ELLERY QUEEN'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

25 ¢

SEPTEMBER 1942

THE MALLET	*James Hilton*
SUSPECT UNKNOWN	*Courtney Ryley Cooper*
ACCORDING TO THE EVIDENCE	*Hugh Pendexter*
THE UNRECKONABLE FACTOR	*Samuel Hopkins Adams*
THE MOUSE'S BLOOD	*Ellery Queen*
THE MAN NEXT DOOR	*Edgar Wallace*
SCREWBALL DIVISION	*Anthony Boucher*
THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE CHIEF	*Lincoln Steffens*
TREMENDOUS ADVENTURES OF MAJOR BROWN	*G. K. Chesterton*

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

PUBLISHER

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK

EDITOR

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VOL. 3 NO. 4 *SEPTEMBER 1942*

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A new short story by the creator of Mr. Chips and the author of "Lost Horizon" is an event — a new detective short story by James Hilton is even more so, since Mr. Hilton's work in this field is virtually unknown to the general public. . . . "The Mallet" has never before been published in America.

THE MALLET

by JAMES HILTON

"FEEL the revivifying forces of youth coursing through your veins — see the pink flush of health in your cheeks when you catch sight of yourself in the bedroom mirror first thing in the morning — no more aches and pains — no more vague feelings of depression — no more hard-earned money thrown away on doctors and quack medicines! For this, ladies and gentlemen, is *not* a quack medicine, nor is it a drug — it is Nature's Peerless Herbal Remedy, discovered by myself and prepared after a lifetime of trial and experiment! No other man in the world has the secret of it — no other man in the world can offer you the key of this wonderful gateway to Health, Strength, and Life! One shilling a box I ask you — no, I'll be even more generous than that — ninepence a box! Ninepence, ladies and gentlemen. . . . Is there any private doctor in this town who would charge you less than half-a-crown for a bottle of his worthless coloured water? . . . See — I'll tell you what I'll do — it's a special offer and I'll never make it again as long as I live — sixpence! *Sixpence!* . . . Who's going to be the first? . . . Thank you, sir. Two shillings? Thank you — here's your box and here's your one-and-six change. Are you satisfied? . . . That's right. You're quite sure you're satisfied? . . . Good. Then permit me to give you your sixpence back as well. Take this little box of Concentrated Health, my dear sir, as a gift from me to the most sensible person in this crowd . . . now, ladies and gentlemen, who's going to be the next? . . . Thank you, madam. . . ."

The loud, far-carrying voice of the cheap-jack echoed across the market square of the little northern town of Finchingfold. The parish clock showed ten minutes to nine; at nine, by order of the municipal authorities, he would have to pack up. Six times already he had gone through his well-worn patter about the marvellous Life-Giving Herb he had discovered years before on the banks of the Orinoco River, in South America. Captured by a fierce

tribe of Indians and left by them to die of malaria, he had managed to crawl a few hundred yards into the trackless forest and there had caught sight of a curious unknown plant. Its pleasant aroma had tempted him to taste it, and lo! — within a quarter of an hour the fever had left him and he was a New Man! Prudently gathering an armful of the precious herb, he had escaped with great difficulty to civilization, there to complete his life work by manufacturing the herb in pill form and selling it in the market places of England.

The story went well as a rule; nor had it ever gone better than in Finchingfold on that warm Saturday in July. Was it that the folk of Finchingfold were more than usually "run down" after a broiling week in workshop and factory; or was it that he himself had been particularly eloquent? He could not make up his mind, but the fact remained — and an exceedingly pleasant one — that he had already sold no fewer than ninety-seven boxes that afternoon and evening. Ninety-seven sixpences — two pounds eight-and-six. Cost of boxes, wrappings and pills — say five shillings. Market fee — one shilling. Net profit — two pounds two-and-six. Not bad at all — oh, decidedly not bad.

Doctor Parker Potterson was therefore in a thundering good humour after his day's labour. His face beamed with joviality as he exchanged his last dozen boxes for the sixpences of the crowd. They were just the sort of people he liked best — quiet, respectable working men and their wives, a few farm labourers from the neighbouring countryside, perhaps a sprinkling, too, of better class artisans. Sometimes in the bigger towns there were hooligans who tried to make trouble, or even that far greater nuisance — the "superior" person, often a doctor, who asked awkward questions. But Finchingfold seemed full of exactly the right kind. And that quiet little fellow in the front row who had been the first to buy in the final round — he was just the kind to whom it paid to be generous. Most likely he would find that the pills did him a world of good, and for the next few months would be busily advertising Doctor Parker Potterson's Peerless Herbal Remedy at home, at the workshop, and amongst his friends. Yes, undoubtedly, he was well worth his free box.

By the time that the church clock began the chiming of the hour, Potterson had actually sold out — an event that had happened only once or twice before in his entire experience. He hummed cheerfully to himself as he packed his various impedimenta into the small bag. A stethoscope, a highly-coloured chart of the human body, a fragment of the Life-Giving Herb in

its natural state — it was quite easy to transport. Feeling about in his pocket he abstracted another herb, which perhaps in his heart