than a second-string dramatic critic. His body seemed never to fit comfortably into Phyllis's Victorian chairs. For she, knowing she could never afford anything like Nancy's penthouse, had done wonders with a three-room suite in a remodeled house. Fred suffered shame because she had bought furniture secondhand.

Mike had started to write his play, and since Phyllis knew the home-town background so well, he consulted her nearly every day. Out of her resentment of the townspeople who had pitied and patronized the music teacher's daughter grew Mike's most vivid characterizations. She had a gift for mimicry, and when she had the chance to strip others of their emotional veils she shed completely the pretty reticence with which she guarded her own secrets.

They saw less and less of Nancy. In the beginning she had been splendid, generous in helping Phyllis furnish her apartment, never appearing at their door without gifts and gadgets, and putting on an apron to help with the serving when Phyllis gave her first party. No one could name the day when they had ceased to interest her. Perhaps it was Fred's conversation. Mike was too self-absorbed to worry about anyone's moods but his own. He did not see Nancy nor bother to telephone her until the play was finished.

"I thought you were dead," she said, when he finally called.

"This is the resurrection. I've written a play." As she did not hail this with a bravo, Mike's heart sank. "I'd like to read it to you," he said timidly.

"Come up tonight," she said. "How about dinner?"

That was in the morning, and the rest of the day passed like a century in a mortuary. To pass the time he took a long walk, and since a blizzard was beginning to blow up, he arrived with a purple nose and frostbitten fingers.

At dinner they chatted like long-separated school chums who had been living in different hemispheres.

They had their coffee and Courvoisier in the living-room. Then Nancy stretched on the couch and said, "Let's hear the play."

She seemed to accept his genius indolently, but he was as pleased as though she had compared him to Shakespeare. Now the writing of his

play seemed a man's job rather than a gesture of unholy impudence. While he read she lay quiet, her face expressionless, and only once, when he made a particularly neat point, caught his eye. Finally it was over. They heard the hiss of burning wood, the wind in the airshaft, the distant hum of the traffic.

After a time Nancy said, "It's good, Mike. Some of it is very good."

He skipped to the couch, leaned over to kiss her. "Do you really think so?"

She turned away, unwilling to accept the kiss until she had finished telling him what she thought of his work. He might not, after all had been said, still want to kiss her.

"Take a drink first." She gave him three fingers of brandy. "It's a good play, Mike, except for two things. Two very important things. One is the way you solve the problem for your characters. You make it too easy."

"But the tragedy demands —"

"Tragedy, my eye," she interrupted. "You've given it a happy ending. No one wanted that woman to go on living. You killed her because it was convenient. You were afraid to face the bigger problem of keeping her alive."

Mike's silence seemed significant. Actually he had nothing to say. Presently he became solemn and remarked, "It's a good point. I'll think about it. What else?"

"The girl."

"What's wrong with her?"

"I don't believe her. She's always right, always the victim. She hasn't enough guts and evil to make her human."

"Perhaps you don't understand that sort of woman. There are females without evil in their hearts."

"Down in their secret souls," Nancy retorted, "all women are vipresses."

"Apparently you judge every other woman by your own limitations."

"Thanks for telling me what you really think of me, Mike."

"Listen; I know this woman. A small-town woman, pretty and poor, surrounded by snobs."

"I know that woman, too. We come from the same town, Mike."

"You never knew the people. You were shut away, protected from the problems of the sordid citizens, the rich girl living in your castle behind the stone wall."

Nancy stared into the fire. "Perhaps I can't judge this play at all, Mike. Perhaps it's too personal. I'm all tied up in prejudices. You ought to get someone else to read it."

It was then that Mike made a grotesque mistake: "Phyllis has read it and she thinks it's absolutely true to life."

"She would."

"Don't be a vipress, Nancy."

She neither spoke nor stirred. In her greens and reds and golds, with the big hoops in her ears, she was like one of those haughty, rebellious duchesses that Goya loved to paint. Mike lost his temper, screamed, called

her an egotist and a snob. Furious because his anger seemed trivial beside her aloofness, he gathered up his things, thrust the play back into his brief case, stamped out into the hall for his hat, coat, scarf, and rubbers. As he let himself out he looked back at her. She sat in the same position, hunched before the fire, staring as if in a trance into the flames.

Three days later she left for Florida. When the season was over, she drove to Mexico. Through Phyllis, who got the news from her aunt, he learned that Nancy had taken a year's lease on a house in Taxco.

She had been right about the play. Mike heard the same criticism from his wisest friends, and in April he began to rewrite it. While he was working he thought constantly of Nancy. He felt that some measure of gratitude was due her, but he could never humble himself before Nancy nor beg her forgiveness.

In June he sold the play, and spent the summer making further changes. It opened on the thirteenth of September and was immediately a hit.

Gilbert Jones headed the cast, and at the party after the opening Mike introduced him to Phyllis.

When Mike saw them together on the dance floor, he was reminded of that New Year's Eve when she had danced so recklessly with Johnnie Elder. Excitement colored her cheeks. Above the flimsy black stuff that veiled her shoulders she was like a painting on ivory. She wore black jet earrings, fine old ones set in gold, an inheritance from her grandmother.

She and Gilbert Jones danced together, drank together, laughed, teased, flirted, and forgot that there were other people at the party. Behind them, like a shadow, hovered Fred Miller. He had caught his annual cold earlier than usual, and he blew his nose constantly.

Every woman at the party envied Phyllis. Gilbert wore his good looks like an advertisement of superior masculinity.

He was not a fine actor. He was too handsome to play any part as well as he played Gilbert Jones. In Mike's play he was cast admirably as a vain and selfish bachelor who had been for years the lover of the heroine's mother. Gil loathed the part and the play, but it was a distinguished production and he could not have afforded to turn it down. He fancied himself a romantic rogue and believed that he would come into his own if he ever found a lush, heroic, swashbuckling part. He had a theory which he argued tirelessly whenever he found a listener. This weary and cynical world, Gil said, longed for escape into romance; the great play of the century would be three acts of capes and boots, duels and balconies.

While Mike's play was in rehearsal, its press agent, needing copy, sent out a paragraph about Gilbert Jones's quest for the perfect romantic role. It was a typical press-agent blunder, for Mike's play, which he had been paid to exploit, was anything but romantic escapism. The paragraph, printed by

dramatic editors too bored to be careful, bore fruit. Gil received a flood of manuscripts by writers who agreed that the theater would be saved by swashbuckling romance. Most of the plays were too amateurish to bear reading, but finally one came in that fitted all of Gil's requirements. It was about the Cavaliers who settled in Maryland. A schoolteacher in Moline, Illinois, had written it.

Not long after Mike's play had opened and royalties were pouring in, Gil asked Mike to read the swashbuckling script. Mike read it and laughed. He had better use for his money than investment in that rose-garlanded tripe.

One day Phyllis came to see Mike. She said that Mike was shortsighted and stubborn, and that in refusing to put money in Gil's play he was losing the chance of his life.

"It's kind of you to be so interested in my career," Mike teased, "but I happen to be making as much money as I need, and I'm not interested in the financial end of show business."

"But you love the theater," she said with pretty reproach. "I've often heard you say it needs a shot in the arm. Here's your chance, Mike, not only to make a fortune for yourself, but to do something really important for the theater."

"Since when have you become a patroness of the drama, Mrs. Miller?"

Suddenly angry, she cried, "Why do you always call me Mrs. Miller? You know me well enough to use my first name."

"I know why you're out procuring for the drama, Phyllis."

"But it's a great play. People are so tired of realism. Life is hard enough nowadays, with war and taxes and all; nobody wants to be reminded of it in the theater. They want escape."

"I've heard that before," Mike said. "From the source."

She shrank into a corner of the chair. Her love for Gil had influenced her taste in clothes. She had begun to seek picturesque, old-fashioned effects, which on her were charming. She had on a black velvet suit with white ruffles at wrist and neck, and a little black tricorne tilted over one eye and tied on with a black veil. As she sat in the wing chair, touching her nostrils with a lace handkerchief, she was appealing and beautiful.

"Mike," she murmured, "don't laugh at me. You know what my life's been. Can I help it if I've fallen in love? He's everything I've dreamed about all my life."

Mike's heart was affected, but not his pocketbook. He tried to make Phyllis understand that there was no hope for Gil's cumbersome, dated play. She listened politely, but Mike's arguments failed to move her. At the end he felt that he had grown as tiresome to her as Fred Miller.

She had become a woman with a mission. All of her energy was devoted to a single end. Loving Gil, she sought a means of proving herself worthy. She tried, in every way she knew, to find a backer for Gil's show.

One morning her telephone rang,

and there was Nancy, just arrived by plane from Mexico City. She had also called Mike, and suggested that they all meet for lunch. It was like Nancy to have forgotten that she had departed in anger.

Mike and Phyllis hurried to Nancy's apartment. It was crowded with open trunks and packing cases, woven baskets, painted furniture, wooden plates, painted trays, serapes, and such an assortment of tin and silverware that it looked as if she were planning to open a shop. She crushed them both in enthusiastic embraces, kissed Mike's mouth and Phyllis's cheek, gave them extravagant presents, declared that she had always prophesied Mike's success, and called to her maid for tequila so they might drink to his career.

She looked serene and healthy. The cadaverous hollows were gone, the angles softened by a few becoming pounds of flesh. . . .

That night Phyllis proved she was the better woman by showing that she possessed something even more dazzling than Nancy's jewels and furs. The love of Gilbert Jones, his splendid masculinity, gave Phyllis such glamour that Nancy's sables might have been muskrat. There was no doubt that Nancy was impressed. As was his habit, Gil flirted with a new woman. Phyllis watched as an author might watch actors rehearse the scenes he has written. Her temper was so good that she laughed at Fred Miller's poor attempts at humor.

It was Mike Jordan's party. He had given it to celebrate Nancy's return. Mike had not asked Gil to join these home-town friends, but Phyllis had managed to bring him along without embarrassing either Gil or his host.

Nancy had just seen Mike's play. "It's great," she said. "It's honest and beautiful, and it's you, Mike; I can see you in every line."

"It's you, too, Nancy. Didn't you notice that I took all your advice?"

"Nancy helped you with the play?" asked Gil.

"She saved it from being a dreary and morbid little phony. And a flop."

"Nancy has a great sense of theater, real intuition," Phyllis added. "She might have been a great actress."

Nancy laughed. She knew it was cheap flattery but she enjoyed being the center of attention.

Fred Miller pulled out his watch. "I don't like to break up this party, but —"

"Must we?" Phyllis interrupted. "Nancy's just come home and we're having such a good time."

"I can't help it if I'm tired, dear. Your friends must understand that a businessman can't burn the midnight oil like Bohemians."

Phyllis glanced quickly at Gil. He turned to Fred Miller. "Why don't you go on and let me bring Phyllis home?"

"That's kind of you, Jones. Thanks so much. Good night, everyone."

Farewells were curt. No one bothered to watch Fred go. Gil leaned toward Nancy, whispering some compli-

ment that made her laugh. Phyllis approved.

Presently Gil turned to Mike Jordan: "I know you don't like my new play, but, frankly, I'm quite mad about it, and so is Phyllis. I'm sure that if Nancy's critical sense is as sound as you say, she might be able to suggest whatever changes our play needs."

"Now, Gil," Phyllis pouted, "we mustn't be selfish. Nancy's only just got home and she wouldn't have time to read it now."

"I wouldn't mind," Nancy said. "Bring the manuscript around, will you?"

Mike Jordan sulked. It was contrary of him to be annoyed with Nancy, when his bad temper should have been visited upon Phyllis and Gil. Mike was less distressed by their opportunism than by Nancy's failure to see through their clumsy ruses. He meant to chide her.

As they rode uptown in a taxi Nancy said, "Did you ever see such an attractive man as Gil Jones?"

"He's a heel."

Nancy laughed. "How you loathe handsome men, Mike."

Mike retreated sullenly to his corner of the cab, deciding that if Nancy was so dull as to let a good-looking ham pull the wool over her eyes, she deserved a lesson. Nancy, enjoying his jealousy, continued to tease him. He lost his temper and reminded her of her faults and the mistakes she had made with other men. The evening was a failure.

The next morning Mike's agent called and told him that his Hollywood deal had been settled. Mike could get the salary he asked if he would leave immediately for California. The studio wanted him to rewrite a play which had been rewritten only eight times.

Naturally, he spent a frantic day between his agent's office and the bank and department stores. He closed his apartment and refurnished his wardrobe as though California were a desert island. But he did not intend to desert Nancy. At half-past five he rang her doorbell. The apartment was still cluttered with the woven baskets, silverware, and serapes. The maid, who knew him well, told him to go straight to the living-room.

Gilbert and Phyllis were there. Gil was reading the play. They resented the interruption and were not at all cordial.

"I'm going to Hollywood tomorrow," Mike announced.

"How nice for you," Nancy said.

Mike felt that she was glad to have him out of the way. . . .

A few weeks later Gil handed in his resignation to the manager of Mike's play, and announced that he was appearing in *Jackstraw, A Romance of Cavalier Maryland*. A new producer had come to Broadway; her name was Nancy Miller.

Apparently the radiance of Gil's personality so dazzled her that she had lost all critical judgment. It was a very

bad play, and the author, who had come from Moline for rehearsals, refused to rewrite a line. They got Alexandra Hartman for the feminine lead and, while she gave the play some distinction, she was a hellcat at rehearsals. Gil was so busy appeasing his leading lady, convincing Nancy that they needed more money, and wheedling the author to change a line, that he hadn't a moment for Phyllis.

She was not allowed in the theater during rehearsals. That was Miss Hartman's unbreakable rule. Although Phyllis had worked so hard to get the show produced, found a backer, and listened to all the early discussions, she was now an outsider, brushed aside with a mechanical smile and polite promise when she waited in the lobby for Gil. She consoled herself with the hope of his gratitude in the happy future, after the show was on and a hit. Some day, she fancied, Gil would take her in his arms and whisper gratefully, "How can I repay you, darling Phyllis, for all that I owe you?"

They were opening in Baltimore, the historical scene of the play's action. Phyllis bought herself a new outfit, and was about to reserve a seat on the train, when Fred Miller put his foot down. They had the worst fight of their marriage, and Fred finally said, "The trouble with you is that you think you're Nancy, who can spend a thousand dollars on every whim."

The rebuke defeated Phyllis. It was like an echo of her grandmother's lament. As long as she could remember, Phyllis had been reminded that she could not expect the privileges which Nancy took as her right. She had no money of her own. Fred supported her. When he said, "I won't have you spending money on trains and hotels to see a show you can see here in a couple of weeks," she had to submit.

After the Baltimore opening Fred read the reviews and said, "Aren't you glad you didn't spend the money? They say it's the worst show in twenty years."

Anyone but Nancy would have been discouraged by the reviews. Instead of closing, she put more money into the production, extended the road tour, made drastic revisions in the script, and recast several parts. The author, frightened by the critics, agreed to revisions, but was not able to rewrite, and a play doctor was hired. They took the show on a nine-week tour. Gil was too busy to write a post card to Phyllis.

Fred Miller died suddenly of pneumonia. Phyllis had warned him against going to the office with a severe cold, but Fred always had colds, and if he'd quit work every time he sniffled he would never have held a job. He tried to nurse it at night with hot whisky, aspirin, and all the home remedies which he thought as effective as anything a doctor could prescribe. Phyllis was sleeping on a cot in the living-room. One morning she went into the bedroom and found him unconscious. He died at the hospital twenty hours later.

She was very brave, managed everything, took the body home to his parents and the family plot. Half the town attended the funeral, and they said that Phyllis, pale and touching in her black garments, was the prettiest widow they had ever seen. Fred had left her quite a lot of money. She had no idea that the big insurance premiums which she had always resented would bring her a small fortune.

Jackstraw had meanwhile come to New York. Poor Phyllis, cheated of rehearsals and the out-of-town opening, missed the first night, too. She was determined to see it on the night of her return to New York. Mourning or no mourning, she had her duty to her cousin Nancy and to her friend Gil. She still felt close to the play and cherished the memory that she had been Gil's first audience for it. This thought gave her strength and hope, and as she sat beside the window of the dining car she decided that she would not telephone Gil that day, but would see the play alone and afterward surprise him in his dressing-room.

With her coffee the waiter brought the morning paper. She turned at once to the dramatic section, thinking that she might read Gil's name in some press agent's notice. And thus she learned that *Jackstraw* had closed on the previous Saturday night.

It was the final irony. After all she had given to it, she had not seen a single performance of Gil's play.

Forlornly she followed a porter through the cold station, and rode to her apartment alone in a drafty cab. The day was miserable. Rain streaked the taxi windows so that she could not even enjoy Fifth Avenue's brilliance. As soon as she got into her apartment, while the shades were still drawn and the radiators cold, she telephoned Gil. A switchboard operator's nasal voice informed her that Mr. Jones had given up his apartment.

She called Nancy. Her cousin uttered condolences on the death of Phyllis's husband, and Phyllis consoled Nancy on the death of her play.

Phyllis said, "How's Gil taking it?"

"Bearing up bravely, looking for a new part."

"I must let him know I'm back."

There was a long silence. A happy thought entered Phyllis's mind. Should Gil want to put on another show, there need be no long, agonizing search for a backer. Fred was no longer alive to remind Phyllis that she could not expect the privileges that Nancy enjoyed; the money Fred had put into insurance would back Gil's new play. She was so eager to speak to Gil, to console him with her golden promise, that she paid little attention to Nancy's unnatural silence.

She did not like to confess to Nancy that she was ignorant of Gil's whereabouts, and she decided to call his agent instead. She was very fortunate, for Gil had just come into the office. He also expressed sympathy, but he could not say much else as his agent was with him. He promised to come and see her that afternoon.

She dressed carefully; used her best perfume. The failure of *Jackstraw* did not seem so dismal now. She was almost grateful for it, knowing that as a result of disappointment Gil would be in a soft, self-pitying mood. She sent out for a bottle of his favorite whisky, arranged it on a tray with seltzer and glasses. When there was nothing else to be done, she watched raindrops roll down the windowpane.

The doorbell rang. She sat quiet for a moment lest she betray too large a measure of eagerness, then drew a deep breath and ran to the door.

Gil was not alone. There was Nancy, too. No woman who was not a millionaire would have appeared in public in such an old, streaked raincoat. She had on galoshes and had a green scarf tied around her head.

Gil took both of Phyllis's hands, gazed deep into her eyes. "Well, dear," he said, in a thick voice. They held hands until Nancy spoke sharply. "I wish you'd help me with these boots, Gil."

He turned to help Nancy. "We were sorry to hear about Fred."

"Thank you," said Phyllis.

Nancy took her wet things into the bathroom. For a couple of minutes Phyllis and Gil were alone. Neither spoke. They were aware of rain dripping against the window and the sizzling of steam in the radiator.

When Nancy came back, she asked, "Have you told her, Gil?"

He shook his head.

"You might as well know, Phyllis. Gil and I are married."

Phyllis handed around drinks, then raised her own. "To your happiness," she said, and finished the highball before she put down the glass. She saw the look of triumph in Nancy's eyes.

Gil and Nancy soon left; but on Saturday of that week Nancy happened to be in the neighborhood of Phyllis's apartment and stopped in. Phyllis was not at home, and Nancy said that she would wait. She read a magazine, washed her face, and used the telephone, which was in Phyllis's room between the twin beds. Before she went, she wrote a note begging Phyllis to dine with them the following Tuesday. Phyllis found it on the bed table, tore it into small pieces, and threw it into the wastebasket.

"No use being a hypocrite about it," Phyllis remarked several weeks later when she told the story to Mike Jordan.

On the Tuesday of Nancy's dinner party Gil was called to the telephone by Phyllis's maid, who told them that Mrs. Miller had been taken to the hospital. When she came to work that morning, the maid said, she had found Mrs. Miller unconscious in her bed. The doctor thought at first that she had taken an overdose of sleeping medicine, but an analysis showed that she had been poisoned. It was a poison that worked slowly and the dose had been insufficient.

Gil suffered extravagant remorse. It was only natural for him to blame himself for the poor girl's attempt at suicide. As soon as she was allowed visitors he visited her at the hospital.

She was sitting up in bed, looking very frail and gentle in a white maribou jacket with enormous sleeves.

She held out both hands. He took them. They were cold and so soft that there seemed no bones under the thin flesh. His eyes filled as he bent over to kiss her.

She looked up at him with burning eyes and whispered, "Someone tried to kill me, Gil."

His hands dropped. He moved away and stared as though he were looking at a ghost. She shook her head and repeated the astonishing statement. "You don't believe I'd have done such a thing myself?" she asked. "You know me so well, Gil, you know I'm not brave enough for that."

It was discovered later that five or six poisoned capsules had been placed in the box with her sleeping pills. . . .

The telephone rang again. New York Operator Forty assured Mr. Jordan that she was still working on his call. When he came back to the patio, he said, "I'm thirsty, Lissa; may I have a drink?"

We went into the kitchen, which was on the east side of the house, and about twelve degrees cooler than the patio. I got out some cheese and crackers, and we sat with our drinks in the breakfast nook.

"Had someone tried to murder Phyllis, or was that merely an excuse because she was ashamed to admit that she had tried suicide?" I asked.

"Wait," Mike said. He was a playwright, and as keenly as he felt this story, he was still too much of a technician to give away the climax before recounting the events that led to it.

He finished his drink and held out his empty glass to me. While I squeezed a lemon, he began the final chapter. . . .

A few months later Mike Jordan came to New York on a Hollywood writer's holiday. He had a suite in an expensive hotel and went to night clubs at which he would never before have dreamed of spending money. He saw both Phyllis and Nancy, and each told him in precise detail her separate story.

Phyllis was being frightfully gay at this time, spending Fred Miller's money wildly and surrounding herself with good-looking young men. She had become extremely chic. This Mike thought was an affectation. Like so many bored women, she was seeking compensation for the dullness of her nights by exhibiting herself in costumes whose extravagance advertised her loneliness.

Frequently at parties or the theater she met Gil and Nancy. They and all of their friends dutifully appeared at all the smart places and saw the same people over and over again. To show that she bore them no malice, she invited Mr. and Mrs. Jones to a couple of her big parties, and Nancy returned the hospitality by inviting Phyllis to dine . . . with seven other guests, four of them male and attractive.

For a few months Gil and Nancy considered themselves the happiest couple in town. Nancy thought her husband the handsomest man in the world and herself an extremely fortunate woman. Gil was good-natured and disinclined to quarrel, and as long as his wife admired him, he was indulgent of her moods. The one subject on which they could not agree was the story Phyllis had told him about the poisoned sleeping pills. Gil still believed that someone had tried to murder Phyllis, and Nancy held to her theory that this was an excuse to cover an unsuccessful attempt at suicide.

Although they solemnly promised not to speak of it, they were tempted constantly to find arguments to support their separate attitudes. He thought her unnecessarily vindictive about her cousin, while she considered him a credulous fool. For a while they managed to keep their opinions to themselves.

One night they met Phyllis at a dinner party. Afterward Gil and Phyllis were partners at bridge. They won quite a lot of money, and on the way home Gil boasted about his game and, to show sportsmanship, praised his partner. Nancy stiffened. Aware of her displeasure, he hastily changed the subject.

Although her marriage had increased Nancy's self-confidence, she was still thin-skinned.

"You needn't be afraid to talk about Phyllis," she said coldly. "I know what a superior creature she is."

Gil did not speak again until they were in their apartment. His nerves were on edge. "Look here," he said when they were in the hall, taking off their coats; "this has gone far enough. Every time I mention Phyllis you act as if I'd insulted you. We've got to have this out once and for all."

They quarreled bitterly, brought out buried grievances, and led each other to the subject of the poisoned pills. Later, when she was questioned about this quarrel, Nancy said that she could not remember precisely what each of them had said, but only that Gil's gibes had so wounded her that she ran the length of the apartment into her bedroom and locked the door. For a while, she said, he had stayed in the corridor, shouting abuse.

The next day she could not force herself to speak to him. He addressed her politely, just as though they had not quarreled, but she seemed not to hear. It was Nancy's habit, when she was hurt, to brood for days. She regretted her moodiness, but had never been able to cure it.

This, more than the quarrel, upset Gil, for the actor's pride was fed by the response of his audience. Nancy's passionate silence destroyed his self-confidence and led to the distrust of his charm. And when, lunching alone at a popular restaurant, he ran into Phyllis, in a turban made all of violets and a purple veil tied in a bow under her chin, he invited her to have a drink with him.

He told her, as she later reported to the police, of Nancy's sulks. The

news did not surprise Phyllis. She was well acquainted with this habit of Nancy's; it had always made family history. She advised Gil to feed Nancy a bit of her own stew and to treat her with the same black indifference.

The idea delighted Gil. When he donned a mood he wore it like a wig and tights. In contrast with his brooding melancholy, Nancy's sulks were a pale fog beside a storm cloud. She was utterly bewildered. All of her life, Nancy had been given her own way; when she sulked and refused to talk, her parents and the servants had waited tremulously for her mood to lighten. Now she had a taste of the bitter medicine.

Gil noted the effect of his performance and was as pleased as though he had heard a first-night audience shouting bravos. Perhaps he kept it up longer than necessary. Her nerves were frayed. Too proud to beg forgiveness, she waited shyly for him to offer the first word.

The triumphant actor sought a wider audience. One woman was not enough for him. Daily he made reports to Phyllis. One day, when they had been having tea together, he went off with her gloves in his pocket. They were fuchsia-colored and size five and three quarters. Nancy's maid, going through Gil's pockets before she sent his suit to the cleaner's, found the gloves and brought them to her mistress with an air of sly innocence.

Nancy turned as pale as if a wound had drained the blood from her. That very day she had bought Gil a reconciliation gift, a costly morocco traveling case with gold fittings. It was in her closet, shrouded in tissue paper, ready to be presented after the first embrace. . . .

It was about four in the afternoon when the maid brought her the gloves. Gil came home at seven o'clock. When Nancy heard the door open she rushed at him, pallid, red-eyed, and screaming like a fishwife.

This was no time for sullen dignity. Gil used words he'd picked up backstage, filth which belonged to the riff-raff of the theater, and which had never before soiled the lips of that dignified actor.

The two maids retired to the kitchen. According to their report, the quarrel lasted almost two hours. It thoroughly exhausted Nancy. Sobbing, she threw herself across her bed. The cook came out of the kitchen to ask cautiously if Mr. Jones wished dinner, but Gil turned and stalked out to the hall, put on his coat, and left the apartment.

According to the story which Phyllis told the police the next day, she was reading in her living-room, when the doorbell rang so furiously that her young Negro maid, who was washing dishes in the tiny kitchen, came out and begged Phyllis not to obey that nervous summons. Quite calmly Phyllis opened the door, and admitted Gil.

He walked to the center of the living-room and said quietly, "I've been through hell."

"Sit down," she said gently.

Gil strode up and down like a caged beast. Phyllis, not wishing the maid to overhear, bade her leave the dishes and go home.

"I'd rather die," Gil said, "than have to look at my wife's face again."

"Why? What's happened, Gil?"

"She's an evil woman." Gil shuddered. "Although I'm not a particularly virtuous man, wickedness in a woman horrifies me."

"Gil dear, be reasonable. Nancy's your wife and a fine, generous girl. She was spoiled at home, but she's wonderfully goodhearted and she loves you desperately. Won't you try to forgive her?"

Gradually, with such argument, she managed to calm him. He asked for a drink, and she brought out the whisky and soda. She did not count the drinks he poured for himself, but thought he must have taken four or five. Toward the end of the evening he became quite garrulous, and told her why he had married Nancy. During rehearsals and the out-of-town tryouts of the play, they had been thrown together constantly. Nancy had been such a good sport about the money she lost on the play that Gil had tried to make it up as much as possible in offering her his friendship. She had interpreted his kindness as love, and showed her passion for him with shocking frankness. The marriage had been impulsive.

He now realized how grave had been the mistake. As sternly as he tried he could not reject his need for Phyllis. Her image was engraved indelibly, he had said, upon his heart.

"I can't sleep, I can't think, I can't work," Gil said, rising and crossing the room to the wide Victorian armchair where Phyllis sat. "I can't live with that woman another day. I'm going to tell her so . . . tonight."

"No, Gil. Think it over. Your marriage was an impulse, and this may be another. You know your own nature; you're too flexible, you allow yourself to be carried away too easily. Tomorrow you may feel differently about her."

"No. I'll never love her. And I'm too upset to let this thing go on any longer. I'll tell her, darling, that I love you."

"No, Gil. That you must never tell her. If it were any other woman — " Phyllis shrugged off the rest of the thought. "But you must never tell Nancy that."

"I'm going home. Tomorrow I'll let you know what I've done." He kissed her on the forehead tenderly like a fond uncle.

Phyllis put the whisky into a walnut cabinet which had once been a Victorian commode. She carried the soda water to the refrigerator and the glass to the sink. The dinner dishes had not been dried and put away. Phyllis ran hot water over them, dried them and tidied the kitchen. This was a habit developed by early training. All the women in the family, even when they had servants, were fussy housekeepers.

She barely slept that night, and at dawn fell into a fitful slumber made

hideous by nightmares. She spent most of the day waiting for Gil to telephone.

When, at last, the doorbell rang, she hurried to it eagerly and, even before she had it open, said, "Gil, dear!"

There stood two detectives who had come to inform her of Gil'sdeath, and when she had sufficiently recovered from the shock, to ask a number of questions. . . .

Nancy told a quite different story.

After Gil had left her sobbing on the bed, Nancy said, she was exhausted. The quarrel had been preceded by two hours of emotion and several days of tension. She fell asleep. When she awoke the clock was striking eleven. The maids had gone home, and she was alone. She had slept heavily and felt curiously light and fresh.

She bathed, put on a becoming new negligee, and awaited Gil's homecoming eagerly, because she felt that the noisy quarrel had released hidden resentments and it would be possible for them to make peace. She had eaten no dinner and was very hungry. There was cold chicken and applesauce in the icebox, and she sliced a couple of tomatoes. She had just poured boiling water into the drip coffeepot when she heard Gil's key in the lock.

He looked cold. His cheeks were almost blue. He had walked, he told her, from Seventy-ninth Street to Sixty-fifth. His mentioning Seventy-ninth Street, Nancy thought, was his way of confessing that he had been with Phyllis. She did not remark upon it, but asked if he would like a drink.

"I've had enough. My head's clear now; I want it to stay that way."

Nancy felt sturdy, calm, and capable of facing any situation. Her tears had washed away grief and anger, and her nap had erased all bitterness.

Of one thing she was certain. She must know the truth, however painful.

"I've been a heel," Gil said.

Since he was so clearly remorseful Nancy did not wish to rebuke him. "I've been pretty difficult myself."

"The worst thing I've done is to have gone to Phyllis with my troubles. It was stupid and selfish of me and unfair to you."

He offered contrition humbly, and she could afford to be magnanimous. "I'm hurt that you went to her, but probably it was my own fault. I'm spoiled and egocentric and willful. A vipress, Mike Jordan used to call me. If I ever let go with one of those moods again, I wish you'd horsewhip me."

"It'd be healthier," Gil said.

"Might even cure me." Nancy felt better. She laughed aloud. "My whole trouble is that we never used horsewhips at home. Even our horses were given their heads."

Gil wrapped his arms about himself and shivered.

"You did get a chill," Nancy said. "If you won't have a drink, let me

give you some coffee. Have you had dinner?"

She heated the coffee and made a nice little cold supper. They ate at their regular places at the dining-room table. As she poured his coffee Nancy said steadily, "There is one thing I must know, Gil. Are you in love with her?"

He set his cup down hard. Some of the coffee spilled into the saucer. "Whatever gave you that idea?"

"You were in love with her before you met me."

"Did she tell you so?"

Nancy hesitated. "What about the suicide? There was no other reason why she should have tried to kill herself."

"Someone tried to murder her."

Nancy did not wish to renew the argument. Instead she said, "It's the way she acts about you. There's a sort of possessive righteousness about her, as if you'd been hers and I snatched you away."

"Great God!" he shouted. "You women act as if a man were a thing to be handed around on a platter. Phyllis couldn't possess me any more than you do. I loved you and asked you to marry me. Isn't that enough?"

Nancy's eyes filled. She tried to hide her emotion by eating, but she could not. As she sipped coffee, she looked at him over the cup and asked, "Do you love me, Gil?"

"I wouldn't live in a house with a woman I didn't love. I should think my past history would make that apparent."

"But I've been so nasty. A vipress."

"A man's unfortunate to love a vipress, but what can he do about it?"

"Come here and kiss me."

After the kiss he went back to his place and ate heartily. They seemed a pleasantly domestic couple again. Tremulously she asked her final question: "Did you tell Phyllis that you love me?"

He nodded. "I told her that I'd made up my mind not to see any more of her."

When they had finished eating, Nancy put the remaining food back into the icebox and washed the few dishes. Although she had been brought up in a house tended by servants, her grandmother had instilled in her a horror of sloppiness. She'd have been ashamed if the servants found the kitchen dirty when they came in the morning.

Her apartment had been designed originally as two penthouses, so that her bedroom and bath were at the opposite end from Gil's. This arrangement had amused them in the early days of their marriage, and they had enjoyed the adventure of traveling the length of the apartment when they visited each other at night.

When Nancy finished in the kitchen she went into Gil's quarters. He shouted from the bathroom that she should go to bed, and that he would come in and say good night. She had only her nightgown under the negligee and it took her but a couple of seconds to prepare for bed. She fell

asleep almost immediately. The short nap had restored but a portion of the energy she had exhausted during the quarrel.

Gil had the actor's habit of sleeping late. But when, at one o'clock the next afternoon, he had not yet rung for his breakfast, Nancy opened the door of his bedroom softly. She found his body on the floor close to the bed. He had apparently tried to summon help before he died. Blood and dried vomit stained his pajamas and the light tan carpet. His protruding eyes were like glazed porcelain balls.

Nancy was shaken but remarkably self-possessed. The maids were amazed by her ability to withstand shock. It was she who telephoned for the doctor who had an office on the first floor of the apartment house.

There was no doubt that Gil had been poisoned. The doctor asked Nancy what he had eaten the night before, and she told him about the coffee, showed him the remnants of chicken, the half-used loaf, and what remained of the applesauce in a white china bowl. And there were four tomatoes in the cooler instead of the half-dozen which the cook had put there the day before.

Nancy told the doctor and, later, the detectives that she had eaten the same food, drunk coffee brewed in the same pot. She remembered that when she had asked Gil if he wanted a drink, he had answered that he had had enough. According to his own story, he had spent part of the evening on Seventy-ninth Street, which led her to think that he had been with her cousin, Phyllis Miller.

Analysis showed that the poison which had killed Gilbert Jones (and Mike Jordan made a special point of withholding its name) worked slowly. If its presence is known in time and an antidote administered, the victim can be saved. But no one had heard Gil's cries. Nancy had slept soundly at her end of the apartment.

By the time Gil's body was examined he had been dead for a few hours, but medical authorities could not say whether he had died at five in the morning or at seven-thirty. And the time element was further complicated by the fact that the poison might have killed him in six hours or nine. He had been a healthy man with a rugged heart. Experts could not name precisely the hour at which he had been given the poison, whether at ten o'clock at night or at one the next morning. And time was the determining factor.

From nine o'clock the night before, or a few minutes after, until approximately ten-forty, he had been with Phyllis. In this detail the girls' stories agreed. If he had left Phyllis around ten-forty, it was reasonable to believe Nancy's statement that the clock had been striking eleven when he opened the front door. He had sat up with her talking and eating, until somewhere around twelve-thirty.

There was a possibility, of course, that he had stopped on his way home at a bar or restaurant. Detectives

questioned bartenders and waiters in the Third and Lexington Avenue places between Sixty-fifth and Seventy-ninth Street, but none of them remembered having served him. And if he had been accidentally poisoned in any of these places, there would certainly have been other victims.

There was one other possibility, suicide. This was not likely. He was not of a morbid nature, and since he had been married to Nancy he had no financial problems. His play had failed, but if actors committed suicide after every flop, there'd be none left to keep the theater going. And the day before he had been interviewed about a good part by an important manager. There was no reason for Gilbert Jones to have been suicidally unhappy. Two women had loved him, but that was more or less what he expected. In his way he had probably cared for both, which is to say that he loved neither, since he had room in his heart only for love of himself.

It must have been one of the women. They had both played emotional scenes with him, had both given him drinks. Their stories were in direct conflict. Each said that he had promised her to give up the other, and had gone so far as to play a farewell scene with the unhappy one. Although neither of them accused the other, each implied that the other was guilty. No poison was discovered in either apartment. But when a murderer washes the dishes, she might easily get rid of deadlier evidence. If there had been poison left in either apartment, the guilty woman could easily get rid of it. Modern plumbing provides a quick and easy way to dispose of such evidence. . . .

While Mike was summing up the points on both sides and adding to my suspense, the telephone rang. We were silent for a moment. All the color had left Mike's face. Into the phone he said, "This is Jordan. . . . All right; I'll hold on."

Although I was crazy to hear the conversation, I had been brought up to believe that there is no sin more despicable than eavesdropping. Virtuously I walked on tiptoe toward the patio.

"You heard the rest, you might as well hear this," Mike said, and I flew into the living-room.

It was on the west side of the house, and although the curtains had been drawn, the sun filtered light through the patterned green cloth. I sat on the couch as I used to sit in the dentist's waiting-room, my hands at my sides pressed hard against the seat.

After a seemingly endless interval I heard Mike say, "Hello, dear." He was silent for a few minutes, and then he turned to me and said, "She's crying."

"Who?"

He spoke into the telephone: "I know you wouldn't do such a thing, my dear. I know who did it. . . . Yes! If you do as I say, she'll have to confess." After another interval he said to her, "Because I know. Of

course it's hard for you, but not half so hard as being accused, yourself."

Apparently she asked Mike to come to New York, for he told her that he was not free to leave, since he was in the Army. "I can't get away, you know, unless they subpoena me, which isn't probable, since I was three thousand miles away when the murder was committed. But I do know positively." His voice became gentler: "You'll have to handle this yourself. Tell her that you must talk to her privately, and get her to come to your apartment. She'll come if you tell her you've talked to Mike Jordan. I'm sure that she knows I know. You must let her think you're alone; but have someone there. If you're constantly under surveillance by the Homicide Squad, so much the better. Have your lawyer there, too, but concealed."

Again there was argument. Mike almost lost his temper. "Of course it's a horrid thing to do, but, my dear girl, you are suspected of murder."

She must finally have agreed, because Mike turned to me and nodded. Then he spoke again into the telephone: "Tell her that you know about her *first* murder."

I gasped. Probably there was as much astonishment at the other end of the wire, for Mike hastened to reassure her by saying, "Yes, indeed. I do know it. Tell her you know what caused Fred Miller's death."

Silence must have followed this revelation. Mike turned to see the effect upon me.

"Then it was Phyllis?" I muttered.

Mike said it into the telephone, "It wasn't jealousy that caused her to poison Gil. She was jealous, no doubt, and afraid of losing him. This made her hysterical, and you know how completely she'd abandon herself once she unlocked that shell of restraint. She probably pleaded with Gil, told him that he dared not desert her after what she'd done for him. I can't tell you exactly what her words were, but I'm sure she disclosed theatrically that she'd been driven to murder for Gil's sake.

"Knowing Gil, I feel that he was shocked at the thought before he quite believed her. Instead of exciting him and increasing his passion, it turned him against her. You knew Gil better than I. He was vain enough to enjoy the spectacle of the two of you weeping and fighting over him, but he didn't want corpses as tribute on the altar of love. I know Gil's faults, too. He was vain and opportunistic, but there wasn't a malicious bone in his body. Think of his naïveté over that suicide business. As soon as she had confessed, whether he fully believed it or not, he began to loathe her. This cooled her considerably, I'm sure. When the hysteria died, she saw that he was dangerous to her, and put poison in his highball."

"She had the poison, you know," Mike continued. "It was the same stuff she'd put into the sleeping pills. After she discovered that Gil had married you and she'd killed poor

Fred in vain, she tried to kill herself. She probably thought she was sincere about it, but the sincerity wasn't deep enough to make her go through with it. If she had died, Nancy, you would have been punished and your marriage with Gil haunted by her ghost. And since she recovered, she found it less embarrassing to appear the victim of a murder attempt than a frustrated suicide.

"That looked bad for you, too, you know. She probably tried to make believe that you'd poisoned her sleeping pills. Yes, she inferred it when she told me the story. Naturally, I never believed it, Nancy; I knew you too well, and I also knew how Fred Miller died."

I did not hear the rest of the conversation, for there came into my mind then the image of a psychology professor, a pompous little man he was, who once said to our class that suicide and murder are not far removed from each other; both, he told us, were born of the desire for revenge upon an individual or upon society. Suddenly, as Mike finished the long-distance call, I saw the pattern of the story. There was only one point which I did not understand.

"How did *you* know, Mike, that Phyllis had killed Fred Miller? I thought you said he'd died of pneumonia."

We were on the patio when I asked that question. The pepper tree's shadow had shifted and Mike sat upright in a metal chair under the striped umbrella. Sunlight and the brilliant hues of the geraniums hinted mockingly at the pleasure of being alive. The blossoms of the mimosa were fat yellow balls.

"There's no doubt that Fred died of pneumonia. In a hospital with a physician in attendance."

"But you said that Phyllis killed him."

"It's easy, Lissa, when a person has a bad cold, to give him pneumonia, particularly if you're his loving wife." In the hot light Mikeshivered."Don't ask me how she did it. That, Lissa, is something I'll never tell anyone again."

"You told her how to do it, Mike? Why? Why did you tell her how to kill her husband?"

Mike rose and walked to the edge of the patio, stood at the wall looking down on the valley and the highway. His fists were clenched so tightly that the bones shone through the skin.

"I gave her the recipe for murder."

"How, Mike?"

Mike did not immediately answer. He stood beside the wall, looking down at the shadows on the hillside and the lively road. "Long ago, Lissa, when I was trying my hand at fiction, I wrote a story. It was a young man's story, bitter and sordid, all about an unhappy wife who brought about her husband's death by a series of acts which caused a bad cold to develop into pneumonia.

"Each of these acts was described in the most minute detail, Lissa.

"I read the story to Phyllis and Nancy. They were the only ones who

ever heard it, for after Nancy'd got through telling me what she thought of my little masterpiece, I burned the manuscript. She was pretty tough with me that night, asked if I was crazy enough to suppose that anyone would ever publish a story that gave such precise instructions to potential murderers.

"After Nancy had attacked the story so violently, Phyllis could not very well praise it. She listened quietly and neither praised nor criticized the tale. But she must have remembered. I knew —" Mike turned abruptly and raised his voice at me as though I were guilty. "I knew as soon as I heard of Fred Miller's death. In a way I feel as if I had committed murder."

How blind men are. When he told me how heavily his conscience was burdened, I told Mike Jordan that this was not his first sin against the cousins. He took off his dark glasses and glared at me. "A sin of omission," I said. "Are you so stupid, Mike, that you've never realized how Nancy loved you?"

After a moment he said quietly, "That's very female of you, Lissa."

"Since she was fifteen and made such an odious exhibition of herself in the silver and black dress at her party. Every time she succeeded in getting close to you, Phyllis came along and dazzled you with her beauty and that mystery which was only a disguise for her coldness and jealousy. Her sole purpose in life was revenge against Nancy, and you were her victim as well as Gilbert and Fred."

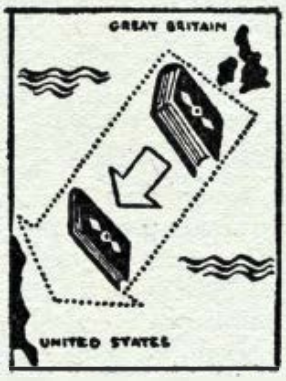
"But Nancy fell in love with other men, with Gil and Johnnie Elder. She flirted quite a lot in Europe and almost got engaged while she was in Mexico."

"She tried to make herself fall in love with them, Mike. Partly because she was trying to get you out of her system, and partly because it was only natural for her to want to take something away from Phyllis. She had shared hope and failure with Gil, which softened her toward him. And, besides, he was not exactly repulsive to women."

Mike's hands fumbled in his pocket. He brought out the roll of bills again, hurried across the patio, and thrust them into my hands. When he spoke his voice was humble:

"Would you mind, Lissa, if I used your phone again? I'd like to call New York."

SOLE ARBITER



We have commented before on the curious differences in taste between English and American editors; how some books published in England — books as fine in the short story field as Ernest Bramah's MAX CARRADOS *and C. Daly King's* THE CURIOUS MR. TARRANT *— made so small an impression on American book-editors that they failed to achieve any American publication at all; how anthologies appear on both sides of the Atlantic and not only suffer a change of title but undergo drastic changes in content. Take, for example, that fine collection edited by John Rhode as a publication of the London Detection Club. The book appeared in England in 1939 under the title* DETECTION MEDLEY. *It was published the following year in America as* LINE-UP. *There can be no serious quarrel about this change — perhaps* DETECTION MEDLEY *is a better title for the English market, and* LINE-UP *a more effective title for the American reading public. But let us dig deeper: the English version of the book contains 35 stories, essays, and articles; the American version contains only 20. Undoubtedly, the American publisher had good and sufficient reasons to restrict their edition to little more than half of the original compilation. It is worth noting, however, that the English book sold for eight shillings, six pence, and the American version for $2.50 — in other words, the English book, with nearly twice as much reading matter, cost* less *than the American book! But again let us not quarrel: perhaps the American reader can afford to pay more than his English brother-of-the-blood — perhaps.*

To get back to our main point: 35 selections in the English edition, 20 in the American. Now, obviously, the American editor had to pick and choose. We can assume that the American editor selected either the 20 best pieces in the original English table of contents, or if not the 20 best, the 20 which seemed most attractive to American readers. Yet, examine what the American edition did not *choose to include: two stories by Margery Allingham (both never published in America); one story by H. C. Bailey (also never published in America until we included it in* ROGUES' GALLERY*); one story by Nicholas Blake (also never published in America until we brought it out in EQMM); two stories by Anthony Gilbert (also never published in America); and, of course, nine other pieces.*

Well, LINE-UP*'s loss is EQMM's equity. We are grateful, believe us, since it gives us an opportunity to keep remedying the situation. We shall*

bring you at least one of the two Margery Allingham stories and both tales by Anthony Gilbert. Here is the first of the two stories by Anthony Gilbert: it is not an Arthur Crook adventure, but it does introduce a character new to American fans. Meet Inspector Field, in a reminiscent mood . . .

THE COCKROACH AND THE TORTOISE

by ANTHONY GILBERT

"TALKING OF cockroaches," observed Inspector Field, guilefully bringing the conversation round to his own subject, "reminds me of a queer thing that happened to me once. It was a good many years ago; I was a sergeant in the K District. That's a fairly well-to-do part of London, and most of the cases we had were shop-lifting and bag-snatching. Not much scope for an ambitious man, but there's generally a chance if you keep your eyes open. One morning I was on duty in the station when I heard a scuttering movement outside and a woman burst into the room. She was a little thing, very plainly dressed, rather taking if you like 'em small, with big eyes and curly lashes. She stood there, staring, and panting as if she'd been running a race.

"I thought she was another of these people who've had their bags emptied while they left them on the counter in order to look at a sweetly pretty thing in the bargain basement. But it turned out not to be that at all. In fact, it was one of the strangest things that ever happened to me." He polished off his tankard and shoved it across the counter. "I was so sure it was a shop-thieving affair that I'd already picked out the right form. Forms are more useful where women are concerned than you'd ever guess; seem to impress them that there's something serious going on.

"When I began to ask what was wrong, though, she just gasped at me: 'I want you to help me. I want some advice. I never meant to come here, but where else am I to go?'

"Well, of course, that wasn't precisely what I'd expected, but you soon learn in a job like ours not to be surprised at anything, so I said as nicely as I could that we'd be glad to help her, and she went on in a jerky sort of voice: 'Of course, I know the proper thing would be to go to a lawyer and make him do something. But I daren't. I don't know any. Only Harry's, and he wouldn't be safe.'

"Harry was her husband, she explained. I told her there were other lawyers, but she said: 'I wouldn't dare trust them. If I picked a dishonest one, and a lot of them are rogues, for I've heard Harry say so, I'd be even worse off than I am now. So I thought

perhaps the police could do something.'

" 'You'll have to tell me a bit more,' I encouraged her, and bit by bit, a word here and another there, I got the story out of her. It was what I'd begun to expect — blackmail — and for the commonest of reasons where a woman's concerned.

" 'It's wicked,' she kept saying, 'simply wicked that I should be tortured like this, just because I was a fool for a little time.'

"I could see at a glance it wasn't any good telling her that life doesn't play a bit fair, and that lots of people are tortured for being a fool for less than an hour. Some of these murderers, for instance, who're driven half-crazy before they strike. But she wasn't the type of woman to appreciate a point like that, so I just let it go and asked her to tell me what was wrong. It was an ordinary enough affair. She'd got playing about with some young fellow while her husband was away, and now the chap was making trouble. Well, that's quite a common position, too, though I knew she wouldn't believe me if I told her.

" 'He's trying to get money out of me,' she went on in an incredulous sort of voice, as if she despaired of making me believe in the existence of such a monster. 'I've told him again and again that it's no good — I haven't got the money — but he says I can get it out of my husband. Which, of course, is just what I can't do. As it is, he's beginning to complain of my extravagance, says I never used to ask for extras like this, and do I think he's made of money? I've sold all my jewelry, and pretended it's being reset, but I shan't be able to keep up that pretense for long, and when Harry finds out he'll start making inquiries, and everything will be ruined.'

" 'You haven't thought of telling your husband?' I suggested, and I thought she was going to faint dead away.

" 'He'd kill me,' she said simply. 'And though sometimes I feel I wouldn't mind being dead, I couldn't bear to think of him being hanged because I'd been a fool.' She admitted that quite frankly. This fellow — she referred to him as Gerald — had just been a diversion. She was young and not bad-looking, and like a lot of young pretty women she'd got into a mess as soon as her husband took his eye off her. But she insisted that it was Harry who mattered.

" 'He's real,' she said. 'Gerald was only a game. I never meant any harm.'

"I sometimes wonder," added Field in parentheses, "whether some of these women would do worse if they meant to play the devil generally. Most likely not, seeing the way women are. Well, she'd tried to shake this fellow off, but he was sticking closer than a brother, asking for more and more money.

" 'Have you got any of his letters?' I asked her, and she said she hadn't, but if I wanted one there were sure to be more and she'd bring one along.

" 'He never wrote the other kind,'

she went on, 'though I used to write pages to him. He's kept all those, and he's making me buy them back. The worst — I mean, the ones that Harry would think the worst — are the most expensive. I don't feel as though there were enough money in the world to pay for them.'

"I was sorry for her, of course, but I don't mind telling you I was a bit disappointed too. Just at first, when she began, I'd got an idea she might be one of those cases that do a fellow a bit of good. These domestic blackmails don't get you anywhere. I asked her the usual things — how long had she been giving this Gerald money — and she said: 'Six months. And I can't give him any more. But lately he's begun to torture me in a new way. He follows me when I'm out; he hangs round the house, so that the servants must notice him. The other day, when my husband and I were walking together, he came across the street towards us. I thought he was going to speak to me. I think he just wanted my husband to notice him, to warn me that he would have no mercy. He's cruel and wicked.'

"I asked her for Gerald's full name, and she hesitated.

" 'I don't want him to find out I've come to you,' she said.

" 'Your best plan will be to suggest a rendezvous next time he asks for money,' I told her. 'Meet him there, and we'll catch him red-handed.'

"She looked horrified. 'I couldn't. My husband might find out.'

"I thought that most probable, but she wouldn't hear of making a clean breast of it. She wasn't afraid of a divorce — there would be no question of that, she said — but her life would cease to be worth living.

" 'It would be just a prison for the rest of my days,' she assured me. 'And he would turn our child against me. I will never, never do anything wrong again, but somehow you must frighten this man away without Harry finding out.'

"I couldn't argue about her husband, of course; there are men like that, taking a pride in cutting off their noses to spite their faces, and go about mutilated forever afterwards.

" 'If you won't tell your husband and you won't give me this man's name, what do you expect us to do?' I wanted to know.

"She said she didn't really know, but that sometimes she thought she'd kill herself.

" 'I shouldn't do that,' I warned her. 'But if you should be in earnest, don't come and tell the police about it first. It's a criminal offense, see? And you'd be making me accessory before the fact.'

"But it was easy to see she didn't care about that. I could be sent to prison for five years and she wouldn't even notice it. Any more than she wanted to proceed formally against this chap who was bleeding her white.

" 'You ought to think of the community,' I told her. 'Why, he may be sucking another lady's blood at this minute.'

"She tossed her head. 'That's nothing to do with me. And, anyway, he isn't. Because he's been following me about ever since I left my house this morning. That's why I came in here, because I thought it was the one place where he wouldn't dare show his face. Even he wouldn't be brazen enough to storm a police station.'

"Outside the door someone whistled, and then a very tall man, dark and clean-shaven, walked in; he had those deep blue eyes you see in some Irish families, and when he saw the lady he began to laugh.

" 'So this is where you got to,' he said. 'I must hand it to you for nerve. Putting your head into the lion's mouth and trusting to his British chivalry not to snap.'

"She stood up; she was a tiny little thing, really, and for a minute I thought she was going to faint. She leaned against my shoulder and one hand clutched my arm. But when I said I'd fetch her a glass of water, she said No, it was all right, she didn't want anything, I wasn't to go.

" 'I've been telling the police about you,' she told the newcomer defiantly.

"He only laughed again. 'Tell me,' he urged. 'I always like to learn.'

" 'The officer says you could get seven years '

"I gasped a bit, because I hadn't said that, though it might be true. It depends on the judge.

"The man threw back his head and roared with laughter. 'That's a good one,' he said, 'but you always were fine at telling the tale. All right, Sergeant, go ahead. Make your arrest. Incidentally, you might let me know the charge. That is, if you know it yourself.'

"I said in a wooden sort of voice: 'This lady wishes to charge you with blackmail,' and instead of laughing again he turned to my companion and remarked in a soft sort of voice: 'So I'm a blackmailer, am I? I will say, Fanny, you do think up good stories. How much have I had off you?'

"I was beginning to feel uncommonly foolish; if this lady had been hazing me it might put me a long way back with my superiors if the truth came out, but before I could speak the woman he called Fanny went on in indignant tones: 'You can't deny you've been following me about all the morning. . . .'

" 'Like hell I have,' he agreed heartily. 'Well, wouldn't you, if she'd pinched a stone worth four thousand out of your house?' He was talking to me now. 'I don't know if you've heard of the Pendleton Emerald? I'm Pendleton.' He fished in his pocket for a card. 'I'm taking this emerald abroad this afternoon, as Fanny knew, and she meant to get her claws on it. I will say one thing, her gang generally does get what it wants. I got a 'phone message this morning calling me up in a ghastly emergency, and off I went hell-for-leather. When I arrived I found my man knew nothing about it, and I realized I'd got Clapham Fanny on my track. This isn't, I may add, the first shot they've made to relieve me of

responsibility for the jewel. Of course, you know all about her; so do we. She's a familiar name to every dealer and fence between Hatton Garden and Amsterdam. I came haring back in a taxi just in time to see another taxi going away from my house. I just caught a glimpse of a lady stepping into it and — well, you can see for yourself she's not a lady you'd easily forget. I knew I hadn't a moment to wait; in that taxi were Clapham Fanny — and my emerald. I was so sure I didn't even stop to open my safe. I knew she'd done that job for me. My man, Baynes, is pretty reliable, but he's no match for an old-timer like our friend here. She'd sent the message, of course — or one of the gang had. It wasn't a woman's voice.'

"He stopped to get his breath, and Fanny said contemptuously: 'That's very clever of you, but this is a police station. They know your sort here.'

" 'Well,' he told her, 'the proof of the pudding's in the eating. Where are my blackmailing letters?'

" 'Do you suppose I kept anything so dangerous?' she asked him. She did look rather handsome in a rage.

" 'Even more to the point,' the fellow went on, 'where's my emerald?'

" 'I don't believe you ever had an emerald,' she scoffed. 'It was clever of you to follow me in here, when you realized I was going to the police at last, and to try and spoil things, but you lose this time.'

" 'Do I?' If he was bluffing, he was a remarkably cool card.

" 'If I'd stolen your emerald do you think I'd be in a police station?'

" 'Ever hear the story of the cockroach that was set before the tortoise as a *bonne bouche?* It took one look at the tortoise and gave one leap and concealed itself under the creature's armpit — the safest hiding-place it could find. I don't want to sound rude, Fanny, comparing you with a cockroach, but — well, you see my point?'

" 'Perhaps the Sergeant's a bit quicker than I am,' Fanny retorted.

" 'Oh, come off it,' said my fine gentleman. 'Hand over that emerald — unless you want to get about five years.'

"Fanny faced him with her chin in the air, her hands gripped round the neck of a little black silk bag she was carrying. 'I haven't got your emerald,' she said. 'I don't know anything about your emerald. I don't even like emeralds. They're unlucky stones. This is simply another of your crooked attempts to get a living.'

" 'My dear, be a sportsman,' Mr. Pendleton urged her. 'You haven't been out of my sight since you left my house, except for a second when I got caught in a traffic jam. It isn't likely the taxi driver has the stuff; you wouldn't let it out of your sight. Therefore, you have it on you. Hadn't you better confess you're beaten? If you won't listen to reason,' he added regretfully, 'I shall have to charge you, and you'll be searched, which will be most humiliating. You do see that, don't you?'

"However, she stuck to her guns that she knew nothing about the thing and hadn't got it, though she was more frightened now. I could feel her trembling.

" 'All right,' said Mr. Pendleton. 'Then I'll charge you with the theft.' And he turned to me.

"I hadn't any choice. I had to have her searched, and off she went with a woman searcher, and I felt pretty uncomfortable altogether.

"I didn't gather that my companion felt much happier. 'I don't like this,' he told me. 'I've a lot of admiration for that girl. She takes chances and she generally brings them off. Silly of her not to admit she had the stone.'

"I wasn't feeling quite so certain myself; after all, he hadn't stopped to examine the safe. It looked to me uncommonly as though he'd walked into the trap Clapham Fanny had laid for him, and that at this very moment the rest of the gang was making its getaway with the emerald. But I had the sense to say nothing about that.

" 'If it turns out that you're mistaken you'll find yourself in a tight pair of shoes,' I suggested, but he only laughed and offered me his cigarette case.

" 'She's got it all right,' he said. 'She hoped I'd weaken, that's all. Just you wait.'

"Well, we waited, and presently the searcher came in and said she'd examined Fanny from top to toe, and the only jewel she had was the big paste diamond on her left hand.

"Well, thought I, this about cooks the goose, and then Fanny herself came in. She was in a towering rage, no doubt about that. Her eyes were burning and she said, in the sort of voice that makes husbands remember there's a job of work they left unfinished at the other end of the town: 'Well, Mr. Pendleton, and what happens now? Perhaps I can't give you in charge for blackmail, but I can give you in charge for slander, and false accusation, and I hope it ruins you.'

"My gentleman hadn't turned a hair. He was still leaning against the door, with his hands in his pockets, and all he said was: 'Then, if you haven't got it on you — and I must take the searcher's word for that — it's somewhere in this room. The point is, where?'

"He didn't move, but I could see his eyes going round to every possible place. 'There's no need to look on the picture rail,' I told him. 'The lady hasn't been alone for a minute, and all the time she was here she was talking to me.'

" 'You remaining stationary,' he suggested. 'Well, that narrows the field certainly.'

"It seemed to me it narrowed it so much it was scarcely a blade of grass, let alone a field, but before I could say so he'd dashed forward and caught me by the arm. While I was wondering what the game was he'd plunged his other hand into my pocket, and when he brought it out there was something in it, something that seemed to fill the room with a bright light. I hadn't had much to do with

jewel crimes, but even if I had, the Pendleton Emerald would probably have dazzled me just the same. Like a green fire it was.

" 'I ought to have guessed when I saw you standing so much nearer the law than is normal or safe,' he teased the girl. 'It was very long-sighted of you. I suppose you thought I'd never look for you in here; and then, when you realized I wasn't altogether a fool, in spite of my appearance, you disposed of the emerald in the one place where no one would think of looking for it. Oh, you're a very pretty cockroach, my dear. Well, what's the next move?'

"I admired the woman then; she must have known she was on a hot spot, but she didn't turn an eyelash.

" 'You can have me arrested — if you dare,' she said. 'Though it mightn't be too comfortable for the Inspector here. After all,' and here she burst out laughing, 'nobody saw me park the jewel.'

"He roared at that. 'Jolly for you, Inspector,' he said.

"I didn't altogether like the way things were shaping.

" 'Do you wish to make a charge?' I asked him.

"He shook his head. 'Haven't the time. I told you this jewel has to accompany me out of England this afternoon.'

" 'It doesn't take all day to make a charge,' I assured him in my driest tones.

" 'I'm afraid, if I do make it, I may never live to make anything else,' he explained. 'Fanny has a husband — and even a public school education doesn't seem to give these gangmen any respect for the police.'

"He grinned, said, 'So long, Fanny,' and to my disgust out she went a good deal cooler than when she came in.

"I was properly angry now. 'You'd no right to do that, sir,' I told him. 'She may be robbing someone else's safe within the hour.'

" 'That's their luck,' he said.

" 'You ought to have given her in charge,' I insisted.

" 'That's her luck,' he told me.

" 'There ought to have been an arrest,' I said again.

" 'That's your luck.' He'd gone before I'd properly understood what he meant. I was beginning to think: 'That's life; just a lot of beginnings that don't lead anywhere,' when one of my colleagues came in with some photographs in his hand.

" 'Keep a look-out for these,' he said, putting them down. 'Some gang got away with the Pendleton Emerald this morning. Old Sir Joseph's foaming at the mouth, and seeing what a squat bald little chap he is, it isn't safe for him to work overtime at that game. It seems it's worth a lot of money — four thousand, the experts say — and he was got out of his house by a trick this morning, and then the thieves turned up as calm as you please, on a pretext of answering some advertisement, tied up the butler, and picked the lock of the safe as easy as kiss your hand.'

" 'Do they know who the chaps were?' I asked.

" 'A man and a woman. Here are the pictures. Someone saw them in this part of London. How they got away with it in broad daylight takes some explaining. One thing, you'd know him again.'

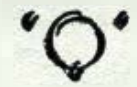
"He put the pictures on my desk. Hers wasn't very flattering, but I'd have recognized his anywhere, that tall dark fellow, with the big shoulders and long chin. I suppose she thought someone had hit her trail, so in she came, parked the jewel as calmly as you please in case questions were asked, and then he popped along to warn her the coast was clear. It was all very prettily done."

"Did they get them?" someone asked.

Inspector Field shook his head. "I did hear the emerald was seen round the neck of a lady in Central Europe some time afterwards, but that might be just gossip. Anyhow, Sir Joseph died of apoplexy within the month, so it wouldn't have been much use to him."

We all felt a bit delicate about putting the final question. Finally, the barmaid, braver than the rest of us, or perhaps just more curious, asked: "And what happened when the story came out?"

Field looked at her disapprovingly. "When you're as old as I am," he told her, "you'll understand there's times when it's positively unhealthy to know more than your superiors. Gives them a wrong impression, and an ambitious man — and I was ambitious in those days — doesn't make mistakes like that. But it's an odd thing," he wound up, pushing his tankard across the counter, "and I daresay these newfangled psychologists would find some indecent reason for it, but since that time I've never been really partial to a tortoise."



NEXT MONTH . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will contain:

Cornell Woolrich's JOHNNY ON THE SPOT
Leslie Charteris's SALT ON HIS TAIL
Joseph Shearing's LOVE-IN-A-MIST
Thomas Walsh's GETAWAY MONEY
Georges Simenon's LE CHATEAU DE L'ARSENIC
Roy Vickers's THE DEATH POSITION ENIGMA

and other top-ranking stories, including a "sleeper" which John Dickson Carr selects as one of his ten favorite detective tales.

What makes a writer write? What causes the distinction between a writer who merely wants to write and a writer who simply has to write? What gives a potential writer the final push? In Elizabeth Bowen's case it was a period in her late teens when she suffered extreme economic hardship. A spree of seemingly uncontrollable extravagance had forced Miss Bowen to sell or pawn most of the things she valued; then for months she lived in rigorous simplicity, barely making ends meet, existing from hand to mouth. During this interval of semi-stagnation, of withdrawal from the world, Miss Bowen suddenly discovered she wanted to write. From the moment her pen first touched paper, the desire became an inner compulsion, and from that time she has thought of practically nothing but writing, its problems, and its fulfillment. True, there have been interims of idleness, but during those lapses or purely transitional phases, she felt only half alive.

Miss Bowen confesses to liking her life, and the life around her, orderly; she loves small gay parties, movies, detective stories, music, and long walks — though not in that order of preference. Today, in the opinion of many critics, she shares with the late Virginia Woolf the highest position among contemporary women novelists in England. Phyllis Bentley once wrote that Elizabeth Bowen's "short stories are limited in range . . . but as regards human emotion they are both deep and wide; there is a poignancy, an intensity, in her presentation of experience."

You will find those qualities — poignancy and intensity, and an incredibly deep understanding — in Miss Bowen's presentation of the experience of murder. Indeed, she projects the experience of murder, as relived in the mind of an abnormal human being, so realistically that one wonders from what depths of creative perception Miss Bowen brought forth so morbid and so telling a study . . .

TELLING

by ELIZABETH BOWEN

TERRY looked up; Josephine lay still. He felt shy, embarrassed all at once at the idea of anyone coming here.

His brain was ticking like a watch: he looked up warily.

But there was nobody. Outside the high cold walls, beyond the ragged arch of the chapel, delphiniums crowded in sunshine — straining with brightness, burning each other up — bars of color that, while one watched

them, seemed to turn round slowly. But there was nobody there.

The chapel was a ruin, roofed by daylight, floored with lawn. In a corner the gardener had tipped out a heap of cut grass from the lawn mower. The daisy-heads wilted, the cut grass smelled stuffy and sweet. Everywhere, cigarette-ends, scattered last night by the couples who'd come here to kiss. First the dance, thought Terry, then this: the servants will never get straight. The cigarette-ends would lie here for days, till after the rain, and go brown and rotten.

Then he noticed a charred cigarette stump in Josephine's hair. The short wavy ends of her hair fell back — still in lines of perfection — from temples and ears; by her left ear the charred stump showed through. For that, he thought, she would never forgive him; fastidiousness was her sensibility, always tormented. ("If you must know," she had said, "well, you've got dirty nails, haven't you? Look.") He bent down and picked the cigarette-end out of her hair; the fine ends fluttered under his breath. As he threw it away, he noticed his nails were still dirty. His hands were stained now — naturally — but his nails must have been dirty before. Had she noticed again?

But had she, perhaps, for a moment been proud of him? Had she had just a glimpse of the something he'd told her about? He wanted to ask her: "What do you feel now? Do you believe in me?" He felt sure of himself, certain, justified. For nobody else would have done this to Josephine.

Himself they had all — always — deprecated. He felt a shrug in this attitude, a thinly disguised kind of hopelessness. "Oh, *Terry* . . ." they'd say, and break off. He was no good: he couldn't even put up a tennis net. He never could see properly (whisky helped that at first, then it didn't), his hands wouldn't serve him, things he wanted them to hold slipped away from them. He was no good; the younger ones laughed at him till they, like their brothers and sisters, grew up and were schooled into bitter kindliness. Again and again he'd been sent back to them all (and repetition never blunted the bleak edge of these homecomings) from school, from Cambridge, now — a month ago — from Ceylon. "The bad penny!" he would remark, very jocular. "If I could just think things out," he had tried to explain to his father, "I know I could do *something*." And once he had said to Josephine: "I know there is Something I could do."

"And they will know now," he said, looking round (for the strange new pleasure of clearly and sharply seeing) from Josephine's face to her stained breast (her heavy blue beads slipped sideways over her shoulder and coiled on the grass — touched, surrounded now by the unhesitant trickle); from her breast up the walls to their top, the top crumbling, the tufts of valerian trembling against the sky. It was as though the dark-paned window through which he had

so long looked out swung open suddenly. He saw (clear as the walls and the sky) Right and Wrong, the old childish fixities. I have done right, he thought (but his brain was still ticking). *She ought not to live* with this flaw in her. Josephine ought not to live, she had to die.

All night he had thought this out, walking alone in the shrubberies, helped by the dance music, dodging the others. His mind had been kindled, like a dull coal suddenly blazing. He was not angry; he kept saying: "I must not be angry, I must be just." He was in a blaze (it seemed to himself) of justice. The couples who came face to face with him down the paths started away. Someone spoke of a minor prophet, someone breathed "Caliban." . . . He kept saying: "That flaw right through her. She damages truth. She kills souls; she's killed mine." So he had come to see, before morning, his purpose as God's purpose.

She had laughed, you see. She had been pretending. There was a tender and lovely thing he kept hidden, a spark in him; she had touched it and made it the whole of him, made him a man. She had said: "Yes, I believe, Terry. I understand." That had been everything. He had thrown off the old dull armor. . . . Then she had laughed.

Then he had understood what other men meant when they spoke of her. He had seen at once what he was meant to do. "This is for me," he said. "No one but I can do it."

All night he walked alone in the garden. Then he watched the French windows and when they were open again stepped in quickly and took down the African knife from the dining-room wall. He had always wanted that African knife. Then he had gone upstairs (remembering, on the way, all those meetings with Josephine, shaving, tying of ties), shaved, changed into flannels, put the knife into his blazer pocket (it was too long, more than an inch of the blade came out through the inside lining) and sat on his window-sill, watching sunlight brighten and broaden from a yellow agitation behind the trees into swathes of color across the lawn. He did not think; his mind was like somebody singing, somebody able to sing.

And, later, it had all been arranged for him. He fell into, had his part in, some kind of design. Josephine had come down in her pleated white dress (when she turned, the pleats whirled.) He had said, "Come out!" and she gave that light distant look, still with a laugh at the back of it, and said, "Oh — right-o, little Terry." And she had walked down the garden ahead of him, past the delphiniums into the chapel. Here, to make justice perfect, he had asked once more: "*Do* you believe in me?" She had laughed again.

She lay now with her feet and body in sunshine (the sun was just high enough), her arms flung out wide at him, desperately, generously: her head rolling sideways in shadow on

the enclosed, silky grass. On her face was a dazzled look (eyes half closed, lips drawn back), an expression almost of diffidence. Her blood quietly soaked through the grass, sinking through to the roots of it.

He crouched a moment and, touching her eyelids — still warm — tried to shut her eyes. But he didn't know how. Then he got up and wiped the blade of the African knife with a handful of grass, then scattered the handful away. All the time he was listening; he felt shy, embarrassed at the thought of anyone finding him here. And his brain, like a watch, was still ticking.

On his way to the house he stooped down and dipped his hands in the garden tank. Someone might scream; he felt embarrassed at the thought of somebody screaming. The red curled away through the water and melted.

He stepped in at the morning-room window. The blinds were half down — he stooped his head to avoid them — and the room was in dark-yellow shadow. (He had waited here for them all to come in, that afternoon he arrived back from Ceylon.) The smell of pinks came in, and two or three bluebottles bumbled and bounced on the ceiling. His sister Catherine sat with her back to him, playing the piano. (He had heard her as he came up the path.) He looked at her pink pointed elbows — she was playing a waltz and the music ran through them in jerky ripples.

"Hullo, Catherine," he said, and listened in admiration. So his new voice sounded like this!

"Hullo, Terry." She went on playing, worrying at the waltz. She had an anxious, methodical mind, but loved gossip. He thought: Here is a bit of gossip for you — Josephine's down in the chapel, covered with blood. Her dress is spoiled, but I think her blue beads are all right. I should go and see.

"I say, Catherine ——"

"Oh, Terry, they're putting the furniture back in the drawing-room. I wish you'd go and help. It's getting those big sofas through the door . . . and the cabinets." She laughed: "I'm just putting the music away," and went on playing.

He thought: I don't suppose she'll be able to marry now. No one will marry her. He said: "Do you know where Josephine is?"

"No, I haven't" — rum-tum-tum, rum-tum-*tum* — "the slightest idea. Go on, Terry."

He thought: She never liked Josephine. He went away.

He stood in the door of the drawing-room. His brothers and Beatrice were punting the big armchairs, chintz-skirted, over the waxy floor. They all felt him there: for as long as possible didn't notice him. Charles — fifteen, with his pink scrubbed ears — considered a moment, shoving against the cabinet, thought it was rather a shame, turned with an honest, kindly look of distaste, said, "Come on, Terry." He can't go back to school now, thought Terry, can't go any-

where, really: wonder what they'll do with him — send him out to the Colonies? Charles had perfect manners: square, bluff, perfect. He never thought about anybody, never felt anybody — just classified them. Josephine was "a girl staying in the house," "a friend of my sisters'." He would think at once (in a moment when Terry had told him), "A girl staying in the house . . . it's . . . well, I mean, if it hadn't been *a girl staying in the house* . . ."

Terry went over to him; they pushed the cabinet. But Terry pushed too hard, crooked; the further corner grated against the wall. "Oh, I say, we've scratched the paint," said Charles. And indeed they had; on the wall was a gray scar. Charles went scarlet: he hated things to be done badly. It was nice of him to say: "*We've* scratched the paint." Would he say later: "We've killed Josephine"?

"I think perhaps you'd better help with the sofas," said Charles civilly.

"You should have seen the blood on my hands just now," said Terry.

"Bad luck!" Charles said quickly and went away.

Beatrice, Josephine's friend, stood with her elbows on the mantelpiece looking at herself in the glass above. Last night a man had kissed her down in the chapel (Terry had watched them). This must seem to Beatrice to be written all over her face — what else could she be looking at? Her eyes in the looking-glass were dark, beseeching. As she saw Terry come up behind her, she frowned angrily and turned away.

"I say, Beatrice, do you know what happened down in the chapel?"

"Does it interest you?" She stooped quickly and pulled down the sofa loose-cover where it had "runkled" up, as though the sofa legs were indecent.

"Beatrice, what would you do if I'd killed somebody?"

"Laugh," said she, wearily.

"If I'd killed a woman?"

"Laugh harder. Do you know any women?"

She was a lovely thing, really: he'd ruined her, he supposed. He was all in a panic. "Beatrice, swear you won't go down to the chapel." Because she might, well — of course she'd go down: as soon as she was alone and they didn't notice she'd go creeping down to the chapel. It had been *that* kind of kiss.

"Oh, be quiet about that old chapel!" Already he'd spoiled last night for her. How she hated him! He looked round for John. John had gone away.

On the hall table were two letters, come by the second post, waiting for Josephine. No one, he thought, ought to read them — he must protect Josephine; he took them up and slipped them into his pocket.

"I say," called John from the stairs, "what are you doing with those letters?" John didn't mean to be sharp but they had taken each other unawares. They none of them wanted Terry to *feel* how his movements

were sneaking movements; when they met him creeping about by himself they would either ignore him or say: "Where are *you* off to?" jocosely and loudly, to hide the fact of their knowing he didn't know. John was Terry's elder brother, but hated to sound like one. But he couldn't help knowing those letters were for Josephine, and Josephine was "staying in the house."

"I'm taking them for Josephine."

"Know where she is?"

"Yes, in the chapel . . . I killed her there."

But John — hating this business with Terry — had turned away. Terry followed him upstairs, repeating: "I killed her there, John . . . John, I've killed Josephine in the chapel." John hurried ahead, not listening, not turning round. "Oh, yes," he called over his shoulder. "Right you are, take them along." He disappeared into the smoking-room, banging the door. It had been John's idea that, from the day after Terry's return from Ceylon, the sideboard cupboard in the dining-room should be kept locked up. But he'd never said anything; oh no. What interest could the sideboard cupboard have for a brother of his? he pretended to think.

Oh yes, thought Terry, you're a fine man with a muscular back, but you couldn't have done what I've done. There had, after all, been Something in Terry. He *was* abler than John (they'd soon know). John had never kissed Josephine.

Terry sat down on the stairs saying: "Josephine, Josephine!" He sat there gripping a baluster, shaking with exaltation.

The study door-panels had always looked solemn; they bulged with solemnity. Terry had to get past to his father; he chose the top left-hand panel to tap on. The patient voice said: "Come in!"

Here and now, thought Terry. He had a great audience; he looked at the books round the dark walls and thought of all those thinkers. His father jerked up a contracted, strained look at him. Terry felt that hacking with his news into this silence was like hacking into a great, grave chest. The desk was a havoc of papers.

"What exactly do you want?" said his father, rubbing the edge of the desk.

Terry stood there silently: everything ebbed. "I want," he said at last, "to talk about my future."

His father sighed and slid a hand forward, rumpling the papers. "I suppose, Terry," he said as gently as possible, "you really *have* got a future?" Then he reproached himself. "Well, sit down a minute . . . I'll just . . ."

Terry sat down. The clock on the mantelpiece echoed the ticking in his brain. .

He waited.

"Yes?" said his father.

"Well, there must be some kind of future for me, mustn't there?"

"Oh, certainly. . . ."

"Look here, father, I have some-

thing to show you. That African knife ——"

"What about it?"

"That African knife. It's here. I've got it to show you."

"What about it?"

"Just wait a minute." He put a hand into either pocket: his father waited.

"It *was* here — I did have it. I brought it to show to you. I must have it somewhere — that African knife."

But it wasn't there, he hadn't got it; he had lost it; left it, dropped it — on the grass, by the tank, anywhere. He remembered wiping it. . . . Then?

Now his support was all gone; he was terrified now; he wept.

"I've lost it," he quavered, "I've lost it."

"What do you mean?" said his father, sitting blankly there like a tombstone, with his white, square face.

"What are you trying to tell me?"

"Nothing," said Terry, weeping and shaking. "Nothing, nothing, nothing."

Criminals In Disguise

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

How well do you know your murderers? Here are ten of the great masters of the art: half of them from fact, half from fiction. How many of them can you identify from the following clues? On the fictional ones, count your answer right if you can name either the murderer or the story in which he appears. See page 130 for correct answers.

---

1. Some writers have claimed that frustrated love drove her to the deed; but the mutton soup for breakfast seems a likelier cause.

2. A medical man by profession, he kept a cautious case-history of his crime, thereby provoking a violent ethical dispute.

3. Everybody's supposed to be able to control his body, but ideas of strangulation came into this man's great white-gloved hands.

4. No mystery surrounds the crime of this pioneer practitioner, but a great deal of hypothetical conjecture attends his marriage.

5. This masquerader came to a literally sticky end, but his peculiar talents would now be of great use to the K-9 Corps.

6. Artist and esthete, hung in galleries rather than on the gallows, he attributed one of his crimes to the victim's intolerably thick ankles.

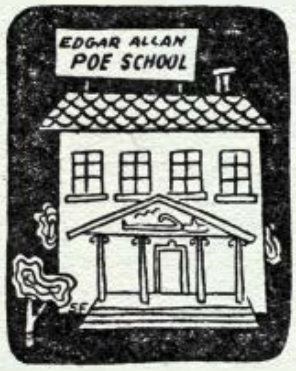
7. This trouper ended a brilliant detective career when a younger investigator used his physical weakness to prove him guilty of murder.

8. She posed unwittingly for an electrifying picture after she and her lover had discovered a new use for sash weights.

9. His crime horrified a nation, drove a popular hero into exile, and inspired a new and drastic Federal law.

10. Known to all mankind, this murderer used his unique ability as a long-range assassin to commit the most perfect locked-room killing on record.

RATIOCINATIVE RIB



Viola Brothers Shore's "Rope's End" won a Second Prize in our Second Annual Contest. When the story appeared in the October 1947 issue of EQMM, Lou Roseman, mystery-reviewer for the Oakland, California, "Post-Enquirer," was kind enough to comment as follows: "If you want to find out how to extract the mystery story from its present blind alley, you should read Viola Brothers Shore's 'Rope's End' . . . It's meaningful mystery that merges with the mainstream of all literature . . . Miss Shore, who is a screen writer and part-time detective scribe, tells a whyhedunit rather than a whodunit tale. She is interested in people and what makes them tick . . . ['Rope's End'] is the murder story brought up to date, or as Miss Shore puts it, psychoanalyzed."

Well, Viola Brothers Shore has more than one string to her bloodhound bow. She can write dead-serious detective stories and she can write live-humorous ones. Here is a sample of what might be called Miss Shore's serio-comic vein — a rare commodity, indeed, in the gumshoe genre, especially when it turns out to be such gorgeous spoofing as "A Case of Facsimile."

We now take you behind the scenes of the Edgar Allan Poe school, situated outside of Shamusburg, in Dicks County, Pa. Meet the sleuthian sorority which cavorts and capers on the E. A. Poe campus. These daughters of detection reside, of course, in Baker Street Dorm, read a school paper called "Poe Pourri," borrow books from a school library in charge of Miss Zadig, obey the scholastic edicts of Dean Dupin, and learn some of the facts of ferreting from Professor of Psychology, Luther Trant. Oh, we forgot to tell you who they are, but you will have no trouble whatever identifying the forebears of Shirley Holmes (and her ever-present Jean Watson), Samantha Spade, Regina Fortune, Nerissa Wolfe, Elsie Queen, and Charlotte Chan.

We call your special attention to the singular word construction of the title, "A Case of Facsimile," and even more especially to a singular remark made by Shirley Holmes, namely: "You will find a parallel among my father's adventures." Note Shirley Holmes's precision in the use of the word "adventures" — she did not say "memoirs."

Would you call the females of the species the weaker 'tecs?

A CASE OF FACSIMILE

by VIOLA BROTHERS SHORE

"MY DEAR GIRLS," said Shirley Holmes, stretching her long legs before the radiator in our room at the Baker Street Dorm, "life is infinitely stranger than fiction. The things going on in this school make the adventures of fiction heroes seem stale and unprofitable."

"Not *my* father's," said Samantha Spade who often drops in to snoop around. "His adventures are never stale and they always pay off. Don't forget he's the original 4F op."

"How can you call a man 4F when he's forever battling and drinking and —" They both burst out laughing and I knew instinctively I had asked another foolish question. I am not as naive as they think. If somebody didn't ask the foolish questions, what would they do with their clever answers? "All right, pray, what is a 4F op?"

"Elementary, my dear Watsie," said my roommate. "An operative whose activities consist of Firewater, Fisticuffs, Facts-of-life and Financial remuneration."

"The Fee Fight Fizz and Fiddle boys," said Samantha, moving restlessly around the room in search of a certain magazine, which I had hidden in the wastebasket. "Jeanie Watson, your face is a thermometer. Every time I get warm it registers." And reaching into the basket, she drew out the April Official Crossword. I prayed for something to happen before she did all the Diagramless.

"Some day I must write a monograph on the deterioration of the pure deductive method. Anybody care for a jujube?" Shirley drew from the pocket of her bathrobe a round cloisonné box which I had never seen. "Ah, Watsie, I forgot to show you this little souvenir from Mlle. Lestrade, in return for my assistance in the matter of the Irene Adler papers."

"You found the missing page?" Irene had handed in her French quiz in record time; but when Mlle. went to mark the papers, all Irene's irregular verbs were missing.

Shirley smiled, making a tent of her long fingers. "Quite simply. It had slipped through the slit in the desk."

"But Mlle. searched both her desk and Irene's!"

"And I searched the desk *next* to Irene's. I had observed who was seated beside her. Naturally I did not reveal the name of the culprit. Because I am certain Raffles Jr. would have returned the page had not Irene handed in her papers before he finished cribbing the verbs."

"And because you've got A Thing on Raffles. That's why you noticed where he was sitting." Sometimes Sammy Spade looks exactly like a blonde Satan.

"I am in the habit of observing," Shirley remarked coldly. All emotions and particularly That One are alien to her logical, precise mind. "Raffles Jr. interests me, but not in the way you imply."

"At least he's not a drip," said Sammy, her yellow-gray eyes growing dreamy.

"Why, Sammy!" I exclaimed. "I thought you had A Thing on Harry Sutherland!"

"Sutherland is a drip," said Samantha.

"*Since when — ??*"

"Since Mrs. Sutherland caught them together behind the ice house. Of course Sammy only went there to hear some of his poems. I suspect much of her recent activity springs from this same interest in poetry," Shirley went on drily, moving out of Sammy's reach. "Have you succeeded in uncovering where Sutherland went the weekend he was missing from his home?" Most of us live at the dorms, but Sutherland's mother has a house down the road, so he's a day student. Quite handsome too, very much the John Garfield type, if you can imagine Garfield writing poems.

"Who cares!" Sammy dropped the magazine, thank heaven.

"As fellow-students of the Edgar Allan Poe School, we all do. Don't run away, Sammy, we are about to have another visitor and to learn something of interest, or I am very much mistaken."

Looking over her shoulder I saw Regina Fortune drop her bike, just as a church clock bonged down the road. Reggie hesitated, looking wistfully toward town. The school lies just outside of Shamusburg, in Dicks County, Pennsylvania. Then, feeling our gaze, she shrugged resignedly and continued into our dorm. "When Regina resists the 4:30 impulse toward tea, clotted cream and raspberries at the Snack Shop, it is certain she has a perturbing problem. A mental case, is it not?" Shirley inquired as Reggie entered and fell across my daybed.

"Oh my sacred aunt. Definitely mental. Most certainly mental. However." She threw a startled look at Shirley. "How'dye know I was at Sutherland's?"

"Had you been to Shamusburg you would have arrived from the South. But you entered the Campus through the North gate. Now, the road to the north is singularly lacking in attraction, except for exercise, which you abhor." (Reggie is *almost* as fond of her creature comforts as Nerissa Wolfe, who will be a perfect *elephant* some day.) "The mere fact of your stirring at all implies a matter of food, which lies to the south; or daffodils, which are opening on the Campus; or cats, of which we possess six since Cyrus settled the moot question of his sex by quintupling; or illness, which moves your tender heart to do battle with your lethargy. Of course, Sister Brown is ill, but had you been calling on the Quakers, you would not have worn your most revealing pullover and all eleven bangle bracelets.

Therefore, having seen Mrs. Sutherland going into Dean Dupin's office (to confer, no doubt, on her son's absence from school) we assume the simple and obvious. While the tigress is away, the cubs will play."

"Reggie!" I cried, "you haven't got A Thing on Sutherland?"

"No. Oh no. Mind doesn't work that way. Not my mind. Interestin' muddle of contradict'ry facts. Natural impulse to put 'em in order. Just the natural woman, burnin' to be useful. Me."

"And have you learned the reason for his mysterious disappearance the last weekend in January, and his even more mysterious illness?"

"His grandfather had a stroke, and that's where he went," I told them. "And Elsie Queen says he's just suffering from too much mother."

"My dear girls," murmured Reggie, settling her comfortable curves into the uncomfortable curves of my daybed, "oh my dear girls. Why are parents? I wish I liked the human race, I wish I liked its silly face. However. More here than meets the eye. Yes. Not a nice case. No. However. Unsportin' to betray a confidence."

"Do you mean that Sutherland confided in you?"

"Watsie the Eternal Stooge," said Sammy Spade. "Nobody confided in me, so you're welcome. Harry-Karry Sutherland is dripping into a decline over a distant Hollywood glimmer whose initials are A.G."

"You mean Hollywood *Glamour*, don't you?"

"I mean Glimmer. Because she's no star. And no very Bright Light would write letters to a drip. Why *anybody* would be calling him up Long Distance — that's the Great Sutherland Mystery."

"Some girl has been calling him from Hollywood? How do you know?"

"Oh, I get around." She certainly does. She gets around waitresses and soda jerkers and a boy in the telegraph office and one girl at the telephone exchange, so they'll tell her all sorts of things which she can't deduce like Shirley. "When the letters and calls *ffffft*, so did Sutherland. Why waste sympathy on a drip?"

"My dear Sammy. Oh my dear Sammy. Doosid insolent judgin' without facts. Doosid stoopid. Any eclairs left?" Which was certainly a sillier question than I ever ask. Reggie's round face looked positively plaintive.

Sammy was tearing around the room looking for my hairbrush, on which I was sitting. It was not very comfortable, but she has no respect for Private Property.

"You will find a spare comb in the bathroom," said Shirley, getting into her tweed slacks. "And wait for us, we're going with you."

Reggie groaned and I tied a candy ribbon around my hair, because you never know who'll be in the Snack Shop. But when we got our bikes, Sammy's was nowhere in sight, and neither was she. "Unless we hasten, our Sammy will have all the cream," said Shirley making off at top speed.

But she was riding north instead of south. Reggie called after her — "Shirley! No. No. Come back. Oh my only aunt. What'll he *think*—" And she actually put on a burst of speed, but of course she is no match for Shirley Holmes. I asked no questions, needing all my breath to keep them in sight. The road is all hills and sharp turns. Rounding the last one, we saw Sammy Spade about to enter the Sutherland gate!

"We told you we'd be with you," Shirley said calmly.

"Well, for heaven's sake!" I panted. "I thought you were going to the Snack Shop. You weren't trying to lose us?"

Sammy grinned. "Am-day i-tray. I wanted to bring Droopy Drip a book." She held a thick volume under her arm, in such a way that we couldn't read the title.

"And have you discovered a picture of A.G. in what, from its size and color, I deduce to be a Casting Directory?" Shirley asked.

"I know you get around, Samantha Spade! But you never got around Miss Zadig to let you take a Reference Work out of the Library!"

Sammy shrugged. "Sime Templar 'borrowed' it when she wasn't looking. I told him it was in a good cause."

"I trust you will use it in that spirit," Shirley said pointedly. "But time is precious, and there is our invalid stretched out in the hammock." As the gate creaked, Sutherland looked up. He was very pale and more Garfieldy than ever.

He turned his back and his voice was muffled by the pillow. "Go away."

"We're sorry you're not well," Shirley said. "We hope our visit will cheer you up."

"I don't want to talk. I promised Mother. Reggie wangled it out of me. Now I suppose it's all over the school."

"Oh my sacred aunt. I knew it. No. Absolutely no." Reggie dropped mournfully to the ground. "Sufferin' humanity. Why are girl friends."

"Reggie never tells anything," said Sammy. "Even when she means to, you have to dig it out of her sacred aunts and her howevers."

Shirley drew up a wicker chair. "Did you know I was instrumental in recovering the Purloined Letterfile for Dean Dupin? No? That should guarantee my discretion. As for my friend Watsie, I have few secrets from her pretty little muddled head." I sat down at her feet, feeling very proud indeed.

"Don't mind me," said Sammy Spade. "I'll just hang over the gate and whistle when I spot the jailer."

Sutherland sat up angrily. "Mother wants me to stick to my studies and become a great poet. You don't realize she's had to be both father and mother to me."

"Well, that ought to keep her busy. Does she have to play Steady Date and Heartbeat too?"

"A boy's best friend is his Mother. And no sacrifice is too great for mine. That's why she bought this house —"

"With your money. Why doesn't she get married again? She's not so awfully faded and lots of old turks can't tell a permanent blonde from a blonde permanent."

"Mother wouldn't ever leave me," Sutherland said proudly.

Sammy groaned. "Some outlook. If you hadn't been so bottle-fed, you could have digested your Angel cake."

Which was Greek to me, but Sutherland turned white and Reggie moaned, "Oh my one aunt. I never told her. Not me. Don't know how she got the name."

"Oh, I have ways. 'Hel-*LO* Hai-ry — this is your Angel speaking' —"

I thought he was going to leap at her but I guess he wasn't up to it, so he sneered instead. "Mother was absolutely right. You're nothing but a little snoop and a fellow would be a fool to get mixed up with you. Besides, we were just a couple of kids."

"Oh we were, were we. And I suppose you've had a qualitative change in six weeks."

"The logical effect of experience," Shirley said drily. "Six weeks ago your mother had that unhappy encounter with Sammy. And **your** grandfather had his stroke immediately afterwards and she left for Miami. Actually it was the first time she ever left you alone at home."

"First time she ever left him alone period," said Sammy Spade.

"Mother didn't want me to miss my midterms. She had to leave because her father was at death's door."

"And before he went through, she had to make sure about the will."

Sutherland ignored her, which is the only way when Sammy's determined to be difficult. She only does it to get you so riled you spill all sorts of things. "None of Mother's family has money. They're always trying to get some. That's why Dad left everything in trust and specified this school, where nobody could get at me. I don't know any of them, but my New York aunt and the one in California have daughters, and every month they want a Hundred Dollars or Two Hundred."

"But what do they *do* with all that money?" I inquired.

"Only Od-gay knows," said Sammy, "because Mrs. S. doesn't send it. She doesn't even send the Tuition till they dun her three times."

"Certain types of relatives require their teeth straightened and permanent waves and courses in Dramatic School," Shirley said.

Sutherland actually smiled. "If you were Sammy I'd say you'd been reading our mail."

"A logical association — California — Hollywood — and having observed your mother," Shirley explained drily. "After she left, you began to enter into things and even tried your first cigarette. I noticed a spot of ash on the lapel of your blue serge. We all had great hopes for you."

"Not me," muttered Sammy Spade. "Once a drip always a plumber's pain."

"But suddenly you canceled all en-

gagements, saying you had to be at home for an important telephone call. From your mother, we might have assumed, only a daily call from Florida would be an uncharacteristic extravagance. I daresay she did call once, ascertaining that you were at home and implanting the fear of missing further calls if you remained away?"

Sutherland flushed. "She wrote me every day from Miami."

"I see —" Shirley said musingly. "And meanwhile a strange young lady was calling you daily from Hollywood."

"*And* writing!" Sammy said spitefully. "On pink paper S.W.A.K."

"Which you are hiding under the pillow? I noted a spot of pink as we came through the gate." Shirley moved the cushion, revealing a batch of letters all Sealed With A Kiss.

Sutherland picked up a letter, a faraway look in his eyes. "She read a poem of mine in the *Poe Pourri* —"

"Ah, of course. And wrote to say she liked it."

"Oh my only aunt. Understatin'. Show her, old son —"

"Just Shirley," Sutherland said pointedly, holding his hand over the signature. Luckily it was typing and I managed to make out 'Dear dear poet . . . immortal lines . . . Would I had words to tell . . .'

"How'd she come to see the *Poe Pourri* out there?" inquired Sammy who was too far away to read.

"Sutherland has relatives in California," Shirley said. "Doubtless they showed our school paper to Miss —?"

"Gossamer," said Sutherland.

"*Gossamer?*" Sammy cried. "Oh no. Not *Angel Gossamer!*"

For the first time Sutherland looked at her. "You've heard of her? Angel Gossamer?"

"No, Sammy," Reggie murmured reprovingly. "No."

"No," said Sammy meekly. "I was thinking of Bandage Gauze."

"Imagine getting fan letters from a star!" I said.

Sammy snorted. "In what picture! Name any six."

"Well, of course, she's not a star yet," Sutherland explained. "She's a baby starlet. One of the major studios is grooming her for a contract." I hoped it was M.G.M. because Charlotte Chan says they give the longest contracts with the most options. "I've got a picture if you're interested." *If* we were interested!

"She's very pretty," I said. And in a way she was, but it's a way that isn't very popular at Edgar Allan Poe. "And she does look familiar. I'm sure I've seen her somewhere."

Reggie murmured, "Interestin' — very interestin', " the way you do when somebody shows you an Abstraction and you have to say something.

Sutherland didn't notice. Love is so blind. "I was sure I'd seen her too. But she hasn't been in any pictures."

"I suppose if they're grooming her, they can't let her out of the stable."

"Sammy, Sammy. Humor misplaced — shockin' bad taste."

Shirley frowned over the letters.

"She quotes a great many of your poems."

"That's the wonderful thing, Shirley! Over the phone, she'd say a line and I'd say one —"

"And when you met her you had the same happy experience?"

Sutherland wore a troubled frown. "You know, it was funny. I'd say a line and she'd just look — Of course, she was thinking about other things."

"Wait a minute!" I gasped. "You *met* her? When? Where?"

"The weekend he was missing from home. You didn't really believe his mother sent for him?"

"What did you use for money?" Sammy inquired cynically.

"I met her at La Guardia airport. She flew in for the wedding."

"Whose wedding?" I tried to remember Who married Who in January.

"Ours," said Sutherland.

You could have knocked me down with a featherweight. An Edgar Allan Poe Junior eloping! "Suppose your mother found out!"

"We were very careful because of the studio. A baby starlet can't get married."

"Why not, if she's of age," said Sammy. "But you can't. Not without your Mama's consent."

Sutherland was gazing off into space. "We took a taxi from the airport. We were married at the minister's home."

Even Sammy was speechless. Almost. "Without a *license?*"

"Angel had the license — we signed it there. The minister and his wife were very kind. She had a cake and champagne cocktails and she was just like my mother. Afterwards they drove us to the hotel. I signed the register — Mr. and Mrs. Harold Sutherland —"

Shirley had been sitting with her eyes half closed, dipping her long fingers into the cloisonné box of jujubes. I knew she was thinking because she was just dipping, instead of picking out the green ones. "No doubt Miss Gossamer had arranged for a reservation. Tell me, when did she begin to show signs of nervousness?"

"When we were leaving the minister's. She began to be very nervous. She was worried for fear the Studio would find out and she wouldn't get her contract. She kept saying, 'We'll stick to each other, no matter what happens — till death do us part —' "

Shirley nodded thoughtfully. "As though she expected something to separate you —"

"She had a premonition," Harry agreed gloomily. "The minister and his wife had just left us when the phone rang."

"Ah —!" said Shirley. "The studio?"

"They wanted her to leave right away — to start a picture."

"Oh, no!" I cried. "She *didn't go —?*"

"She had to. They'd made a reservation on the plane. She wouldn't let me take her to the airport because we'd both feel too bad. She said, 'It's

not really goodbye — and you'll hear from me every day —'" He looked away so we wouldn't see the tears.

"But you never did." I knew. I just knew.

"I've waited and waited —"

"Maybe she's sick — or the plane crashed. Or she was busy rehearsing. Or — you called the Studio?"

"All of them. But they don't want me to know where she is."

"But why? What's wrong?" I insisted.

"The jackpot question," said Sammy. "Who did what to who and how does it pay off."

"Your father left a great deal of money, didn't he?" Shirley inquired.

"I don't know anything about the trust fund. Mother gets the check every month. I have no idea how much it is."

"Twelve Hundred and Fifty," said Sammy. "I happened to run into one of the kids at the bank. And on his next birthday he comes into the principal. And that's what's under the woodpile."

"Oh, no, Sammy. There was nothing about money — not even her plane fare. If she'd only write. If I'd only hear from her."

"You will. After your next birthday. Or try to marry somebody else. Or run for Governor."

"Oh, Sammy, don't be so 4F!" I cried. "Can't you write where you wrote before?"

"I venture to predict his letters will be found unclaimed at the Hollywood Post Office," said Shirley.

Sutherland sighed. "That's what Mother says."

"Your mother? You told her?"

"He had to tell somebody. Besides, she doubtless found the hotel bill in your pocket?"

He nodded dumbly.

"Oh, Sutherland!" I gasped. "What did she *say?*"

"She was wonderful. She said, 'Darling, if you only hadn't tried to keep it from Mother. From now on, let's have no more secrets.' And she promised to help me find her."

Sammy grunted. "I'll write to Spade Sr. He isn't doing a thing these days, just acting on the radio."

"Thanks, Sammy, that's very kind. But —"

"Don't be a lug. Nobody's taking you for a ride while I know it."

"Mother's written to Aunt Bernice to hire someone out there."

"I don't trust your mother's family any further than I can spit mucilage. We'll get a Continental Op."

"Please. I'd rather leave it to Mother. I promised I wouldn't talk about it."

"And I wouldn't," said Shirley. "Do you feel you can stand the truth, Sutherland?"

"I don't want to hear anything about Angel. I don't want to hear anything except from her. That's all I care about. Mother says I'll write better poetry — but I can't — I don't want to write another line as long as I live!" And choking back a sob he disappeared into the house.

Shirley sat with her eyes closed and

I knew it was useless to question her. I turned to Reggie. "Bafflin'. Yes. However."

"Aren't you going to talk it over?" I followed her to the gate.

"Now? Oh no. Mind doesn't work that way. Not my mind. I want my tea." Her round face was a picture of woe. "Oh my Watsie, I haven't had my tea!"

"How can you think about clotted cream while that poor boy eats up his heart!"

"Poor boy. Oedipus complex. Not punnin'. However. The carpenter said nothing but the butter's spread too thick. Comin', Sammy?"

"Am-day i-tray. Gotta see a man about a book. However, to coin a Fortune, 'However.'" And with her most Satanic expression she rode off after Reggie.

Shirley selected a green jujube. "A very trite case, Watsie. You will find a parallel among my father's adventures. Only a few minor details have been changed."

"Which adventure? Please — just give me a clue."

"My dear Watsie, you have all the clues. What do you gather from this letter which I retained for future reference?"

"Well, it's typed. That means she's ashamed of her handwriting. My father used to type his letters."

"While he was courting? And signature, too? Besides, your father did not disappear after the ceremony — witness your presence here today. Have I not told you that every typewriter has a distinctive identity? Note the clogged "e" and the capital "S" dropped out of alignment. They will point out the culprit, mark my words."

"You think it was all a fraud and she was after his money?"

"Most decidedly money is at the root of the whole wretched fraud. You're doing splendidly, Watsie. Of course, you've missed everything of importance. Such as the significance of the telephone call."

"You mean how Angel knew his number? Maybe through his family."

"Undoubtedly. But how did the Studio know where to reach Angel Gossamer, registered in a New York hotel as Mrs. Sutherland? And the call came immediately after the minister had left. No, Watsie, there was no minister, no marriage, no studio grooming Angel Gossamer. *Because there was no Angel Gossamer!*"

"But why? How did she expect to get hold of the money if he's not really married to her?" The question wasn't out of my mouth when a coupé drove up and Mrs. Sutherland got out. Shirley greeted her without a tremor. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Sutherland."

Mrs. Sutherland is large and blonde and there is nothing dreamy or poetic about her. But she puts it on. "My poor boy! I'm afraid he isn't up to seeing visitors."

"He does look wretched. Ah, yes, Mrs. Sutherland, we saw Harry. In fact, we had a long talk. He has had a dreadful experience for a boy of his

temperament." Shirley said gently.

"I warned him not to talk about it. I don't want the wretched mess aired around the school."

"I can well understand that, Mrs. Sutherland. And I hardly think a scandal would help anyone concerned. Provided, of course, that every effort is made to undo the mischief."

"I'm sure I'm doing everything in my power to find the girl. I've asked my sister Bernice to hire detectives out there. I've just received a letter —" She fished it out of her bag.

"May I see it? Merely the envelope? Thank you."

"It's postmarked Los Angeles," she said sharply. "And since you're so interested, they haven't been able to locate the girl at any of the studios."

"Really?" Shirley murmured politely.

"But my poor boy resents any suggestion that he's been deceived. It only makes him more determined to stick to her."

"But isn't that your whole purpose, Mrs. Sutherland?"

She went white under her powder and the rouge stuck out on her cheeks like a clown's. "I don't know what you mean!"

"Oh, come now, Mrs. Sutherland. When you asked your sister to write the kind of letter you could show Harry, you should have warned her to use a different typewriter. Not the same one which typed *this* —"

Mrs. Sutherland snatched the pink envelope. "Give me that letter!"

"Certainly, Mrs. Sutherland. We have already noted the clogged 'e' and the dropped 'S'."

"I don't know what's in your nasty little mind, but if you spread any stories, I shall remove Harry from the school!"

"In spite of his father's will? Yes, do sit down, Mrs. Sutherland. The will provided that Harry was to be sent to this school. His father doubtless forsaw the danger of maternal domination. You got around it by buying this house. You were determined to keep your hold over Harry. You saw it threatened by his growing interest in Samantha Spade. You didn't want him to fall in love with any girl, least of all the daughter of Sam Spade, who would certainly investigate your handling of Harry's funds. You are not spending anything like $15,000 a year on Harry, who never questions your handling of his money. You want him to continue trusting you blindly, so that on his next birthday he will unquestioningly turn over to you the handling of the principal. So you figured a way to make him immune, not only to Sammy Spade, but to all girls.

"I notice you are not in mourning. Your father did not pass on. In fact, he was never ill. You never went to Florida. You went to Los Angeles to visit your sister. The letters from Florida were forwarded by your father. You bribed your whole grasping family to collaborate in a shameless, heartless hoax. Harry, believing himself married, would not look at another girl. And gradually, as you

convinced him he had been deceived, it would be easy to poison his mind against all girls. So that he would feel only you were his friend, only you could be trusted. According to our old Psychology Professor, Luther Trant, many mothers are guilty of this type of misdirected 'mother love' although they do not go to the length of writing letters on pink stationery. You also coached your niece for the telephone talks."

"It's not true! You can't prove a word of it!"

"There is a signature on a hotel register. Room clerks have been known to identify a face and it should not be too difficult to locate your niece in California and your New York sister, and your brother-in-law who posed as a minister. Providing, of course, it becomes necessary to prove the *modus operandi* to Harry."

"He won't believe you. Harry won't believe you."

"I wouldn't count on that, Mrs. Sutherland. The picture seemed familiar because your niece looks a little like you — enough for him to recognize the resemblance when it is pointed out. He himself commented on your New York sister's resemblance. But I am afraid the truth would be a great shock to him."

Her head was bent over her clenched fists and I did not see how she could ever raise it again. I hated to see her escape punishment, and I begrudged her the hope I saw in her eyes as she looked up. But I had to agree with Shirley. "Oh, it would! He's so hopelessly in love with Angel."

"I question that. She didn't know what he meant when he quoted his poems. I'm sure that, deep down, he was a little disillusioned. Time will do the rest, if he is encouraged to seek other young companionship. And under those conditions I agree it would be best for Harry not to learn, just yet, the kind of woman you are, Mrs. Sutherland. That is the shock he's in no condition to receive. In time he's bound to see it, unless you mend your ways. And that will be your punishment. Think it over, Mrs. Sutherland. I suggest an invitation to the Poe Tasters to hold their poetry reading here, Friday night. In which case, I do not think Dean Dupin need be troubled with any of this. He has so many other problems on his mind. I'm sure we understand each other, Mrs. Sutherland."

We left her sitting there, tearing the pink envelope to shreds. "Ah, well," said Shirley, "the less reminders he has of Miss Angel Gossamer, the better. And I think, when her spleen has vented itself, her very practical nature will indicate the only course open to her. So far as you and I are concerned, from here on Sutherland is 4F."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, my dear Watsie, that he is Sammy Spade's case. And you will agree he couldn't be in better hands."

In 1920 William Blackwood of Edinburgh published a collection of detective short stories by J. Storer Clouston called CARRINGTON'S CASES. *Unhappily for American fans, this book was never issued in the United States. The original edition, now exceedingly scarce, is bound in red pictorial cloth; its front cover shows Mr. F. T. Carrington himself, plump, monocled, mustachioed, carrying as odd an assortment of clues as ever perplexed a fictional sleuth: a bag, a bone, and (no, not a hank of hair!) a skull— and to add a final note of sheer grotesquerie, a book titled* ADVICE TO MOTHERS.

But it is not the story of this strange miscellany we now bring you. Instead, we have selected "Coincidence" — Carrington's greatest detectival achievement. Although more than a quarter of a century old, this story must still be ranked as an excellent example of sheer technical craftsmanship.

COINCIDENCE

by J. STORER CLOUSTON

I: MR. WICKLEY'S STORY

"IF IT wasn't for lucky coincidences," said Carrington, "many a gentleman in ginger and broad arrows would be a highly respected citizen. They're done in again and again by the most infernal flukes. The most baffling mystery — yes, I really think I may call it absolutely the most insoluble-looking that has ever come my way — was solved by what seemed like a mere series of extraordinary coincidences."

"Do you mean they weren't really coincidences?" somebody asked.

"There was one real coincidence. The rest was a curious but not at all an unnatural result of quite an ordinary affair — a county dinner, in fact."

After that we simply had to get the story out of him.

"I was asked as a guest to the Devorsetshire Association's Annual Dinner in London (you can guess which county it really was for yourselves). There was nothing very remarkable in that, for I get asked out to all sorts of dinners. I had to reply to the toast of the guests, and there was nothing very remarkable in that either, for I'm always getting let in for after-dinner speaking — when they don't want a very serious oration. In consequence everybody — or at all events most of the people there — discovered who I was; which was a very natural consequence.

"Again, it was very natural that

natives of Devorsetshire and people connected with the county who hadn't seen each other for years, should happen to meet on such an occasion. And if any one, or any two, or any three of them wanted advice in a ticklish matter, it was extremely natural that they should think of the eloquent gentleman who had replied for the guests.

"If you bear all this in mind, you'll see how things fell out, though on the surface it looked as if some capricious elf had taken over the duties of destiny.

"Well, to come to our muttons. The very next morning a card with the name of Mr. R. C. Wickley was handed in to me, and in a moment Mr. Wickley himself walked into my room. He had reddish hair, a somewhat receding forehead, curiously suspicious eyes, and a prize-fighting jowl. It doesn't sound a very promising description, and yet somehow or other the man was distinctly likeable. For one thing, he had a pleasant smile, and for another, the look of one who has seen a good bit of trouble and yet hasn't let his tail down; also he was unmistakably a gentleman.

" 'I saw you last night at the Devorset dinner, Mr. Carrington,' he began, 'and I thought you looked the sort of man who might help me, and who could be trusted.'

"This was not merely pleasant flattering, but it was said with an air of really meaning it and of badly wanting some one he could trust, that roused my interest immediately.

" 'What I am going to tell you,' he went on, 'must be *absolutely* confidential. Your business is a purely private agency, isn't it? You don't give things away to the police?'

"You may imagine that this roused my interest still more.

" 'If you come to me confidentially I give nothing away to anybody.'

" 'Not even murder?'

"I tell you frankly I hesitated. I had never had such a question put to me before.

" 'It would depend on the circumstances,' I said.

"He looked at me and thought for a moment.

" 'I'll risk it,' he said, and plunged into this yarn.

" 'I'm a Devorset man originally,' said he, 'but I've lived a lot abroad and had a pretty mixed career. I'm going to make no bones about anything, and I may tell you candidly that there was one particular part of my life that I want to forget and don't want other people to know. It isn't the part I'm going to tell you about, but it partly accounts for it.

" 'Eleven years ago an old uncle of mine died, and as he hadn't left a will I came into his property in Devorset. It included an old manor-house of the smaller type and quite a nice bit of mixed covert shooting — rough but good sport, and it suited me down to the ground. I came home, settled down on the

place, and hoped my troubles were at an end. Being a hilly, wooded part of the county I hadn't many neighbours — in fact I couldn't raise enough guns to shoot my coverts properly, but that was the only disadvantage. Things being as they had been, I didn't like meeting too many people, for fear some one should turn up who knew what I didn't want known.'

" 'Were you married, by the way?' I asked.

" 'No, I'm not much of a ladies' man and have never missed a wife. I was quite contented, in fact, till things began to go wrong, and I may tell you absolutely honestly, Mr. Carrington, that why they began to go wrong has always been a complete mystery to me. In fact, as you'll see presently, the whole thing has been more like a nightmare than a bit of ordinary life.

" 'My nearest neighbour was a man Spencer, "Toddy" Spencer they called him, a fellow with a handsome wife but no children, pots of money, and quite a big country house. He was a wealthy stockbroker and had bought the place himself, largely for the shooting. As he was always keen for an extra gun, and so was I, we struck up quite a friendship to begin with and I saw a good bit of them. The wife was a trifle too go-ahead for my own taste — though most men would probably have been keen about her; but Toddy Spencer himself seemed quite a nice fellow, in spite of being rather a sulky-looking chap and obviously with a devil of a temper. Like a lot of fellows of his type, he did himself a little too well, both in the eating and drinking line; though I never saw him actually the worse for liquor.

" 'At first, the Spencers used to come down to Devorsetshire only for part of the year, and then they settled down there for good; though Toddy himself always spent at least two or three days in the week in London on business.

" 'Well, after about two and a half years, during which we had been excellent neighbours, the first mystery began. For some unknown reason Spencer suddenly took a violent dislike to me. In fact, dislike is too mild a term. The man hated me.'

" 'How did he show it?' I asked.

" 'Wouldn't shoot with me, stopped me and my tenants from using a path through his grounds, blackguarded me behind my back, and insulted me to my face. This low-class swine of a stockbroker! A man without birth or breeding or any connection with the county before he bought the place!'

"It was quite evident that though Mr. Wickley didn't look particularly aristocratic, he was a gentleman with very sensitive family pride. In fact, the mere recollection of Mr. Spencer's behaviour was making him boil afresh.

" 'I won't trouble you with all the details, for his final performance made the rest seem almost nothing. I gave him a bit of my own mind,

I may mention, which finally put an end to all relations. . . .'

" 'What did you say to him?' I asked.

" 'What I thought,' he answered briefly, and I guessed that what Mr. Wickley thought had probably made Mr. Spencer sit up pretty sharply. 'Well, anyhow, things had gone like this for months, and we were past speaking terms, when one day I got a note from him. I can't remember the exact words, for I threw the thing straight into the fire, but this was the gist of it. He had discovered the black mark against me, and gave me the choice of exposure, or leaving the county and selling my place to him.'

" 'One moment,' I interrupted, for I saw that my visitor wanted to hurry over this part. 'I don't want to press you to tell me anything you prefer not to, but in order to understand this extraordinary ultimatum I must ask you one or two questions. Was this "black mark" — er — pretty serious?'

"He hesitated for an instant, and I saw how suspicious those eyes of his could look. Then he answered, and I saw how doggedly that jowl of his could set.

" 'It was nothing I could actually suffer for — by the law, I mean. I had suffered already. But it had an ugly name, and I don't suppose many people would have been keen to speak to me again. You don't need to know the name, do you?'

" 'No,' I said. 'In fact I had rather not. I only wanted to be sure that it actually did give him the leverage he seems to have assumed it gave him. How did he find this out?'

"Wickley shook his head.

" 'I don't know. He could have found out in one or two ways, if he set to work to find things out about me. And he obviously did.'

" 'Why did he want to buy your place?'

" 'Simply because he hated me, and knew that was the way to hit me hardest. He didn't want more land or an extra house.'

" 'I see,' I said. 'Go ahead.'

" 'Well, after that note came I want you to understand, Mr. Carrington, that things happened right on end, one after the other, without giving me time to cool down or think quietly. I had a lot of woodland on my place, and was rather keen about forestry. It was a hobby of Spencer's, and he had started me, and, curiously enough, the pruning-knife I was carrying that afternoon was a present from him. He got one for himself and one for me. I picked it up and took it with me simply automatically, because I had been carrying it every day lately. But I was thinking of nothing but that note.

" 'Imagine what it meant for me! To hand over a place my family had owned for four hundred years — hand it over to this unspeakable bounder, lose everything worth having, and clear out of the county — imagine what it meant! As to the

other alternative, I felt I would rather shoot myself first. Perhaps I don't express myself very well, Mr. Carrington, but I daresay you can more or less understand.'

"His words may have been restrained, but his face was working and his eyes blazing, just as they must have been when he set out on that walk. I did understand, and I told him so. He seemed pleased, and for a moment almost smiled. And then his face set, and he went on —

" 'Without thinking where I was going I wandered about the Lord knows where, but, anyhow, at last I headed for a certain wood where I had been doing some pruning before. It was just on the boundary of the two properties. In fact, the stream that formed the boundary ran through it. It was a winter afternoon, and quite dark by this time. I entered the wood and then about ten paces from the outer edge of it I pulled up dead. Spencer was standing, half leaning against a tree, with his back to me!'

"Wickley stopped for an instant, and looked at me hard.

" 'I am trusting you with everything!' he said.

" 'I know you are.'

"He moistened his lips and went on —

" 'The sound of the running water had drowned my footsteps. It still drowned them as I took three more steps, and then let him have it in the broad of his back with the pruning-knife. I remember striking sort of slanting and downwards so as to give the curved knife a chance. I'm pretty strong, and it did give it a chance. It went in up to the handle and stopped there. He fell on his face without a sound or a struggle. I had seen dead men before, and I knew he was one. And then, suddenly, I realised what I had done.'

"He paused and licked his lips afresh.

" 'How long ago was this?'

" 'Eight years,' he said.

" 'Eight years!' I exclaimed. 'But I never remember hearing ——'

" 'Wait a bit,' said he. 'The interesting part of the story hasn't begun yet.'

"I wondered what his idea of an *un*-interesting story was, but I said nothing, and he went on —

" 'I don't mind confessing that I lost my head — or anyhow my nerve utterly. I remember I could only say one thing to myself— "I didn't know what I was doing!" I hurried home and made no attempt to seem cool. I got out my car, drove it myself at break-neck speed to the station, and simply left it standing outside. I took the first train to London, and made so little effort to hide what I was feeling, that everybody who saw me stared. I got to London late in the evening, and wandered about the streets all night. In the morning I still kept wandering, trying to avoid newspapers and posters. Then I suddenly got desperate and bought a paper. There was nothing about the murder in it.

So I bought another and then another, till I had bought six papers, but still there was nothing. And then I got reckless. I went straight off to the Hotel Metropole in Northumberland Avenue, the place where both Spencer and I generally stayed when we wanted an hotel in London, ordered a room and went straight to bed.'

" 'Your story is interesting enough now, Mr. Wickley.'

" 'Wait!' he said. 'I haven't come to the interesting part yet.'

"I really began to think the man was off his head.

" 'I slept almost all day,' he continued, 'and when I woke up in the late afternoon my head was pretty clear again. And, Heavens! I was afraid now! I dressed very quickly, and then sat in my room waiting for some one to come for me. And then I suddenly got reckless again, walked out into the corridor, and boldly went down by the lift. I stepped out of the lift, and was crossing the hall, when out of the corner of my eye I seemed to see some one I knew. I looked round, and as I'm a living sinner, Carrington, there was Toddy Spencer sitting in an armchair looking at me!'

"He stopped abruptly and added —

" '*That's* the interesting part.'

"And I had to confess he was right.

" 'What did you do?' I asked.

" 'Simply stared at him, just as he was staring at me, only he wasn't staring quite so hard. And then he suddenly spoke to me in quite a friendly voice, almost nervously in fact. I answered him in just the same tone, and there we were talking together in the hall of the Metropole as if nothinghad happened at all.'

" 'What did you talk about?'

" 'The weather, I think, and we each made the pretty obvious remark that the other seemed to have come up from Devorsetshire. We exchanged about half a dozen sentences or so, and then we each nodded, and I went out.

" 'I'm not a murderer after all!' was my first thought, and for half an hour I was happy as a boy.

" 'And then the whole thing began to come back to me — Spencer standing in the wood — the way he fell — everything. I simply *couldn't* have imagined it! And yet equally I couldn't have imagined talking to Spencer in the Metropole. I stayed three days in London hesitating, and then I simply had to go back and see for myself.'

"Again he stopped abruptly and asked —

" 'Now what's your impression so far, Mr. Carrington?'

" 'That you were overwrought, and imagined — or else dreamt — the murder scene.'

"Wickley's voice sank.

" 'I went back to that wood, very cautiously, and taking care that nobody was about — and there was a freshly filled-in grave there. Some one had been buried, very roughly and hurriedly, and not very deep. Who was it?'

"I thought he was going to answer the question himself, but instead he waited for me to speak.

" 'Do you mean to say you never discovered?'

"He shook his head.

" 'It's an absolute mystery to me! Nobody in the neighbourhood apparently was missing. Nothing was ever said, or whispered, or rumoured, of a murder. Nothing more ever happened. I couldn't possibly live on in that place. I let the house, but not the shooting — because I didn't want people to be going through that wood, and I've been a wanderer for eight years. Last week I came to London and met a cousin who persuaded me to go to the Devorset dinner last night. And there I saw Spencer again, for the first time since we parted in the Metropole. That started the whole thing again in my mind. And then when I heard you were a private inquiry agent, I suddenly decided to end the suspense and come to you. I want you to find out what happened — who that man was.'

"I thought for a minute or two before speaking.

" 'You have only mentioned three people,' I said. 'It obviously wasn't yourself, and it wasn't Spencer. The third was his wife.'

" 'It certainly wasn't her. It was a man. Besides, she is still alive.'

" 'Then I have absolutely nothing to start upon.'

"I was silent for a little longer, and then I said —

" 'I must think it over, Mr. Wickley. Leave me your address.'

"He left me thinking very hard, I can assure you."

II: THE STOCKBROKER'S WIFE

Carrington lit a fresh cigarette and began the second part of his story.

"Wickley left my office only a little before my usual lunch hour, and I sat on over my fire for some time, thinking, but not seeing a ray of light. That made me rather late in getting back after lunch, and when I came in my clerk handed me a card and told me a gentleman was waiting in my room. On the card I read the name, 'Mr. A. D. Spencer.'

"When I glanced up from it and caught my clerk's eye, I could see that he evidently thought I had done myself too well at lunch. I suppose I had been standing for the whole of five minutes gazing at that card. The appearance of Mr. Spencer immediately on top of Mr. Wickley seemed a thing hardly in the course of nature. I began to wonder whether there was some sort of a conspiracy between the two men. I tried to see in advance what line this man Spencer was going to take. And then I recovered my wits and walked into my room.

"I found a heavy-looking man of rather above middle height, clean-shaved, with a blue chin, baggy eyes, and very black hair. He had the skin of a man who, as Wickley said, did himself a little too well, and I

could also quite believe that he could be a sulky ill-tempered devil if things went wrong.

" 'We didn't exactly meet last night, Mr. Carrington,' he began, and there was quite a dash of geniality about the man when he made the effort, 'but I was at the Devorset dinner and heard you speak. I also came across an old acquaintance there. Meeting him set me worrying about an old problem, and seeing you put it into my head to come and consult you on the matter.'

"And then I realised that there was no conspiracy at all, nor even any very extraordinary coincidence, but, as I told you at the start, just a series of quite natural events that had produced this startling result. My second thought was — 'What a bit of luck! The solution to the insoluble problem walks into my office!' However, you'll see how far out I was there.

" 'Of course you'll understand that this is strictly confidential,' said he.

" 'Naturally,' I said; and I noted that though he was evidently keen on secrecy, he didn't show the same extreme anxiety as Wickley.

" 'Well,' he said, "I'll begin my story eleven years back. Or perhaps I should first mention that some years before that I had purchased an estate in Devorset. I'm a stockbroker, by the way: Spencer, Spencer & Luderman is my firm, and I'm the senior partner. Eleven years ago an old fellow in the neighbourhood called Wickley died, and his nephew came into the property and settled down next door to me. By next door I mean rather under a couple of miles away; but we had no other neighbours — of that class, I mean — within six or seven miles, and we didn't know them either. Consequently Wickley and I saw a lot of one another.'

" 'What sort of a fellow was he?' I inquired, with my most truth-seeking expression.

" 'I wish you had noticed him at the dinner last night,' said he, 'and you'd have understood better what kind of a proposition he was. A reddish-haired, heavy-chinned sort of fellow, with queer eyes, and the word "past" stamped all over him.'

" 'What do you mean exactly?'

" 'Well, I mean that he *had* a past, and I soon began to guess as much from his very appearance and manner, though at first I only felt vaguely that there was something unusual about him. I may mention that he isn't the kind of person one would naturally suspect of a shady record, for the Wickleys are a very good old Devorset family, and if family pride would keep people straight, well, it ought to have kept him. He didn't show that feature either to begin with, but you'll see in a minute the sort of too-good-for-a-damned-stockbroker gentleman he was. My place was about twice the size of his, I may add, and he was deuced glad to have as many days shooting with me as he could get. Some precious rotten days he gave me in exchange; but of course

shooting with a two-penny-halfpenny squire was always an honour!'

"This speech naturally didn't prejudice me much in favour of Mr. Spencer. Little though he realised it, he was making me look at things more and more from Wickley's point of view — bad hat though Mr. W. may have been, and respectable as Mr. S. no doubt was.

" 'I am coming to a very painful part of my story now, Mr. Carrington,' he continued. 'In fact it's so infernally unpleasant that it has kept me from telling the facts to a living soul up to this moment. I had a wife, in fact she's legally my wife still, and I was very fond of her. I can assure you on that point — I was desperately fond of her! She was an uncommonly beautiful girl. She was on the stage at one time, I may say, and might have gone very far on her looks alone, but I married her and took her away from it. She was a lady by birth, but she hadn't a penny, and it was a love marriage pure and simple — love marriage on my part at least, for I don't believe she ever really loved me. We had no children, either, and that was a fatal mistake.'

"He paused and stared moodily at my fire. I was much more in sympathy with Mr. Spencer now.

" 'Well, to get over an unpleasant business as quickly as possible, we began to drift apart pretty fast. I still loved her to distraction — in a way; but we both had tempers and she led me the devil of a dance, and it was cat and dog half the time. When I bought this place in Devorset she kicked at living there permanently — too slow for her. She'd stay for some months and we'd have house parties and so on, and then back to town again. And then all of a sudden she quite changed round. Perfectly agreeable to living all the year in the country she became now, so we gave up our flat in town and settled in Devorset; even though it meant her being quite a good bit by herself, for I generally had to spend part of my week in town on business.'

" 'Then, like a thunderclap, came the suspicion that there was something behind this change of tune. One needn't go into all the details, but several little things made me morally certain that Elise was being unfaithful to me. We were having worse rows than usual at that time, and in one shindy I charged her with it. In order to hit me back hard she actually admitted it!'

"Spencer was quite carried away by his own story by this time, and I could judge exactly the kind of dangerous revengeful man he was.

" 'The only question was, who was the man? And there couldn't be any question about that either. Wickley was the only possibility!'

" 'Ah!' I exclaimed, and he looked at me sharply. 'Go on,' I said, 'I begin to see the position now.'

"I saw it a lot clearer than he had any notion of. This of course accounted for Wickley's first mystery — the unexplained hatred that

Spencer showed for his neighbour.

" 'There could be no doubt about it,' said he. 'He was the only man in the neighbourhood of our own position in life whom we knew in the very least intimately. And he lived inside of two miles from us. Six miles away there was a fat fellow of fifty with a wife and large family — a dull bore of a fellow. Seven miles away were two maiden ladies. Nine miles away was an invalid of seventy. Those were the only alternatives, and we scarcely ever saw any of them. Besides, I had grown more and more convinced that Wickley had something shady in the background. I knew him now to be a blackguard!'

" 'Knew?' I repeated. 'But had you any proof?'

" 'When there are no possible alternatives, that's proof enough! Besides, I soon got proof of his character. I made inquiries about him — set an agency on to his track, and I discovered' — he paused and hesitated for an instant —'well, I need only say that he would never have been received in any decent society if people knew what I found out. It had happened abroad — he had done it ——' Again he broke off and the scowl lifted a little from his face. 'But the man had suffered for his sins, and it had really nothing to do with my story except that it gave me a hold over him. I was mad with anger and I determined to use it.'

" 'Had nothing else passed between you?' I ventured to ask, for I remembered Wickley's version and I suspected Spencer was skipping a bit.

" 'Oh, well,' he admitted, 'I may as well allow that I had shown him pretty plainly that I didn't want to have anything more to do with him. We had one open row, and that was when he showed me what a damned high and mighty aristocratic snob he was. "Gentlemen aren't grown in two days out of dirty stock-broking mushrooms!" Those were his actual words!'

"I must confess that I had scarcely given Mr. Wickley credit for such powers of invective, and I realised now to what a pitch of fury the two of them had roused one another.

" 'As I was saying,' he went on, 'I was quite beside myself with rage by this time, and I did a damned silly thing. I wrote to him threatening to show him up if he didn't clear out of the place. I even went the length of telling him he must sell me his property. That was simply to crush his pride, of course.'

" 'You called it "silly," ' I said. 'That seems hardly the adjective to use.'

" 'Wait a bit and you'll see why,' said he. 'I must tell you first that I was trying hard to catch my wife all this time. Having to go up to town two or three days a week and leave her to play the devil with that fellow nearly drove me demented. On the other hand, it gave me a chance of catching her napping. One of my servants was watching her for me,

but I think Elise must have suspected him. . . .'

" 'Him'? I said.

" 'It was my chauffeur as a matter of fact; a smart young fellow. He came to me one day and told me he suspected what was up and offered to watch her. I paid him well for it, but though he said Wickley was often hanging round my place, he never found anything definite against my wife. I tried my own hand at it too, by coming back from town when she didn't expect me, but they were cunning as Satan. I never caught them.

" 'But to come to the climax of the affair: I wrote that letter to Wickley from my London office, and then the sudden thought struck me that I would come straight home myself. He wouldn't expect me, seeing the address on the letter, and he would probably see my wife at once about it. That's how I argued. When I got home my wife was out, nobody knew where. My suspicions became a practical certainty. I took my gun and I set out in the direction of his house. I'm telling you everything quite candidly, Mr. Carrington. I was just approaching the boundary of the two properties when I saw him coming towards me, as I thought. I slipped behind a tree and watched him. He turned into a wood that lies just on the boundary, and I stood for a short while like a man in hell!'

"Mr. Spencer took out his handkerchief and passed it across his face. As for me, I never was more fascinated in my life, hearing the other half of Wickley's story like this! In a moment Spencer went on —

" 'I yielded to temptation, Mr. Carrington. I felt sure that he and my wife were in that wood, and I meant to kill one or both — Wickley certainly. I made a little detour, entered the wood, crossed a stream that forms the boundary, and suddenly I saw him. He was lying dead on his face, with a huge blood stain all over his back!'

" 'Wickley was?' I exclaimed.

" 'I had just seen him go into the wood. Who else could it be? But I didn't go near the body. I simply turned tail and hurried home as fast as I could walk. It took me all my time to keep at a walk and not to run! And now do you see what a silly performance that threatening letter was? It had come on top of other foolishness, for I had used my tongue pretty freely about the fellow. And now he was lying murdered and I had been seen leaving my house with a gun, and probably had been seen going in that very direction! Also, I knew in my heart I had meant to kill him. Lord, what a shock I got! You may think me a fool to have felt like that. . . .'

" 'I don't in the very least,' I assured him in all sincerity.

" 'Well, that's how I did feel. Anyhow when I got home I didn't wait in the house — I simply couldn't do it. I tramped off to a little local pub, slept the night there, and went back to town in the morning. And now

comes a bit of the story that you probably won't believe, Mr. Carrington.'

" 'I believe everything you tell me,' I said.

" 'I had a room at the Hotel Metropole at that time. On the same afternoon, soon after I had got back to London, I was sitting in the hall with a bundle of evening papers, looking for some news of Wickley's murder, when what do you think? Wickley himself stepped out of the lift and walked across the hall under my nose!'

"He looked at me expectantly, and I tried to seem dumbfounded. I must have succeeded pretty well, for he seemed quite satisfied.

" 'It is absolute gospel truth,' he said. 'Just as he was passing, he spotted me, and do you know, the extraordinary thing was that all signs of enmity seemed to have left the man! As for me, I was so thankful to see him alive, I could have embraced him. We exchanged a few ordinary remarks in a perfectly friendly way, and then he walked out of the hotel. I haven't seen him from that moment till last night at the dinner, and it was meeting him again that tuned me up to doing what of course I always should have done. I want this mystery cleared up, Mr. Carrington. I want to know who that man was I saw lying dead in the wood.'

"He stopped, and I realised with a shock that Spencer's story had done absolutely nothing to solve Wickley's mystery. I had counted confidently on its cracking the nut, but instead it simply presented me with the same mystery over again.

" 'You never discovered who it was?'

"He shook his head.

" 'Never to this day. I can only tell you that nobody is known to have been murdered, or even missing, in Devorset at that time. But I'm afraid that won't help you very much.'

" 'Tell me what you did, and your wife did, immediately afterwards.'

" 'I funked going back for three or four days. My nerves were utterly rattled. When I got home, my wife had left, cleared right out, and we have never lived together again since. Before leaving she told our housekeeper that she sacked Martin, the chauffeur — no, Marwell, that was his name. Presumably she sacked him because she had discovered he had been spying on her. Of course she had no business to do it on her own account, but I didn't care by that time. In fact I was rather glad to be rid of him; he knew too much about the miserable business. She left a short note for me, only a line or two. I can remember it by heart. "This is absolutely the end of it. We must never meet again. I have done my best for you. Be grateful to me for that." '

" 'What did she mean?' I asked.

"He shook his head.

" 'I haven't the least idea. A woman's way of getting in the last word

and claiming to be in the right, I suppose.'

" 'And have you ever met again?'

" 'Never.'

" 'Have you lived there at all since then?'

" 'No. I let the place at once. And Wickley let his too. Neither of us have lived in Devorset since.'

" 'Did you by any chance lose an overcoat about that time?'

"Spencer stared at me very hard.

" 'Lose an overcoat?' he repeated. 'No — or rather yes, now I come to think of it. I used to have rather a nice Burberry, which must have gone missing just about that time. I remember wondering what had become of it, though such trifles didn't worry me much then.'

" 'And a felt hat?'

"He stared and then thought again.

" 'Possibly; but I had several felt hats, and one might have gone astray without my noticing it, especially in the state of mind I was in. Why?'

" 'Just a vague idea I had. It was getting towards dusk. you say, when you saw the body in the wood?'

" 'I don't think I said so, but it was.'

" 'Well, I'll think over the whole story,' I told him, and Mr. Spencer shook hands and walked off."

III: THE LOST ENGINEER

"Now," said Carrington, "we come to the one really remarkable coincidence. There was present at that Devorset dinner a man with an unsolved riddle lying on a dusty shelf at the back of his memory, and he wasn't a Devorset man either, but a guest like myself. He was a fellow Tuke, a London solicitor; he knew the man who was acting as my own host that night, and so I made his acquaintance at the dinner and had quite a yarn with him. Furthermore, Tuke's host knew Spencer and introduced Tuke to him. It was Tuke's two meetings with Spencer and myself that brought him to my office a couple of days later, and one can trace cause and effect just as in the cases of Wickley's and of Spencer's visits to me. But it was an extraordinary chance that Tuke, with that riddle on the dusty shelf, should have happened to be at the Devorset dinner that night.

"He was a nice, gentlemanly, solid-looking man was Tuke, and didn't suggest anything very exciting when he sat down and told me he had come to see me professionally. But when he said that it was the meeting with Spencer which had reminded him of an unsolved, half-forgotten mystery, I assure you I pricked up my ears.

" 'About nine years ago,' he began, 'a poor girl came to me with a very queer story, and a very sad story too it was. She was a Mrs. Borham, or thought she was — a pretty slender young thing of barely twenty-one, full of pluck, but with the marks of pain and worry stamped too clearly on her face for any one with any observation to miss. And this was the story she told me.

" 'She was the daughter of an impecunious half-pay Naval Officer and was staying with some relatives at Dover when she met Reginald Borham. He was a man of twenty-five or twenty-six, a mechanical engineer by profession, remarkably good-looking, with the manners and address of a gentleman, and a most romantic tale of high-born relations who had disowned him owing to his refusal to marry an heiress whom he did not love. It was a cock-and-bull story if ever there was one, but as he professed to having fallen in love with this poor girl, and as she certainly fell in love with him, she swallowed it whole, and to make a long story short, married him.

" 'Reading between the lines of her story, and interpreting it by what I was able to pick up about the man, he seems to have married her simply because she wouldn't succumb to his advances otherwise. She was unusually attractive, and he was evidently carried away by her for the moment very completely, for it wasn't his usual procedure with women by any means. As a rule he specialised in married ladies, and lived either on their bounty or on blackmail. In fact he was the worst type of animal that goes about on two legs, a creature vicious to the core, without a rag of honour to cover him or an ounce of compunction in his heart. Such animals ought to be shot at sight!

" 'He actually had an engineer's training, plenty of brains, and considerable aptitude for mechanical work, and at the moment was connected with some Admiralty job at Dover, but within three months of his marriage he deserted his work and his wife and vanished into space. I traced another woman in connection with his flight, but she lost sight of him too, and as his employers strongly suspected his honesty, they didn't make any effort to trace him. In fact every man he has been connected with has been thankful to see the last of him, and every woman has bitterly regretted she ever met him.

" 'The poor young wife came up to London and determined to make her own living. She had no money, her people had strongly disapproved of the marriage, and things weren't pleasant at home. Having no business training of any kind and being passionately fond of children, she took on the job of nursemaid in the house of some people she knew, and there she was in a dark-blue uniform and bonnet, wheeling a perambulator about the Park and the streets of Bayswater when I made her acquaintance.

" 'Well, now I'm coming to the part where I want your detective mind to follow me very closely, Mr. Carrington. Just ask any questions you like if things don't seem clear. It was about a year after her marriage, and she had been nearly nine months on this job, when she was wheeling her pram one day along a quiet street in the neighbourhood of the Edgware Road. Suddenly on

the opposite pavement she spied her husband walking rather quickly in the opposite direction, with a lady at his side! They never glanced across the street, and of course it would never have entered the blackguard's head to suspect that a nursemaid wheeling a pram could be his wife; but she, on the other hand, studied them carefully and described them to me exactly.

" 'Borham himself was got up immaculately as the young man about town — silk hat fashionably tilted backwards, morning coat, black and white striped trousers, patent boots with yellow tops, and all the rest of it. The lady had extremely golden hair, a face which even her rival admitted was remarkably pretty, with long eyelashes and very red lips, decidedly of the actress type.

" 'Mrs. Borham stopped short on the opposite pavement and bent over her charge as a nurse might naturally do, but her eyes were following the couple across the way, and she was prepared to wheel round and follow them when they were safely past. However, they didn't go very much farther. There was a quiet hotel in this street, one of that type which probably does a pretty mixed sort of business, but with a very large smart-looking motor-car standing in front of it. She was struck at once, she said, with the contrast between the car and the hotel. Borham and the lady glanced over their shoulders as if to see that the coast was clear.

Then they turned into the hotel.

" 'Imagine the poor girl's feelings as she watched this performance! Fortunately she had heaps of pluck and resource and she determined to see the affair through, so she crossed the street and paced backwards and forwards for about half an hour, taking care never to come near enough to the hotel to be seen from the windows. Unfortunately she was just about at the farther end of her beat when the lady reappeared, and she didn't even see her actually come out of the hotel. In fact, when Mrs. Borham looked round, the lady was on the pavement just about to get into the car that was standing by the curb, and the only person with her was the chauffeur, who was just at her back. He opened the door of the car, she got in, and off they went.'

" 'And Borham himself?' I asked.

" 'Never came out at all. His wife waited and waited in that street, but there was not a sign of him.'

" 'Could he have come out before the lady, while his wife happened to be walking away from the hotel?'

" 'She declared it was quite impossible, for she kept constantly glancing over her shoulder. No; for some reason or other he must have remained in the hotel till after his wife went away. Conceivably he had spotted her.'

" 'Was the chauffeur with the car before the lady came out?'

" 'It seemed a curious thing, but Mrs. Borham declared that there was no one with the car. Presum-

ably the man was in the hotel having a drink. You see he would have a long wait, and his mistress would hardly be in a position to wig him for it, considering that he could scarcely help seeing what she was up to.'

" 'I see. Well, what happened next?'

" 'Just before leaving, Mrs. Borham wheeled her pram right past the hotel, and when she was passing the door her eye was caught by an envelope lying in the gutter immediately opposite. On the off chance that the lady had dropped it while getting into the car, she picked it up. It turned out to be empty, but on the outside was written, "Mr. J. Marwell, c/o A. D. Spencer, Esq.," and then followed an address at some well-known Kensington flats. Next morning she came to me with her story and the envelope.'

" 'Dropped by the chauffeur, I suppose?'

" 'By Jove, you're quite right! I put the matter into the hands of an inquiry agent, and found that Mrs. Spencer corresponded to the description of the mysterious lady. Also Spencer's chauffeur was named Marwell.'

" 'And Borham?'

" 'Ah, now we come to the most mysterious and extraordinary part of the whole business. Not a single trace was ever seen or heard of Borham again! I admit there were difficulties in the way of tracing him. There was obviously no use in tackling Mrs. Spencer direct, for she would simply have denied everything. We might have threatened her with exposure, but Mrs. Borham wouldn't hear of a public scandal, for in all probability exposure would have meant the Divorce Court for Mrs. Spencer, with Borham's name and history brought into the business. The people at the hotel denied all knowledge of the whole affair. It was that sort of an hotel, you see. My agent tried Marwell, but he was like a clam. And nobody connected with the Spencers, whom we could get hold of, seemed to have even heard of Mr. Borham.

" 'As a final and complete checkmate, the Spencers very shortly afterwards gave up their flat in town, and settled down on an estate he had purchased in Devorset. Our only remaining chance of getting at Borham had been by watching Mrs. Spencer, and now, of course, that was gone.'

" 'Has Mrs. Borham never heard anything of her husband again?'

" 'Not from that day to this. I heard from her about six months ago. Apparently some other man was wanting to marry her, but that vanished blackguard, Borham, stood in the way. She asked what I should advise. Well, I gave her the best advice I could, but I had to confess that the man had beaten us completely. And now, Mr. Carrington, can you suggest any possible step?'

"I thought for a minute or two, and then I said —

" 'You can tell Mrs. Borham that her husband has been dead for eight years.'

"Tuke stared at me very hard indeed. 'But — how do you know?' he exclaimed.

" 'Borham was Marwell,' I said, 'and Marwell met the fate he deserved — very suddenly.'

"After Tuke left me I made certain other inquiries, and here's the true history of the vanished Borham, *alias* Marwell, from the time he went down to Devorset with the Spencers.

"Mrs. Spencer was infatuated with the scoundrel, and the scoundrel had Mrs. Spencer under his thumb. His latest enterprise, just before he first met her, had been in connection with a fraudulent motor company. You'll remember of course, that he was a useful engineer, and he was a man who would stoop to anything, and stick at nothing. He applied for the job of Spencer's chauffeur, and Mrs. S. saw that he got the billet, without raising the faintest suspicion in her husband's mind. Then he started this double life of young blood and chauffeur, changing clothes at that hotel.

"The next thing was the warning given them by the efforts of Tuke's agent (who must have been a bit of an ass) to bribe Marwell to give away Borham! Hence the move to Devorset, where they thought they would have an absolutely free hand, and in a very short time the scoundrel found himself in clover. Mrs. Spencer had her scene with her husband, and knew he suspected Wickley. She told Marwell *alias* Borham, whereupon the man — without telling her — hit upon the ingenious device of going to Spencer and offering to shadow his wife. He thus had three sources of income; his pay as chauffeur, pay from Spencer for acting as spy, and any amount of odd sums from the infatuated woman. Also he lived in comfort, and had a beautiful woman devoted to him. And with Spencer's suspicions all directed at the wrong man the game seemed safe as houses.

"After a time, however, one small fly got into the ointment — though it seemed only a trifle. Under yet a third name, he started an intrigue with the daughter of a respectable farmer some miles away, and then began to get in a funk of driving his mistress about in the car more than he could help. He belonged to that class of man who seems able to tell an infatuated woman anything without breaking the spell, and he actually had the audacity to tell her this, and suggest meetings in the woods about the place, instead of taking her afield. She provided him with a coat and hat of her husband's, so that he might pass as Spencer himself if any one caught a glimpse of them; for Spencer was known to come and go constantly between London and his country house, and was also known to be often wandering about his woods when he was at home."

Carrington rose and planted himself before the fire, looking down upon the three of us who were listening to him; and suddenly and very impressively came to the *dénouement* of his tale.

"One evening at dusk she came a little late to a rendezvous in a certain wood. It was just across the boundary, so as to add to the chances of not being interrupted — Destiny had seen to that. There she found him stark dead on his face, with the handle of a pruning-knife sticking out of his back. She had thought her husband was in town, but guessed instantly he had come back — and guessed rightly. She thought she recognised his pruning-knife (he had bought two, and given one to Wickley, you'll remember) — and this time she guessed wrong.

"She hurried back to the house half demented, and found her husband had actually been home, and now had fled. And then she was quite certain who had done the deed. What should she do? Hide her own shame, save her husband's neck, and smother the scandal! That woman actually took a spade, and in the dark, in that lonely wood, found a bit of loose soil, and got the body hidden somehow. The next evening, she had the nerve to go down again and pile more earth on top, and meanwhile she told the housekeeper that Marwell had been sacked. Nobody else in the house had liked him, and nobody worried what had become of him. And then she wrote that note to her husband — 'I have done my best for you. Be grateful to me for that,' and left the house and him for ever."

"How did you find all those details?" we asked.

"Well, to begin by giving myself a little pat on the back, I came to a pretty correct conclusion at the end of Spencer's story. One man alone had disappeared from the neighbourhood, and that was the chauffeur Marwell. I judged him to be an obvious rascal from his offer to spy upon the wife. Also I knew that there was nobody in her own station of life who could possibly have been Mrs. Spencer's lover. Finally, I had learnt that one of Spencer's coats had been abstracted, which not only accounted for the unknown victim being mistaken for Spencer, but pointed to his having been a member of the household.

"Then came Tuke with his story which confirmed my suspicion, and told me almost everything. And finally, I hunted down Mrs. Spencer, and made her tell me the rest."

"And did you tell any of them the whole truth?"

"Only Wickley. I couldn't give his secret away to anybody else. But I told him everything. Whether it consoled the poor devil or not I don't know, but I assured him he was simply the instrument selected by Fate to rid the world of an unspeakable blackguard."

SPEAKING OF CRIME

A Department of Comment and Criticism

by HOWARD HAYCRAFT

ONE obstacle to previous considerations of mystery production or over-production and its consequences (a topic not unknown to readers of this department) has been the almost complete absence of reliable statistics. This lack was remedied in part a few months ago when Judge Lynch, the respected crime critic of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, included a count of his own reviews for the last six years in his annual summary for 1947. To supplement these figures your reporter has carried the computation back an additional six years, also using the Judge's *SRL* reviews for the sake of consistency.

Here, to settle future arguments, are the combined Lynch-Haycraft findings on American mystery production (new books only) for the last dozen years: 1936, 210 titles; 1937, 221; 1938, 226; 1939, 232; 1940, 256; 1941, 230; 1942, 220; 1943, 205; 1944, 185; 1945, 180; 1946, 215; 1947, 272.

On the basis of these figures the wartime year 1945 would seem to mark the low point and the post-war year 1947 the high for crime literature production in America in recent times. I use the qualified form because of a number of variables involved. To cite but one: who among us can say with certainty what is mystery and what is non-mystery — when yesterday's thriller is billed as today's "psychological study in fear"? Still, the figures cited should serve until better come along.

At this point, in view of some uncharitable remarks here and elsewhere about 1947's record output and none too high quality, it is pertinent to report that mystery production for the first six months of 1948 showed a sharp numerical decline as compared with the same period of 1947 — a decrease variously estimated at between 25 and 35 percent, depending on dat ol' debbil classification. Pretty evidently, the cause of this decline is economic, but whatever the reason, there are those of us who consider it a basically healthy corrective which has arrived none too soon for the general mystery welfare. And if, on the side of quality, the products of the six months did not precisely set the world aflame inspirationally, they at least generated a level of competence perceptibly higher than last season's blind rush-to-print.

Before considering the half-year's output in detail, however, I should like to comment briefly on one or two matters of more general nature. It occurs to me that the semantics of that amorphous entity called "sus-

pense" have come dangerously close to the ludicrous when, on the one hand, the adjective is applied to a locked-room puzzle by John Dickson Carr and, on the other, one hears (as did a recent meeting of Mystery Writers of America) the fiction editor of a national magazine define the suspense novel as "a story in which the reader knows the murderer from the start." The first instance is merely humorous; the second seems to me a fallacy worth critical scrutiny. For (excepting the tale in which the criminal is protagonist) I fail to understand the supposed virtue in the current and short-sighted fad in some quarters for excluding mystery from the suspense novel. On the contrary, as that master of the topic Alfred Hitchcock has written, unknown peril is always more frightening than known peril; and clearly that story which can call upon *both* mystery and event is stronger in reader-interest than the story which must rely on event alone. Imagine REBECCA with the mystery element removed! Who would wish a THIRTY-NINE STEPS in which the reader knows what Hannay does not? Make no mistake, I am all for liberalizing the mystery novel by such means as improved writing and increased emphasis on the "why" as well as the "who" and "how" of crime. But in the prevalent vogue for "telling all" I suspect there is more than a little confusion of form with substance; if not indeed the growth of a new convention far narrower than any it seeks to avoid. For these reasons I suggest that writers and editors would be well advised to think twice before selling mystery short.

Another writing habit I've been wanting to speak of is the matter of first-person narration in the mystery novel. Barring a handful of *tours de force* which depended on the device to bring them off — and a permanent dispensation for Archie Goodwin — I can think of few first-person mysteries in the last several years (and some of them have been very good indeed) which would not have been more effective in the third-person. The first-person method offers deceptive advantages, especially to the novice. Most beginners find it simpler to handle, and it affords quick reader-identification. But for this easy victory the writer pays heavily by the sacrifice of objectivity and mobility and many of the subtler qualities that make for good craftsmanship. Nor should we forget the temptation to over-writing and irritating mannerism inherent in first-person narration, as illustrated by the Had-I-But-Known sorority and the boys of the I-Felt-Lousy-I-Felt-Swell brigade. (The floor is open to anyone who wishes to challenge the use of the first-person in criticism.)

Now for a quick glance at some of the half-year's mystery headliners, beginning on the structural left with the suspense entries. Oddly enough, the palm for the most un-put-downable job of the months under review, to my way of thinking, belongs to a tale of solid detection, the Lock-

ridges' I WANT TO GO HOME (Lippincott). Taking one consideration with another, I would place this North-less story (despite my predilection for Mr. and Mrs. N.) high among the authors' many fine performances. Another suspense novel making intelligent use of mystery is David Duncan's THE BRAMBLE BUSH (Macmillan), which rates a special cheer for its brilliant plotwork; incidentally, if you read this yarn in *Collier's* you'll find some interesting differences in the book version. Kenneth Millar's THREE ROADS (Knopf) deserves an E for earnestness and execution, but suffers as fiction from overmuch psychiatry. The same goes for Rosemary Kutak's I AM THE CAT (Farrar & Straus), not up to her previous DARKNESS OF SLUMBER; Ernest Borneman's TREMOLO (Harper), despite its faithful jazz band background; and Elizabeth Eastman's THE MOUSE WITH THE RED EYES (Farrar), wherein some superior writing is lavished on the year's thinnest premise. Not much more plausible, but told with the author's usual compulsive skill, is Cornell Woolrich's RENDEZVOUS IN BLACK (Rinehart), which also raises the question: how repetitious can you get? (Compare this novel with Woolrich's maiden book, THE BRIDE WORE BLACK, to see what I mean.) Courtroom addicts have their choice of two engrossing trial stories, one English and one American. Bruce Hamilton's THE HANGING JUDGE (Harper) almost, but not quite, achieves the intensity of Edgar Lustgarten's 1947 triumph, ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE; while "John Reywall's" THE TRIAL OF ALVIN BOAKER (Random) displays both the strength and weakness of the transcript-of-evidence method, but gets a trifle out of hand in the closing passages.

Among legitimate examples of "the reader knows all" — i.e., the story from the criminal's point of vantage — I would give top ranking to THE TROUBLE WITH MURDER by Roger Bax (Harper), a taut and absorbing Francis Iles-ish melodrama by the author of last year's DISPOSING OF HENRY. In NIGHT CRY (Dial) credit William L. Stuart with the lean and honest story of a hard cop who kills a man in anger (and astonishing improvement over Stuart's 1945 stereotyped toughie, THE DEAD LIE STILL). Comparable honesty of purpose and presentation characterizes Doris Miles Disney's THAT WHICH IS CROOKED (Crime Club), though you may find its protagonist less sympathetic. Give high marks, too, for effort and imagination, to Stanley Ellin's often moving "first" DREADFUL SUMMIT (S. & S.), even if promise exceeds performance. Here, by the by, is a pat example of a novel which would be improved by the restraint of third-person narration. And as illustration of the fallacy of "telling all" when the story does does not require it, I nominate Charlotte Armstrong's THE CHOCOLATE COBWEB (Coward-McCann). Miss Armstrong turned the trick once in THE UNSUSPECTED (despite, not because of, the "tell all" method so

far as I'm concerned); but this contrived essay in breathlessness is no UNSUSPECTED. Finally, one special warning, lest you be misled by a distinguished name. Throughout the first part of THE DARK WHEEL, signed by Philip MacDonald and one A. Boyd Correll (Morrow), I found myself speculating whether I was reading the burlesque to end all suspense novels; throughout the last part I wondered sorrowfully how an artist of Mr. MacDonald's high reputation and achievement could allow his name to be associated with such hopeless shoddy.

Turning to mystery and detection of more traditional pattern, the domestic or all-American division produced no BIG SLEEP or BLOOD UPON THE SNOW in the first half of 1948, but was not without its quota of competent and entertaining performances by old writers and new. For its semi-documentary technique and amalgam of high purpose with a humanly absorbing problem, I particularly admired Eleazar Lipsky's MURDER ONE (Crime Club), in the mood both of the author's KISS OF DEATH and the screenplay BOOMERANG. In similar vein, the late Robert Finnegan's last novel MANY A MONSTER (S. & S.) is easily his best, even though some of its social content seems extraneous to the central problem. If Fredric Brown's THE DEAD RINGER (Dutton) lacks, perhaps inevitably, the freshness of THE FABULOUS CLIPJOINT, there is compensation in its vivid carnival setting and one of the year's tightest and most satisfying plots. Dorothy Cameron Disney's EXPLOSION (Random) and John Stephen Strange's MAKE MY BED SOON (Crime Club), both well told, will possibly appeal more strongly to women readers than to men. Brett Halliday's BLOOD ON THE STARS (Dodd) places greater stress on plot development than has been the wont of the hardboiled whodunit recently; I like the new, comparatively relaxed Mike Shayne, too.

George Harmon Coxe's VENTURESOME LADY (Knopf) reminds us again of this dependable author's year-in year-out competence; as does Elizabeth Daly's latest Henry Gamadge story THE BOOK OF THE LION (Rinehart). For quiet humor, springing from character and situation, try Margaret Scherf's ALWAYS MURDER A FRIEND (Crime Club). F AS IN FLIGHT (Morrow) marks a stride in characterization for steadily maturing Lawrence Treat, though readers will divide sharply over his exasperating heroine. In SHE WALKS ALONE (Random) Helen McCloy attempts an ambitious *tour de force* which, as a longtime admirer of this author's sincere craftsmanship, I regret to state doesn't quite jell; Basil Willing please come home! Of several promising first novels, two I think you'll like especially are Herbert Brean's naturalistic WILDERS WALK AWAY (Morrow), albeit solution doesn't measure up to puzzle, and William McGivern's BUT DEATH RUNS FASTER (Dodd), a medium-boiled job stronger in background than plotting.

With the British 'tec returning to something like its pre-war representation on American publishing lists, Nicholas Blake wins special gratitude for MINUTE FOR MURDER (Harper), his first Nigel Strangeways novel in seven years and an exceptional blending of chess-puzzle and character. THERE IS A TIDE (Dodd) illustrates again Agatha Christie's recent tendency to minimize Poirot and emphasize the other *dramatis personae;* whether you regard this as asset or liability will depend on your feeling about the little Belgian. For readers who hold that E. C. R. Lorac's pleasant Inspector MacDonald stories have been unjustly neglected, RELATIVE TO POISON (Crime Club) is occasion for double rejoicing: the author's first appearance on a major American list, and her neatest puzzle to date.

Three English second appearances which did not equal the promise of their 1947 prototypes are Maureen Sarsfield's A PARTY FOR LAWTY (Coward), Max Murray's THE KING AND THE CORPSE (Farrar), and Shelley Smith's HE DIED OF MURDER (Harper). Nor does Allan MacKinnon's MAP OF MISTRUST (Crime Club), while diverting, approach last year's HOUSE OF DARKNESS. Best debut: ON SUCH A NIGHT by Anthony Quayle (Little), lightsome, sophisticated handling of espionage. Standard Empire performances: LOVE LIES BLEEDING by Edmund Crispin (Lippincott); OUTRUN THE CONSTABLE by Selwyn Jepson (Doubleday); THE MISSING WIDOW by Anthony Gilbert (Barnes); THE FINISHING TOUCH by Anne Hocking (Crime Club); DANCE WITHOUT MUSIC by Peter Cheyney (Dodd); AN AUTHOR BITES THE DUST by A. W. Upfield (Crime Club); DEATH OF AN AUTHOR by John Rhode (Dodd); ETERNITY RING by Patricia Wentworth (Lippincott).

As usual, space runs short just as I come to the anthologies, but I must find room to recommend for your permanent library Ellery Queen's TWENTIETH CENTURY DETECTIVE STORIES (World) and James Sandoe's MURDER: PLAIN & FANCIFUL (Sheridan). Both volumes emphasize previously uncollected stories. However, I would call the Queen work chiefly notable for its terminal essay, an annotated, authoritative, sometimes controversial, selection of the 101 greatest volumes of detective "shorts" which is easily the year's outstanding contribution to 'tec scholarship; while the lasting value of the Sandoe volume is similarly enhanced by an afterpiece identifying famous real-life crimes which have appeared in fictional guise.

Incidentally, in reply to numerous correspondents, Sandoe's admirable mystery reviews did *not* cease to be published when the Sunday book supplement of the *Chicago Sun* folded a few months back. Interested readers will find them in the amalgamated *Chicago Sun-Times* each Friday.

THE MAN WHO MARRIED TOO OFTEN

by ROY VICKERS

IF THE Marchioness of Roucester and Jarrow had been an educated woman she might have been alive today. And so, of course, might the Marquis. But it was not through her lack of education that she was caught. The crime, as a crime, was wholly successful and it was only discovered inadvertently by the Department of Dead Ends. The tragic truth is that if she had known only as much law as the ordinary middle-class woman knows she would never have committed murder.

In spite of the crude melodrama of her life and death — ideal stuff for newspaper headlines in normal circumstances — she never "made the front page." This was because she was arrested two days after England had gone to war with Germany, with the result that she got about ten lines in two of the London papers.

She married the Marquis on May 5th, 1901, when she was twenty-three. It was a manipulated marriage and the manipulator was her own mother — an altogether objectionable person who let lodgings at Brighton, and indulged in various other activities with which we need not distress ourselves. But — curiously enough, as we are talking of a murderess — they distressed Molly Webster very much indeed.

The name Webster, by the way, is quite arbitrary, though Molly acquired legal right to it through the fact that she had used it all her life. She did not know who her father was; nor, one is bound to believe, did her mother.

Early in her life something seems to have weaned Molly from the influence of her mother. We need not be mystical about it. At various times the house would tend to fill itself with respectable people. There was an elderly artist, the late Trelawney Samson, who painted Molly when she was a lovely little thing of five. He remained her friend throughout childhood and must have taught her a great deal, though he could not eradicate an unexpected tendency to be much too careful with small sums of money. Probably from him she derived her love of respectability which later became an obsession.

Presumably through Samson's influence, she was sent to the local High School where for a time she was a model pupil. Except for one mention of her parsimonious tendencies she earned consistently good reports and won three prizes, each for arithmetic. The record of a dull little plodder — until we suddenly find that in her second year in the upper school and actually on her fifteenth birthday she

was expelled for striking a mistress.

For three years she tried various jobs, beginning with domestic service. She had a number of situations, leaving each of her own accord, and in each case being given an excellent character. There was a brief period in various shops, including, of all things, an undertaker's.

The next we hear of her is at twenty-two, making fairly regular appearances in provincial music-halls. She was a good-looking girl but not a ravishing beauty, being too tall and bony for her generation. Her photographs are disappointing, though one can detect a certain grace and beauty that must have been appealing. We must infer that her physical lure lay in her vitality, which was considerable. Both before and after marriage she had a number of ardent admirers — none of whom, we may believe, ever touched her lips.

On the halls she was able to support herself without her mother's assistance and to dress quite reasonably. All those who knew her at this time have agreed that she led a life of almost puritanical respectability. In those days puritanism was not a helpful quality in a comedienne. Her strong line was Cockney characterization, but she never allowed the slightest risquerie in her songs or her patter.

At the end of April 1901 she had an engagement in her home town — at the then newly opened Hippodrome. Here an unknown admirer sent her an elaborate bouquet and, as was her custom, she sent it back.

On the following night, immediately after her turn, the manager brought two men to her dressing-room. One was an elderly man with white hair, bear-leader to the second man, who was thirty-one but behaved as if he were sixteen.

The elder man was a Colonel Boyce. He introduced the younger as "Mr. Stranack." Because there were two of them, one of them white-headed, Molly was reasonably polite.

The next day they turned up at her lodgings in Station Road. The younger man, it appeared, was very smitten and the Colonel was giving him disinterested moral support.

For some reason Molly seems to have made investigations. She found that the names were genuine — as far as they went; that Stranack's full name was Charles Augustus Jean Marie Stranack and that when he was not paying court to comediennes he was more commonly known as the Marquis of Roucester and Jarrow.

This knowledge seems to have produced in Molly the same kind of violent storm that had changed the smug little pupil into the apache who had smashed her mistress' jaw. We may say that by the same storm the puritan temperament was blown out like a candle. In fact, she went to her mother, whom she had not seen for seven years, and positively asked for a helping hand.

"All right, dearie! I'll help you. You shall have your chance in life no matter what happens to me."

Under instructions Molly separated

the young Marquis from the Colonel and enticed him to her mother's house. The details become a trifle coarse, for they were stage-managed by her mother — from the moment when the young man entered the house to the moment when a shabby lawyer was put on to blackmail him.

The Marquis succumbed to threats and nine days later married Molly at the Brighton registrar's office.

After the ceremony Molly came to herself — the rather queer self that she had created out of the half-understood teachings of the artist and her own violent reactions from her mother's mode of life. One imagines her looking round a little vaguely to see where this temperamental leap in the dark had landed her. There was, among other things, her husband.

In the whirl of what we may by courtesy call her engagement, she had had little time to make his acquaintance. She now found that she had tied herself to an amiable, irresponsible, reasonably good-looking young man, with the mental outlook of a schoolboy who has broken bounds. She extracted his history, which was an uninspiring affair. He seemed to be uncertain whether he had any relations but fancied that a man who had been awfully nice to him was his second cousin. He had spent a short time at Oxford and a still shorter time in the Army, after which his father had handed him over to Colonel Boyce.

After his father's death, some nine years previously, the Colonel had taken him, she gathered, first to Paris and Vienna, then to Canada and later to the East, and they had had a perfectly gorgeous time. He had never been to the House of Lords — he even inclined to the belief that it was an Elective Assembly — and but rarely visited the family estate at Roucester in Gloucester.

The Marquis bore curiously little resentment for the means by which he had been married. It is even possible that he regarded the whole thing as the more or less normal procedure; for his conception of sexual morality was, as will presently be seen, elementary. Moreover, under the Colonel's tutelage his social experience had been almost limited to chance acquaintances in hotels.

Molly let him take her to Paris for the honeymoon, where she made the discovery that her husband was infatuated with her. It is unlikely that she was at all deeply stirred in response; but if she was not, it is quite certain that the Marquis never knew it. To her, marriage was a new job and she did it well. Paradoxical as it may sound, Molly was, in many respects, an excellent wife.

As well as a husband, there was an income of something under three thousand a year — which she was to take in hand a little later. And then, of course, there was the fact that she had changed a very doubtful name for a quite indisputable title. For the first year she was very sensitive about the title. It would be clumsy to say that she was a snob. The title was to

her the symbol of her emancipation from the sordid conditions of her birth and childhood and her quite natural pride in it led to an incident on the first day of their honeymoon — which cast, one might say, the shadow of the tragedy of six years later.

They put up at the *Hotel des Anglais* where he astonished and offended her by signing the register as "Mr. and Mrs. Stranack." And in this connection we hear her voice for the first time. One imagines the words being very clearly enunciated (thanks to her training in the halls) while the new consciousness of rank struggles with the Cockney idiom.

"I felt myself going hot and cold all over, though I didn't say anything until we were in our room. And then I said: 'This is a nice thing, Charles,' I said, 'if you're ashamed of me already. And if you're not, why did you sign Mr. and Mrs. Stranack?' And then he laughed and said: 'Well, you see the fact is that jolly old manager-fellow recognized me and that's how we signed it before. Must be careful, what!' And I said: 'Do you mean to say you've brought me to the very hotel where you've stayed before with some woman? I never knew men treated their wives like that,' I said. And he laughed again and said: 'That's all right, kiddie. She was my wife, too. Married her at the place they call the *Mairie*.' "

Molly was taking no risks. She walked out of the room, called an interpreter and made him take her to the *Mairie*. Here she obtained the marriage certificate of Marthe Celeste Stranack, née Frasinier, dated February 15th, 1897 — which she did not want. And the death certificate of the same — dated January 22nd, 1901 — which enabled her to return to the *Hotel des Anglais* without menace to her technical respectability.

After leaving Paris they went to Bournemouth and spent the summer drifting about English watering-places. In those days Roucester Castle had not been thrown open to the public. It was let until the following September. As soon as the tenancy expired Molly insisted on going to live at the Castle. So there, in the following April (1902) her son was born.

Again it was probably the reaction from her mother that made Molly take her own motherhood with fanatical zeal. It might almost be said that the baby changed the very contours of the countryside. Roucester, which perhaps you know as a noisy little town, was then hardly more than a village. That town was called into being by Molly's discovery that it was impossible to live in the Castle on three thousand a year. The knowledge made her angry and she wanted to hurt somebody, so she hurt Colonel Boyce.

The Colonel had combined with the duty of tutor those of absentee overseer of the estate. He was an honest, stupid man with the class-morality of a Victorian gentleman. After the debacle he returned as guardian of

Molly's child and with the boy was killed in an air-raid on London in 1917. Only a few days before his death he gave evidence to the Court of Chancery.

"I was aware that the Marchioness had called in a firm of London accountants to examine my books. And I think I may say, without fear of being accused of malice to the dead, that Lady Roucester was disappointed when no defalcation was discovered. In a subsequent interview she asked me a number of questions, particularly in regard to the leases. At the end of our conversation I found myself virtually discharged as an incompetent servant. Thereafter, I understand, the Marchioness managed the estate herself."

She did. Molly, the ex-music-hall hack and unscrupulous adventuress, took over that rambling, difficult estate and in five years was squeezing out of it a trifle under eleven thousand a year net. If you have driven through this part, you may regret the big factory of the Meat Extract people whose coal barges have spoilt that bit of the river, while Cauldean Hill, of course, has been utterly ruined by the quarry. But you should remember in charity that they are the indirect result of Molly's conscientious motherhood.

She even made a partially successful attempt to build up her husband, who had now taken on the tremendous importance of being the father of her son. Even that first year she raised enough to attend the Coronation — dragged along with her the reluctant Marquis, protesting, not without truth, that he looked a most frightful ass in miniver and a coronet. She made him attend some of the debates, but neither threats nor tears would induce him to make a speech. He was an indifferent horseman but she soon had money enough to put him back in the traditional position of M.F.H.

Out of it all she took no more than four hundred a year for herself of which nearly three hundred was spent on dress.

In their third year that handful of prosperous and for the most part idle persons who are commonly called "the County" began to approve of what she had done with the Marquis, and in the fourth year they "called."

Oddly enough, they seem to have liked her. There are no stories of her gaucherie. As she made no secret of her origin and did not claim to be one of them, they willingly gave her the position to which her rank would normally have entitled her.

Her aim was to fulfil her role as adequately as she could in the country. There was no town-house, though she hoped they would be able to afford one by the time Conrad was old enough to go to Eton. Cowes was financially out of reach, so they spent August at the Castle.

It was on an August morning in 1907 — actually Bank Holiday — when there came the next crisis in her life. At exactly half-past twelve she went out, as she had a bit of a headache and intended to potter in the

garden until lunch time. But she was still on the terrace when she saw the station victoria coming up the drive.

Disentangling the facts from her own rather verbose account, we gather that she waited on the terrace until the cab was immediately below her. She then called out to the woman sitting in it:

"Hullo! Have you come to see me?"

The woman seemed to be flustered by this informal greeting. She made no answer and let herself be driven on to the entrance. Here she hesitated, then walked along the terrace to where Molly was standing.

"Excuse me asking — but are you Lady Roucester?"

Molly had had a quick look at her and thought she might be an old-time acquaintance of the halls.

"Yes. And I know your face quite well, but since I've had the influenza my memory is something awful."

"Excuse me. But the family name is Stranack, isn't it? Your husband's got a girl's name, hasn't he? — Jean-Marie. Charles Augustus Jean Marie Stranack? And he's called — " she consulted a piece of paper — "the Marquis of Roucester and Jarrow. He was born in Roucester and he's thirty-eight."

Tears, Molly said, were running down the woman's cheeks. She took a folded paper out of her purse and gave it to Molly.

"Perhaps you'll look at this and tell me what we'd better do?"

It was, of course, the certificate of marriage between Charles Stranack and Phyllis Margaret, solemnized in St. Seiriol's Church, Toronto, on June 30th, 1900.

Toronto — June 30th, 1900 — as against Brighton May 5th, 1901. The two women seem to have stood together for two or three minutes without speaking to each other. They were certainly there at twenty-five minutes to one when the youthful Lord Narley, heir to the Marquisate, passed within a hundred feet of them with his governess.

"Is that your little boy?" asked Phyllis Margaret. "Of course, it's hard on him but — I really don't know what's to be done, I'm sure."

Very hard on him, thought Molly! He had been known as a young lord who would one day be a marquis. They would laugh at him all his life. For, of course, wherever she went with him it would "get about." Even at Brighton, where she had been nobody, it had "got about" that the name of Webster had been chosen at random. He would just be "Master Conrad" — if anything.

("*All right, dearie, I'll help you! You shall have your chance in life no matter what happens to me.*")

By one o'clock Phyllis Margaret was dead.

Legally, it was a premeditated murder; but humanly speaking the whole thing was planned and carried out on the spur of the moment.

"I suppose we aren't going to fly at each other's throats," said Molly. "We shall have to see Charles about

this. He is pottering about after rabbits and won't be in for ever so long, for he's always late for luncheon, but I know where to find him."

The two of them crossed the home-park together. Molly had kept the marriage certificate, which presently she put in her blouse. On the way their conversation seems to have been confined to an amicable agreement that the Marquis had always been untrustworthy with women, and probably always would be.

At a quarter to one they came upon the Marquis in a clearing in the copse. Joseph Ledbetter, a junior keeper, who was with the Marquis, testified to the time. He testified further that as the two ladies approached the Marquis showed signs of an almost ludicrous agitation and that he actually said, "Good lord, Joe! I'm in the soup. You'd better mouch off."

There follows one of those amazing little scenes that positively shock our preconceptions. We are compelled to imagine those two unhappy women turning upon the Marquis and denouncing him for the cruel little cad that he was. We imagine him faltering and cowering. But in fact he merely said:

"Hullo, Phyllis!"

And Phyllis Margaret said:

"Hullo, Charles! I've just had a word with Lady Roucester." (This was very civil of her since she believed the title was justly her own.) "And I saw your little boy, only it was too far off and I couldn't speak to him."

"Ha! Jolly kid, what! Only Molly runs him on a tight rein. I suppose we'd better be mouching back! Must be nearly lunchtime."

Molly took out the certificate and showed it to him.

"I only want to know one thing, Charles. Is that a forgery?"

He just glanced at it, then looked away and she knew it was not a forgery. She folded it and put it back in her blouse.

"Bit awkward, what!" said the Marquis. "I suppose we can fix something?"

But Phyllis Margaret was not very helpful.

"I don't know what we can do, Charles. It seems it's going to be hard on one of us. And it wouldn't surprise me if this lady was to refuse and have you sent to prison."

That told Molly that the woman did not want to fix anything. Of course, there was no need for her to do so, reasoned Molly. She had only to make her claim to be sure of the title and at least a substantialalimony. But the fool ought to have realized this before she came to Roucester.

"That's quite right, Charles! You can't fix anything — you'll have to go to prison — unless I save you." ("*All right, dearie, I'll help you!*")

Molly grabbed the shot-gun from his hand, wheeled round and shot Phyllis Margaret through the head at a range of about four inches.

("*When she fell down dead looking all horrible, Charles was sick. And then I knew that it was no good, and that*

he couldn't keep his head and tell the tale I'd already thought of. And I thought of Conrad and I didn't love Charles at all, because I think he was a worm. But Conrad takes after me and I always meant him to have his chance.")

Molly was holding the shot-gun while the Marquis babbled in terror. By checking up on other events we are able to work out that she gave him some seven minutes before she tackled him.

"I'm going to say that she was one of your cast-off loves and when you wouldn't do anything for her she snatched your gun and shot herself. You must remember to tell the same tale. Otherwise we shall both be hanged because they'll say we murdered her together."

"Yes — yes, that's what we'll say! That's a fine idea! Let's go," dithered the Marquis.

("*But his teeth were chattering and I was afraid he would run away. So I knew I'd have to do it quickly — or he would let some slut look after Conrad if I were taken.*")

"Wait a minute, Charles. We've got to get the tale right before we move from this spot. We've got to rehearse it. You play Phyllis. Go on — take the gun. Put it up as if you were going to shoot yourself. . . . No, you can't do it like that or you won't be able to reach the trigger. . . . You'll have to put your mouth right on the muzzles. Go on — be a man!"

She saw that he could doubtfully reach the trigger. Anyhow, Molly's finger got there first — and virtually blew her husband's head off with the left barrel.

Molly had read all about fingerprints. She tore a strip of lace from her clothing — in those days they wore a gathered frill tacked inside the skirt-hem — and wiped the gun from muzzle to butt, including both triggers. She put the lace under her blouse beside the marriage certificate (and later washed it herself and wore it again).

Even when the muzzle had been in his mouth the Marquis could barely have reached the triggers. He was wearing a golf suit (precursor of plus-fours). She rolled back the dead man's stocking, unbuckled his leather strap-garter, looped the garter round the trigger, then fastened the buckle. By such a device — by putting his toe in the loop of the garter — a man could blow his own head off with a shotgun.

Then she ran to Ledbetter's cottage, which was nearer than the Castle and in the opposite direction.

"Get on your bicycle at once and go for Dr. Turner and the police. There has been an accident."

"Did you say go for the police, my lady?"

"Dr. Turner and the police, Ledbetter. You'll all have to know soon, so I may as well tell you now. His lordship shot a woman who was blackmailing him and then committed suicide."

She turned back, walked through the copse past the two dead bodies to the Castle, where she summoned the

housekeeper and the butler and gave them her version of the affair.

It is an axiom that the greater the risk taken by a murderer at the moment of murder, the greater are the chances of ultimate escape. Molly had taken an enormous risk at the moment of murder. Young Ledbetter might have hidden himself in the copse to see the fun. About four hundred yards away, part of the copse was being cleared by five laborers and a foreman. It was their dinner hour and any one of them might have passed the spot. It just happened that none of them did so.

There was no suspicion of Molly, partly because there was no perceptible motive. The Coroner, whose daughter Molly had presented at the last Court, confined his comments upon her actions to expressions of sympathy and admiration of her cool-headed courage. The local police toed the line. But the Treasury sent down Detective-Inspector Martleplug to have an unofficial look around.

From a close examination of the scene of the murder Martleplug picked up nothing. There was nothing in the footsteps to upset Molly's story — and very little in the gun itself. Round one trigger was the garter which, in any case, would have blotted out fingerprints. On the other trigger there were no fingerprints — though there ought to have been, if the Marquis had shot Phyllis Margaret before looping the garter round the other trigger and shooting himself. But you couldn't build anything on that.

Martleplug managed to take the gun back with him to the Yard. Molly neglected to claim it and in course of time it drifted to the Department of Dead Ends.

It was fifteen days before they found out anything about the dead woman. Her underclothing had been marked "Vanlessing" and eventually they found that she had stayed for three weeks in cheap lodgings off the Waterloo Road and had there called herself "Mrs. Stranack." The landlady, whether she knew anything or not, gave no information that was of any use in tracing her late lodger's previous movements.

Molly shut up the Castle for a year and took her boy to the South of France. Early the following summer she spent a few weeks at Brighton. Her mother, whom she did not go to see, died during this visit and Molly created a mild situation by refusing to pay her funeral expenses. Eventually she backed out, and commissioned her former employers, obtaining a special discount. Shortly after Christmas she returned to the Castle.

She now entered upon the third phase of her paradoxical career. Although she was only twenty-nine her hair was beginning to go grey. (To dye one's hair was socially impossible in 1907.) Her dress became severe. But her devotion to her son's future forbade her to become a recluse. She took up archery and became president of the Gloucester Toxophilites.

She was still very close-fisted, ran the estate with a rather brutal economy and gave perilously little to charity. Nevertheless, she attained a certain popularity. She was willing and eager to open bazaars, to work for hospitals and the like, and once a year she would throw the Castle open to the Waifs and Strays, entertaining them with reasonable liberality. In short, she was systematically training herself for the role of *grande dame* which she intended to fill when her son was grown up.

In 1909 she sent the boy to a preparatory school. For a fortnight at the beginning of each term she was moody and even tearful. She disliked and secretly disapproved of boarding-schools as she did of hunting. But she believed both to be necessary for his welfare.

For five years she lived like this and we may assume that, in psychological jargon, she had transmuted the ego that had committed murder. We pick up a blurred record of the period through the news-cutting agencies — paragraphs in local papers about small activities and doubtful little anecdotes. Suddenly the spotlight falls on her again on July 10th, 1914, in the form of a letter from the management of the Hotel Cecil in the Strand (now the headquarters of a petrol organization).

The letter informed her that a Mrs. Vanlessing had contracted a liability of £34–15–0, that she had stated that she was sister "to" the Marchioness of Roucester and Jarrow and, further, that her ladyship would be only too pleased to pay the account.

Vanlessing! She remembered the name vaguely in connection with Phyllis Margaret. But she remembered too that Scotland Yard had done their best with the gun and the footprints and one thing and another. So she wired back:

"*Never had a sister so cannot accept liability — Molly Roucester and Jarrow.*"

The Vanlessing woman slipped away but was found by Scotland Yard a week later. On arrest she repeated her tale, but tearfully withdrew it when she was shown a photograph of Molly.

"Aw! I'll take the rap," we imagine her saying (for she was a Canadian). "Guess the whole thing was a plant and I've been made a sucker by my own sister. She married a guy called Stranack in Toronto on June 30th, 1900. She claimed she'd found out later — about 1907 it was — that he was an English lord. She was down and out at the time and I lent her the money and gave her the clothes to come over here. Never had a word from her since. So I thought I'd drift over and see if I could collect."

Three weeks later — two days after we had entered the War — Superintendent Tarrant of Dead Ends took a young subordinate named Norris to Roucester Castle. Norris was carrying the shot-gun that had killed the Marquis, not as might be expected in a gun-case but in a cricket bag. In the train Tarrant opened the cricket-

bagand, as Norris described it, started messing about with the gun and the garter that was still looped round one of the triggers.

"We have called, Lady Roucester, about the woman Vanlessing who recently pretended to be your sister. We've caught her."

Molly was rather haughty about it. It was three in the afternoon and she had had them shown into the dining-room (now open to the public on any weekday except Mondays during the summer months between 12 a.m. and 4 p.m.).

"I am not interested," she said. "I never had a sister. I read in the papers that you had caught her. And I don't know why you have come all the way from London to tell me."

"Quite so, Lady Roucester. We know she is not your sister. And I didn't come all the way from London to tell you what you know already. I came all that way, Lady Roucester, to tell you something I think you *don't* know. She is the sister of the woman who was shot on your estate."

To which Molly made the rather unexpected answer: "What do I care?"

"Did you know that the woman who was shot on your estate seven years ago, Lady Roucester, had married your husband in Canada?"

"No." That was what Molly said. But she must have said it very badly, for Tarrant was able to see that she was lying and this encouraged him.

"Perhaps you would like to look at this marriage certificate?"

Molly looked at it for a long time, racking her brains, no doubt, for something to say — making the uneducated mistake of believing that it was necessary to say something.

"Well, I still don't see that this has got anything to do with me or my son. The woman is dead, isn't she! She's out of it. And I'm here. What's it all about?"

The atmosphere had changed from that of a Marchioness giving audience to a couple of detectives to that of an hereditary harridan giving back-chat to the cops.

"Wait a minute!" said Tarrant. "Do you believe that if a man commits bigamy and the first woman dies the second becomes his legal wife?"

That was, of course, what poor Molly had believed and Tarrant saw it at once and was now sure of his ground.

"What do you mean by 'legal wife'?" she shrilled. "Are you trying to say that I wasn't the legal wife of the Marquis?"

Tarrant, we must suppose, was making the most of the atmosphere, stimulating her deep-rooted instinct to treat him and his kind as natural enemies. It sounds unsporting but you must remember that murder is very unsporting.

"The Marquis seems to have had a weakness for legal wives!" he remarked. "I've got another one here. Look. A Frenchie this time. Marthe Celeste —"

"She died before he married me. Next, please, as the saying is."

"That's right. But Phyllis Margaret was alive when he married you. Care to look at the dates on these certificates?"

More back-chat from Molly, then Tarrant again:

"We know Phyllis Margaret was alive when he married you. And take it from me that you've got your law all wrong, as your solicitor will tell you if you ask him. If the Marquis married you while he had a legal wife living it doesn't matter whether she's dead now or not. Living or dead, she would be his wife in law — and you wouldn't. In fact, you wouldn't have any right to the title."

There was a sharp cry from Molly and she fell in a faint. The cry of agony was genuine. The faint may have been a fake to gain time.

Tarrant and Norris lifted her on to the long seat in the bow window (you will see the plain oak now, but it was upholstered in those days). Tarrant was standing over her when she opened her eyes.

"You wouldn't have killed them both if you'd known that, would you, Molly?"

"What the hell d'you mean?"

"I'll soon show you what I mean. Norris, give me that gun."

We imagine a little gasp as the gun, with the garter looped round one of the triggers, was held before Molly's eyes.

"You swung it on the coroner that the Marquis looped the garter round the trigger — then put the two barrels in his mouth — like this — then put his foot in the loop — like this — and blew his own head off."

"He did — he did I tell you! I saw him."

"I know you *said* you saw him. Now I'm going to show you something. . . . Open the window, Norris." He broke the gun, took a single cartridge from his pocket and inserted it. "Now hold the gun, Norris. Point it high. Now — watch this, Molly. Here's the Marquis putting his foot through the loop. See?"

Tarrant pulled the garter. There came a report as the gun discharged itself harmlessly through the open window. Then Tarrant swung the gun round and held the muzzle of the twin barrels close under the nose of the Marchioness of Roucester and Jarrow.

"Keep still — I'm not going to hurt you. Smell those barrels. Which one has just carried the charge? The right barrel! Go on — smell it! Put your finger in and you'll find it's warm — and dirty."

"What're you doing to me? Take that gun away!"

"The garter fired the *right* barrel," said Tarrant. "But it was proved by the position of the wound that the Marquis was killed by the *left* barrel."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Then I'll tell you. You killed that woman yourself. Then by some trick of your own you got the Marquis to put the barrel in his own mouth as if he were going to shoot himself. But it was you who pressed the trigger and killed him. And *when he was dead* you

wiped the triggers for fingerprints and then you took the garter from the dead man's leg and *looped it round the wrong trigger.* And then you —"

"Oh, all right! I did it for my kid's sake — God help me! And now it's all for nothing I don't care what happens to me."

They arrested her and took her away. And then a rather dreadful little thing happened — while they were charging her.

"Name?" asked the Charge-Sergeant.

"No good asking me," said Molly. "Ask this gentleman here — he knows all about the law. I was Molly Webster before that dirty little skunk married me."

"The name is Molly Stranack, Marchioness of Roucester and Jarrow," said Tarrant and then: "I asked you to look at the certificates, Lady Roucester. Perhaps you'd like to look at them now. Date of marriage between Phyllis Margaret and Stranack, the Marquis — June 30th, 1900. *Death* of Marthe Celeste Jan. 22nd, 1901. Marthe being alive at the time, the marriage to Phyllis Margaret was not a marriage at all. She could have prosecuted the Marquis for bigamy. But she couldn't have shaken your title — or your son's succession."

"Then, after all, there was no need to —"

"None whatever — *my lady*," said Tarrant and then Molly burst into tears, probably the first she had shed since babyhood. Tarrant, he said afterwards, could not stand the sight of her grief and bolted back to his office where Norris was waiting for him — a flushed and very nearly indignant young Norris.

"I say, sir! That garter — in the photo of the gun taken at the time it's looped round the *left* trigger. Look here!"

"Is it!" said Tarrant. "Then it must be my fault. I remember unfastening it in the train going down. I must have put it back on the wrong trigger. Very careless of me, Norris. Always replace things exactly as you find them. But, after all, it doesn't alter the fact that she murdered her husband and that woman. And I'm afraid she'll be hanged."

But here Tarrant was wrong. Molly, the indisputably genuine Marchioness, was also the hereditary *gamine* who knew a trick or two for evading the vigilance of the cops. She had smuggled in a phial of medinal tablets, harmless enough if taken one at a time but fatal if swallowed *en masse.*

ANSWERS to

Criminals In Disguis

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

1. Lizzie Borden (1860–1927), who has been romanticized by John Colton and Mrs. Belloc Lowndes among others, and who refused to partake, on the morning of the murder, of the mutton soup served for breakfast to the rest of the family.

2. Dr. James Sheppard (in THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD by Agatha Christie), who served Poirot as a Watson in the murder which he himself committed — an act which stirred up furious and still-raging arguments as to whether or not Mrs. Christie was playing fair with the reader. (P.S.: She was.)

3. Sergeant Ottermole (in *The Hands of Mr. Ottermole* from A TEA-SHOP IN LIMEHOUSE by Thomas Burke), of the account of whose many murders Ellery Queen has justly said, "No finer crime story has ever been written, period."

4. Cain (*Genesis* 4), the pioneer practitioner (in DeQuincey's term) of the art of murder, who found a wife in the land of Nod — a fact that has perturbed literal-minded fundamentalists and rejoiced equally literal-minded atheists, since there were presumably no people on earth at that time outside of Eden.

5. John Stapleton, né Baskerville, alias Vandeleur (in THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES by Arthur Conan Doyle), whose skill in training the great hound could well be utilized by the Army for its specialized dog units (known colloquially as the K-9 Corps), and who is forever buried "in the heart of the great Grimpen Mire, down in the foul slime of the huge morass which had sucked him in."

6. Thomas Griffiths Wainewright (1794–1847), friend of Lamb and Macready and celebrated by Oscar Wilde in *Pen, Pencil and Poison*, who poisoned (despite his cynical mot) for profit but was never convicted, and who exhibited at the Royal Academy 1821–1825.

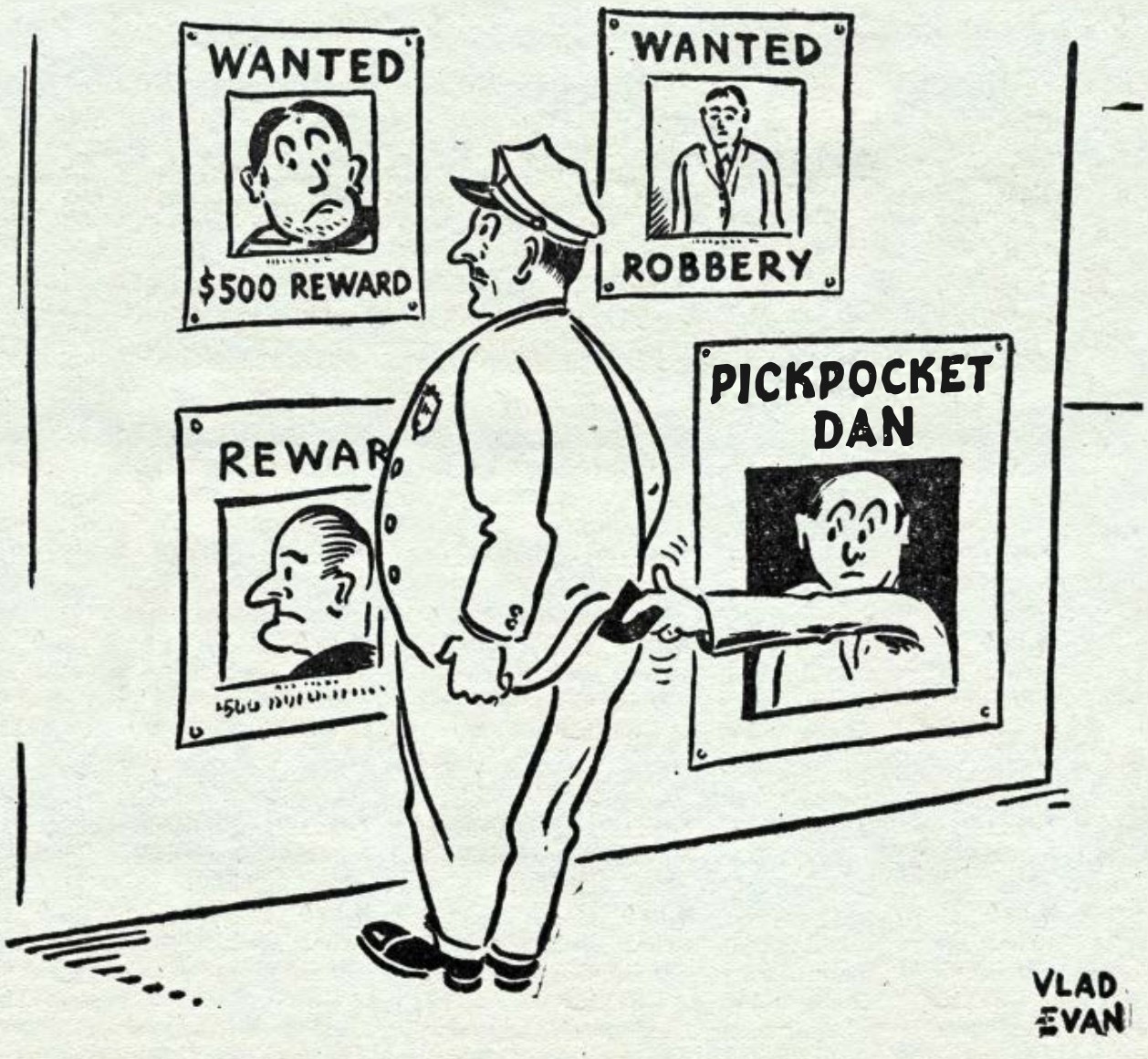
7. Drury Lane (in DRURY LANE'S LAST CASE by Barnaby Ross), the deaf actor-detective who was driven to murder, and then to suicide when his protégée recognized the murder as the work of a deaf man.

8. Ruth Snyder (1895–1928), who with her lover Judd Gray killed her husband in a clumsily complex plot involving among other props a five-pound sash weight, and who was photographed at the very moment of her death in the electric chair by

Thomas Howard of the New York "Daily News."

9. Bruno Richard Hauptmann (1899–1936), whose role in the kidnaping of the Lindbergh child had results as diverse as the so-called "Lindbergh Act" extending Federal jurisdiction over kidnapers, and a Yorkville rally in 1935 at which a group of Nazis ardently booed the name of Lindbergh.

10. The sun (in *The Doomdorf Mystery* from UNCLE ABNER by Melville Davisson Post), who focused his rays through a bottle of corn likker to explode the percussion cap of a fowling piece and destroy an evil man with fire from heaven.



SECOND PRIZE WINNER: BRETT HALLIDAY

According to N. Y. Penal Law, Section 2445, the husband or wife of an accused person is in all cases a competent witness, but neither husband nor wife can be compelled to disclose a confidential communication made by one to the other during their marriage. This rule of evidence does not exist, however, in detective-story law. So, by editorial edict, we now compel Mrs. Brett Halliday, better known to her own appreciative audience as Helen McCloy, to take the stand and disclose confidential opinions about her husband.

"Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?" we ask Mrs. Halliday.

"I do," she replies in her low but firm voice.

"What is your husband's occupation?"

"He is a writer."

"Will you tell the jury which part of your husband's writing is best known?"

"I would say the Michael Shayne stories. They've appeared in magazines, books, movies, and on the radio."

"Do you consider the Michael Shayne stories your husband's best work?"

Mrs. Halliday ponders. Then she replies: "No. I think the Shayne stories are very good of their type, but my husband has written a series of engineering tales which in my opinion are among the finest modern detective short stories."

"That is your considered opinion?"

"Yes, indeed. I have said so in print."

"Will you be good enough to mention the title of one of these engineering stories and tell us what you said about it in print?"

"Well, perhaps the best one was called 'Human Interest Stuff.' It was reprinted by Ellery Queen in his magazine and in one of his anthologies. You see, my husband began his professional life as an engineer and he has retained from his earlier vocation that sense of design which is so important to an engineer and an architect and equally to a writer. In 'Human Interest Stuff' the dénouement accomplishes what too few detective stories do — not only to surprise the reader but also to emphasize the tragic resolution of the conflict between the hunter and the hunted, with the life of one and the integrity of the other at stake. In other words, the

story does not depend for its effect on surprise alone. It is, more importantly, a story of true realism, with that suggestion of a quiet, impersonally brutal fate which one of the first realists, Turgeniev, believed the essence of life itself."

"Does the story have any other significance?"

"Yes, I think it does. When you read a short mystery story like 'Human Interest Stuff,' you can't help wondering if the humble mystery, so neglected by serious critics, may not really be the beginning of a movement back to design in writing. Remember that the serious novel itself began with the reading matter of the people, of the masses."

"Thank you, Mrs. Halliday. Your witness."

But the opposing counsel is wise enough to let well enough alone. He recognizes the truth when he hears it, and waives cross-examination.

Only one further item of evidence need be introduced. Brett Halliday's prize-winning story, "Extradition," is cut of the same cloth out of which the author wove "Human Interest Stuff." Like that story and like "Big Shot" which also appeared in EQMM, "Extradition" represents the sincerest writing that has come from Brett Halliday's fertile typewriter.

EXTRADITION

by BRETT HALLIDAY

I RECOGNIZED him as soon as I saw him sitting there at a rear table in the Juarez barroom. He was not only alone at the small table, but he also gave the impression that he was alone in the crowded room.

I don't know exactly why. Something about the way he sat there drinking *sotol* out of a thick water glass, remote and withdrawn; the arrogant set of his wide shoulders that disdained the shabby clothes he wore; the cheapness of the rotgut he was drinking. It was in the cold, measuring quality of the blue eyes beneath shaggy brows.

They seemed to look through a man, past the confines of the room.

That's what I remember about him now, as I look back on the scene, but at the moment I wasn't very objective about his appearance. All I could think of was that he was alone. I remember thinking that it was destined to be like that with him always, that he had chosen a lonely path for himself so long as he lived.

Murder does set a man apart from his fellow-man.

I recognized him from his picture in the paper. He had strangled a girl named Lola in El Paso the night before, and the American police had a good description of him and were

searching for him through the dark alleys of El Paso while he sat alone across the Border guzzling *sotol* in a Mexican dive.

That was back when extradition was more an empty word than a reality, and a man could leave a lot of fears behind him when he crossed the Rio Grande. But there was some law in Juarez even in those days, and you never could tell when a Mex cop might discover his conscience, or a couple of U. S. dicks might slip over in plain clothes and yank him back without due process of law.

Not that the killing had been important enough to arouse a lot of public indignation. Lola wasn't the sort to get people excited about her murder. Just a crib girl on one of the dim side streets near the river. She'd been living with this guy for months, supporting him with money she earned from other men, and I suppose she finally got tired of it. But she made the mistake of telling him she was through while they were alone, and there was no one to stop him. So he strangled her and took a few dollars from the top of her stocking and beat it across the river before her body was found.

There were pictures of the dead girl in the paper, too. I'd known Lola for a long time, back when she hadn't looked like that, and I'd been nagged all day by memories of her as she'd been then.

But that's something just between Lola and me. Hell, I could remember the time when I was sore enough to kill her myself. Years back, when she first started down toward where she ended. I made a fool of myself that time. Lola had a nasty way of rubbing a man the wrong way.

That's why I felt like I did about her killer sitting there in the saloon with a shoulder-holstered gun bulging his coat, probably without getaway money, and wondering how long Juarez would remain safe for him.

Remembering Lola, I knew I had to get him out of Juarez. The country south of the Border is a tough one without money or a job. I couldn't just step up and offer him either. Not without overplaying my hand and maybe telling him what I knew about Lola and why I was making the offer.

Our train was pulling out at midnight. Just a couple of hours later. I had a feeling I'd regret it all my life if I left him sitting there like that, knowing what I did about the set-up.

Another thing I knew about the guy was the fact that he had once been a construction man. A good one, from all reports. A hightop rigger with all the savvy and nerve that job calls for. But you can't handle skycables and a load of liquor at the same time, so he'd given up the cables.

It gave me a queer feeling way down in my belly to see him sitting there twiddling a water glass of *sotol* in his big, scarred hands, with a gun bulging his coat while he waited for whatever was going to happen. Hands that were muscled and calloused from cable work, and that had choked

the life out of Lola just last night.

I suppose that had something to do with my feeling about him. Construction men have a personal pride in themselves and the men they work with. Maybe it sounds corny, but the real building stiff is like that underneath the hardboiled pose he shows to the world. It's a tough, dangerous profession, and a man doesn't stay in it long unless he has the absolute trust of his coworkers.

Take my gang — the three men drinking at the bar with me that night in Juarez: Larry Wheeler, Benny Arentz, and Walter Drake. We'd been together four years, and there had hardly been a day on any job that one of us hadn't trusted his life to one of the others. Of course, we were a special sort of gang. I guess you'd call us trouble-shooters. Each one of us a specialist in his own line, and together we made a team that could whip any job flung at us.

Sure, that's bragging, but we had a record to brag about. Larry Wheeler was past fifty, stringy as whipcord, bald and sarcastic. He knew more about concrete than Mr. Portland himself. He knew rock and water analysis, when to increase the water content to combat the solvency of aggregates, and tricks with reinforcing steel that let the rest of us forget all about waiting for the stuff to take an initial set.

My rigger was Benny Arentz. He had the shoulders of a Percheron on top of a short, grotesquely thin body. He had long arms, and the shoulder muscles flowed down into them and on to big hands that could reave a six-place block on the end of a steel cable while he hung by his knees from a strut three hundred feet above the ground and whipping thirty degrees each way in a tropical wind.

Benny had come up from the oil fields, and the only thing wrong with him was women. He was ugly enough to have to keep on proving to us and the world that he was irresistible to the ladies. On the job he was all right, but on a city street he was as hard to hold back as a stud horse.

Walter Drake was our powder man. He was a graduate of the Copper Queen in Bisbee, had worked all over the world, and had once lifted fifteen thousand tons of rock off one side of the Khyber Pass and deposited it where they wanted it down the slope. He knew all about rock formation and fissures and faults and bearing strata, and what three and a half sticks of forty percent would do in a drill hole.

Me? I was just the boss. I've got an engineering degree some place, but I managed to forget I had it twenty years ago. With Larry and Walter and Benny doing the work there wasn't much bossing to be done. Every once in a while I got an idea, and generally it worked. More luck than anything else, and I always knew that some day I would run into one that was even too tough for me. Like the one we were headed south to look at when we stopped off in Juarez.

A rush job that had brought us up

in a hurry from one of the Keys off Florida where we were fooling with a little problem of setting up hurricane-proof oil-drilling rigs. It was back in the days before the Elephant Butte dam above El Paso pulled all the flood water out of the Rio Grande, and in the spring the boundary river had a way of swelling to an unmanageable torrent through the big canyon below the Big Bend. There was an International Highway cutting across from Burnsville to Alixican that both Mexico and the United States had been pushing toward the river from both directions, and everything was set for big doings with speeches by both Presidents, and stuff like that, when the two countries were joined by the highway in just a month.

No one knew when the spring floods would come, but when they did it was a cinch there wouldn't be much bridge building across that river until the waters subsided. No one had thought about that, apparently, until just a few days previously, when the water started rising.

Our job was to throw the bridge across before the floods got too high. Maybe in a day. Maybe a week. Or maybe not for a month. It was just chance that we stopped at Juarez between trains — a freak of fate that put us in the saloon for a few drinks that night with Lola's murderer.

Trouble was, Benny was having more than a few drinks. Usually I don't care how much one of my crew puts away, and it wouldn't be smart to say anything about it if I did. But Benny worried me. He'd been away from women a long time and he was beginning to get that look about him. A widening of his nostrils and a deepset glow in his eyes. With a normal guy it wouldn't have mattered. We had two hours till our train left, and two hours would do most men. But not Benny. If he went off the track he might stay off two or three days. I'd picked a saloon for our drinking that didn't cater to women, and I was hoping for the best.

Then it happened.

I saw her push back the swinging doors and walk in. Part Indian, from the tall grace and the free-swinging stride of her. Young and supple and rounded enough to set a man's blood racing, yet old enough to assure him he wouldn't be wasting his time making a play for her. I turned my head and saw Benny looking at her, and his nostrils flared and the glow flamed in his eyes and he set his glass down on the bar slowly.

I put my hand on his forearm and said, "Hold everything, Benny. We're catching a train in just two hours."

I guess he didn't hear me. He didn't give any indication that he did. He was staring past my shoulder toward the girl, and from the look on his face I knew she was giving him the eye. God knows why. There were lots of other men there. But Benny had a way of telegraphing something to a woman like that. His upper lip tightened and twitched upward.

Walter Drake stood on the other

side of Benny, their shoulders touching. He was turned away, saying something to Larry. He must have felt Benny's muscles tense, because he broke off what he was saying and turned to look at the girl.

She took a few steps toward us and Walter switched his gaze to Benny's face. I tightened my fingers on Benny's arm. But Benny pushed away from us toward the girl. Walter shrugged and looked at a clock on the wall. "Still two hours before the train leaves. Maybe . . ."

"Nuts," I said. "You know if Benny goes out that door we won't see him until tomorrow."

Benny and the girl already had their heads together and he was whispering to her. She nodded. Benny turned toward me with a grin.

"I'm going out for a few minutes."

I said, "No, you're not."

He said, "The hell I'm not."

I said, "We've got a job to do. We're catching that midnight train."

"Sure." He tried to be placating. "I'll be back like I said."

People at the bar were watching us, grinning. I saw the killer turn in his chair to listen.

"Nothing doing, Benny," I said. "If you walk out that door you needn't come back."

The grin went off of Benny's face. He said, "If that's the way you want it."

"No, boss." It was Walter Drake. He grabbed my shoulder and spun me around. "You can't let the best rigger in the business go like that. My God! Maybe Benny could even follow us down tomorrow . . ."

I said, "Benny'll never rig another hoist for me if he goes out that door." I turned back to the bar and picked up my drink. My hand was shaking. I heard Benny and the girl walking out of the place together.

Walter and Larry both jumped me. I told them I couldn't help it. If a dame meant more to Benny than sticking on the job, that was all right with me. We were all pretty sore and saying things we didn't mean when a new voice horned in behind us.

It was the guy who had been sitting alone at the table. Lola's murderer. He said, "If you can use a hightop rigger where you're going, I'm it."

We stopped arguing and looked at him. Walter and Larry looked at his cable-scarred hands first. Then at his face. Then at the gun-bulge under his coat. He was a little drunk. Just enough to sway on both feet as he stood there.

I said, "How do I know you're a rigger?"

The man had loose lips. He pulled them away from yellow teeth in a smile, and he looked worse than when I'd first recognized him at the table.

"I can cut it, all right. White Construction for ten years. Top rigger on that big Rio job six years ago. My name is Smith." He held out his hand.

I took it.

Walter Drake said roughly, "You were in Rio on another job six years ago, boss. If this mug was top rigger

for White, you should've run into him."

"I think maybe I did," I said slowly. "Doesn't seem like your name was Smith, though."

"It's Smith now. What's this job all about?"

He pushed up to the bar with us and I gave it to him. I saw Walter looking at me speculatively, and later when the four of us were on the train together heading south, he sat beside me and said:

"I think I got it, boss. You knew Smith was a rigger when you told Benny off. Recognized him from Rio. That's why you took a chance firing Benny. Smith looked like he'd jump at a job."

I said, "Benny needed telling off."

Walter nodded. I was still the boss and it wasn't up to him to tell me how to run my crew. He said, "It's taking a chance, though. Might be some fancy rigging waiting for us this time."

I didn't tell him how big a chance we were taking. The guy was a murderer and I was helping him make a getaway from Juarez where the police might have picked him up any time. I couldn't tell Walter and Larry that. I couldn't tell them about Lola and what had once been between us that caused me to give her killer a chance to escape from Juarez. Me, who always hated a killer.

The job didn't look too tough when we reached the bridge site by truck about noon the next day. The Mexican side of the highway was subgraded all the way up to the jump-off, and there were some tents set up and a temporary field office. The graders and rollers were working half a mile back, with the surfacing pushing up on them.

The spot chosen to jump the Rio Grande was a wide depression in the cliffs that form the river canyon, and you could see it was flooded every year when the water got up. There was an eighteen-foot fill on the south side, and a corresponding fill about eighty-feet across on American soil. The sheer cliffs were limestone, and muddy water was rolling and leaping not more than twenty feet below the edge.

Two cables were strung across with buckets on pulleys and a steam winch on either side to drag men and supplies across. The resident engineer for the American end was waiting for us when we piled out of the truck. He was a mild-looking ginzo of about thirty, with tired eyes and lines of worry on his face. He introduced himself as Harry Blaine, and I liked him right off. I felt sorry for him when he explained that he was from the East and no one had bothered to warn him about the way the river flooded every spring and that was why he'd left the bridgework till the last.

The Mexican engineer was waiting for us outside the field office and took us in to look over the blueprints. He was slim and good-looking, with a little mustache and a lot of cocksureness. His attitude was one of polite

regret about the whole matter, and a disposition to wash his hands of it. He blandly hinted that it was up to us and to fate, and that he planned to stand back on the sidelines.

The bridge design was orthodox. A single-arch span anchored in concrete abutments at each end. The steel was prefabricated and already on the site.

I took the blueprints and went out to see what we could figure out. There was a hot Mexican sun beating down, and the silence of the Border country broken only by the faraway sounds of road construction. My three men had slid off the fill and were grouped at the foot of it on the bank of the river. I went down toward them and saw that grouped wasn't exactly the right word.

Walter Drake and Larry Wheeler were squatting down examining the limestone formation of the river bank. Smith stood alone, about two feet away in actual distance — with us, but not one of us. His hands hung loosely at his sides and his head was lifted and he stared across at the other side. At American soil. Separated from it by eighty feet of muddy water.

I took time off from the problem confronting me to wonder what was in his mind as he looked across the river. He stood solid and immobile, and I couldn't see his face. This was the course he had chosen when he choked the life out of Lola. The wrong side of the river. He could never go back again. I wondered if that bothered him.

I stopped behind Walter and Larry and asked, "How does it look?"

Neither of them looked up. Larry said, "Not bad. Give me four days to get my forms set and I'll start pouring concrete. I don't care what the river does after my abutments and wing-walls get their initial set."

I looked down at the water and then at my blueprints. The profile showed the opposite cliff to be five feet higher than where we stood. I said, "Have we got that long?"

"*Quien sabe.*" Larry spread out his hands and was cheerful about it. "Any other ideas?"

Walter was still studying the rock and the water beneath him. "One of the guys on the truck says he's seen her rise twelve feet in twenty-four hours."

I squatted down beside them. Smith stood in front of us looking across the river. Larry took the blueprints out of my hand and studied them. "Eight days," he said after a moment, "and they can start on the trusswork."

I shook my head. "That's why we're here. To beat the river if she takes a notion to come up fast."

"Eight days," Larry repeated stubbornly. "You've got some bad stresses here. My anchor plates won't hold —"

"I've got a better idea," Drake broke in. He pointed down the side of the cliff. "I'll give you a set of steel braces about twelve feet down. We'll build up from them, grouting into the cliff every two feet. If we've got the steel around to do it with, you can forget your anchor plates and

just throw up wingwalls to protect the fill."

Both of us looked at him and began shaking our heads. Smith acted as if none of this meant anything to him.

"Here's what I mean." Walter grabbed a pencil and began sketching his idea on the print. "Build up braces from twelve feet down—that's all the bearing we need." He paused to study the steel diagram. "Here's stuff we can steal from the truss. These two I-Beams are only extra weight. We burn them off in six-foot lengths—"

"Wait a minute," protested Larry. "How are you going to get into the rocks for anchorage and how—"

"Let me worry about that." Walter was in his stride now. "They've got powder here, and drills. Drop me some scaffolding twelve feet down and give me four hours before the water hits that point. I can stay ahead of it after that."

I said, "You might make it in time. The other side has five feet of elevation, so if we shoot this side first . . ." I stood up, staring across the river. "Let's jump in the bucket and ride across. If it'll work the same on that side, we'll get started."

The three of us went toward the bucket. I turned back and said, "Come on, Smith. We've got to decide this thing fast." Larry and Walter stopped and looked back at us.

Smith turned slowly from the river. "You three go ahead. I'll start rigging a boom for Drake's scaffolding."

"You'll have to check the other side too and get your boom layout started there," I told him impatiently. "No use jumping in on one side unless it's workable from the other."

He shook his head. There was still that remote quietude about him. "I'll save time by booming the whole job from this side."

Larry said, "You're crazy." He looked across the river. "It's at least eighty feet across."

Smith nodded calmly. "I've been figuring my end while you guys were arguing. We passed a five-yard dragline in that last cut. I'll get it here and anchor it to use the boom."

"It's only a fifty-foot boom!" Walter ejaculated.

"Don't you think I know what I'm saying?" Hot anger flared in Smith's eyes and he took a step forward. I was conscious of that gun under his coat. He stopped and went on flatly, "I'm doing the rigging on this job. One of those pines on the hill behind us will extend the boom to handle the other side from here. Don't try to tell me my job."

Walter and Larry looked at me. I said, "Smith's right. It'll be faster if he can handle the whole thing from this side."

Walter looked down at the swift water. He said in a queer voice, "I like to know my rigger when I work above fast water. If a man went into that, his body wouldn't be recovered until it washed up somewhere beyond the other end of the canyon."

A muscle jerked in Smith's face. He said, "If you're afraid of fast

water, you'd better let somebody else do your job." He turned and strode up the fill toward a truck to drive back for the dragline.

The three of us got in the cable bucket and started across to inspect the American side.

Walter Drake said, "I guess you know he's packing a gun under his coat."

"I know a gun-bulge when I see it," I told him.

Larry said quietly, "I've got myself a hunch he feels happier on the south side of the river where the American law can't touch him. That's why he wants to boom the whole thing from the Mexican side."

"Larry's right," Walter said. "Smith's on the dodge. Hell of a guy for the controls of a boom," he added morosely, looking down at the swirling, deadly water beneath our bucket.

"He's our rigger for this job," I reminded them. "No matter what he's done, he's still a construction man. When the chips are down, you can't get the job out of a man's blood. This is tough enough to take any man's mind off his own trouble."

I had to count on that, and I had to make them count on it. No matter what they thought about Smith personally. Time and the flood waters were catching up with us and the job called for teamwork above everything else.

And we got that teamwork. No matter how we felt about Smith, he was a top-hand rigger, and nothing else counted during the next forty-eight hours. A rush job gets hold of you like nothing else in the world. The throbbing pulse of men and machinery against the elements grips a man and puts everything else in the background. You don't sleep and you don't eat and you don't notice the lack of either. It's you against the job, and that's all there is in the whole blasted world.

When dark came on, we set up searchlights on both sides of the rising river, and time ceased to exist. The floodwaters crept upward on the sides of the rock cliffs, snarling and angry at being thwarted by human beings. Smith anchored his big dragline back from the edge and lashed a 60-foot pine trunk to the spidery boom. He used the materials at hand and none of us tested the job. The rigging was up to him and we had our own work to do. He slung his blocks from the end and threaded them, and geared his winch for the extra load, and he had Walter's scaffolds steady against the cliff five feet above the rising water by midnight.

Walter drilled his holes and shot them while I made up his steel the way he wanted it, and before daylight he had the first braces grouted in and was ready for the next set up the cliff.

The water kept rising, but we kept ahead of it. Larry was throwing his forms together out of anything he could get his hands on, and he had a mixer going on both sides by noon of that first day.

Walter Drake rode a hook over the

chasm the first time Smith tried out his improvised boom. I saw Walter swinging across on the end of a cable and I remember only a feeling of pleased surprise at knowing he was ahead of the water on our side and ready to tackle the first set across the river. Smith was in it with us and we were a four-man team doing the impossible again, just as my four-man teams had done in the past. If any of us had wasted time wishing we had Benny, it would have been time we couldn't afford to waste.

We weren't conscious of Smith any more than we were of one another. He was an integral part of the whole, and we couldn't function any other way.

It was noon of the second day when I stopped long enough to realize we'd pulled another one out of the fire. We had the job whipped and could afford to straighten up and look around us. The muddy water was already above the lowest steel braces in the side of the cliff, but a webwork of steel was bolted securely in place on both sides, and you could see the river was conceding defeat. It was turbulent and spiteful, eddying in swift whirlpools and roaring its frustration.

Suddenly the whole scene seemed calmly peaceful to me. Just an ordinary job moving along smoothly, when up to that moment it had been an electrified inferno of activity with success hanging in the balance.

Smith was at the controls of his rudely improvised boom and Walter was finishing up his anchor plates on the Mexican side. Larry had a mixer grinding out concrete into his forms on both sides of the river, and the steel erectors were calmly laying out their stuff for the end trusses. Blaine and the Mexican engineer were conferring together in front of the field office, and they both looked as smugly pleased with themselves as though they had figured out the whole deal.

On the other side of the river — the American side — a couple of well-dressed gents were leaning over the cliff's edge to inspect the work beneath. You could tell they were big shots from the way they acted. Suddenly something went wrong with a block at the end of Smith's tree-trunk boom and there was a snarl of cable up there as he tried to lift a piece of steel to swing it across the river.

It looked like a bad tangle from where I stood, and I started down to the winch to take the control for him if he had to go up the boom to straighten it out.

I stopped before I'd gone very far. I hadn't paid much attention to Smith's end of things during the past forty-eight hours and during that time he'd found a workman who could push the winch while he handled the rigging. A feeling of pleasure went through me at this evidence of the thorough way Smith had taken hold and put everything out of his mind except getting the work done. Some riggers I've known wouldn't have thought of a small detail like that, wouldn't have bothered to train a winchman during the stress Smith

had been under, but it's just those small details that differentiate a real craftsman from those who don't quite succeed.

Smith left the workman at the winch and went hand over hand up the steep-sloping steel boom. I watched his big body snake upward and out over the river to the end of steel and then up the roughly trimmed trunk of the pine extension.

I walked on down to the edge of the river while he hung on at the top with one hand and worked at the twisted cables with the other. One of the big shots on the American side looked up and recognized me and I knew I'd have to go over and make my report to them in person. Well, the job was under control and I was ready to make my report. I nodded and waved that I'd be over, but the cable buckets were busy and I had to wait my turn.

Smith got the tangle loosened and signaled the winchman to take up the slack easy while he stepped down to a support on the boom and waited to see that it didn't snarl again.

A twenty-foot piece of steel was slung on the end of the cable ready for hoisting, and it was on the bank behind me. I saw the cable tighten easily and the steel slide toward the edge.

I stepped onto the steel and grabbed the cable for a ride across. My responsibility was ended and I wanted to turn the whole thing over to someone else and get some sleep.

The steel beam slid off the bank smoothly and out over the water. The winchman lifted it a few feet as we swung so it would clear the higher bank on the other side. I glanced up and waved at Smith riding the end of the boom above me — it looked like a goodwill gesture to thank him for the part he'd played in filling up my gang and helping me out of a tight spot.

I was half-doped with weariness and lack of sleep, and as I waved, I shifted my weight just enough to unbalance the beam in its sling.

When a two-ton beam starts slipping, you don't readjust it by shifting your weight back. One end of it lifted up and I started riding the other end down toward the water. My one-hand grip on the cable wrenched loose and things happened fast. We were near enough to the American bank so that I could jump for the steel framework jutting out from the cliff.

I went into the roaring water, and as I hit, I remembered the remark Walter had made two days previously about a man's body being washed up at the other end of the canyon, miles below us, if he ever went into that fast water.

I was sucked under like a floating chip, and then heaved up and slammed on my right side against the steel I'd reached for. I got a left-hand grip, but the current was tearing at me and I knew I wouldn't last long. My right arm hung limp and I couldn't let go to grab the rope let down from above or the sling on the end of the cable which the winchman had let down for

me when he saw what had happened.

There were people leaning over the edge above me shouting for me to hang on until they could let down a rope, but none of them seemed to realize that my right arm had been smashed and was useless.

None of them except Smith who was perched high above me on the boom. Looking straight down, maybe his perspective was better. Anyhow, he caught on at once and he acted with the hair-trigger speed that drives a man instinctively at a time like that.

He swung out from the boom and caught the swinging cable and came down it toward me. I saw him coming and I wasn't surprised to see a killer risking his life to save mine. I knew that's the way construction men are built. They get that way working together on jobs where death is everywhere.

He hit the water beside me and got the sling between my legs and signaled the winchman. We went up with a jerk and swung out over dry land and the cable set us down gently together on American soil.

We were surrounded before we got untangled, and the two well-dressed gents had hold of Smith before he could reach the gun under his wet coat. They flashed Ranger badges on him and took him away quietly. Back to El Paso to stand trial for strangling Lola.

Larry and Walter couldn't get over how queer it was the way everything happened so opportunely. They wondered how a guy like me could so far forget himself as to shift his weight on a delicately balanced steel beam while riding it across the river, and they thought my right arm healed mighty quick after having been hurt so badly that it was useless while I was in the water.

I never explained those things to them, nor how the Texas Rangers happened to be on hand when Smith came back to the American side. A repentant Benny Arentz was waiting to go on the next job with us when we got back to headquarters, and I don't think any of the three men needed to know that I had intentionally shuffled Benny aside that night in Juarez so we could take a killer along with us as rigger in his place.

There were still other jobs to be done, and a boss isn't much good if his men begin to lose faith in him.

I think they might have understood and forgiven my deception if I'd told them the whole truth, but somehow that was part of the past I wanted to forget. I've always felt I was a poor brother to Lola, and it was partly my fault, I guess, that she ended up in an El Paso crib.

—Continued from back cover

Imagine! ALL 3 BOOKS FREE! Full-Size Publishers' Editions. A $7.00 Value

Why Does the Detective Book Club Make This Unusual Offer?

THESE three top-flight, full-length mystery novels are the VERY LATEST books by three great mystery "aces"—ERLE STANLEY GARDNER, LESLIE FORD, and CORNELL WOOLRICH. These books are selling right now for a total price of $7.00—but you may have them ALL FREE as a membership gift from the Detective Book Club!

Good books? Good authors? They just don't come any better. And now you can have all 3 FREE—as a membership gift from the Detective Book Club. We make this astounding offer to introduce you to the many advantages of the Club.

How This Club Brings You The Best NEW Mysteries

About 300 new detective books are published every year. You can't read them all. It's hard to find the best. But a mystery by Erle Stanley Gardner, Leslie Ford, Agatha Christie, Cornell Woolrich, Ellery Queen, Mignon G. Eberhart, or Carter Dickson is *sure* to be good. ALL OF THESE, and many other famous writers, have had their books selected by the Detective Book Club. Many are members of the Club themselves

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get three of them in one handsome volume (*at least* a $6.00 value) for only $1.89! You do not have to take a volume every month—you may accept as few as four during the whole year.

You Enjoy These Five Advantages

(1) Every month you are offered the cream of the finest brand-new detective books—bybest authors. (2) You save two-thirds the usual cost. (3) You do NOT have to accept every monthly selection. (4) Your books are fresh, unopened—delivered right to your door. (5) Your volumes are so well printed and bound that they will grow into an attractive lifetime library.

Mail Postcard NOW For Your 3 Free Books

Accept your FREE copies of these three top-flight mysteries NOW! Your acceptance of these books, as a membership gift from the Club, will not obligate you to take every month's three-in-one selection. You may take as few as four triple-volumes each year. You may cancel your membership whenever you wish. A description of the next month's selections will be sent to you with each month's triple-volume and you may reject in advance any volume you do not want.

SEND NO MONEY! Simply mail postcard promptly and receive your THREE membership gift books FREE—and receive, also, the current triple-volume containing three complete new detective books! Mail postcard NOW to:

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

One Park Avenue, New York 16, New York

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR THREE FREE BOOKS

●

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

FREE—Three Brand-New Mystery Novels

19

Walter J. Black, President KL

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

One Park Avenue, New York 16, N.Y.

Please enroll me as a member and send me, FREE, in regular publishers' editions, the THREE new, full-length mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition, send me the current triple-volume of the month, which contains three complete, new detective books.

This does not obligate me to take every monthly triple-volume during the next 12 months. I may take as few as four during this period, if I so wish.

I will receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and may reject in advance any volume I do not wish to own. I need send no money now, but for each volume I do accept I will send only $1.89, plus few cents mailing charges, as complete payment within one week after I receive it. *(Books shipped in U.S.A. only.)*

MR.
MRS.
MISS } _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ Zone No (if any) _____ STATE _____

CORNELL WOOLRICH

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

LESLIE FORD

Free! 3 BRAND-NEW MYSTERY NOVELS!

TO NEW MEMBERS

FREE!—THREE new mystery novels by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER, LESLIE FORD, and CORNELL WOOLRICH! These are their *very latest books*, absolutely complete—3 baffling classics of crime by three masters of mystery! Each of these books is selling right now at $2.50 or $2.00. But all 3 are yours FREE—as a membership gift from the Detective Book Club!

1

The Newest Chiller by

CORNELL WOOLRICH

RENDEZVOUS IN BLACK

THIS killer ALWAYS struck on May 31st—just after midnight! The *time* was always the same. Only the *method* was different. In 1941, it was "Death By Lockjaw"—only it was *not* accidental. In 1942, Victim No. 2 was strangled. In 1943, the police entered the word "Shooting" on *two* death certificates. In 1944, the victim was left unguarded for a few minutes—and became No. 5!

2

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER'S

NEWEST *Perry Mason* MYSTERY

THE CASE OF THE VAGABOND VIRGIN

IT ALL STARTS when you "pick up" beautiful Veronica Dale. First, vagrancy; then blackmail, and finally—you're facing the D.A. on a MURDER charge! And the gun is traced to YOU!

The noose is almost around your neck. Then Mason (now your lawyer) asks Veronica one little question . . . but it's big enough to break the case!

3

The Newest Puzzler by

LESLIE FORD

THE DEVIL'S STRONGHOLD

YOU hear that your son is again over a Hollywood glamour girl. So you rush out there. You get threatening letters. Then a girl walks into your room. Ten minutes later she is found . . . murdered! *And you were the last person seen with her!*

Even Colonel Primrose isn't fast enough to stop ANOTHER MURDER! Yet, his solution is so amazing that everybody is left gasping—including the KILLER!

Continued on inside cover

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT No. 7
(Sec. 510, P L & R)
New York, N. Y.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD

No Postage Stamp Necessary if Mailed in the United States

4c POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

ONE PARK AVENUE

NEW YORK 16, N. Y.

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW

•

NO STAMP REQUIRED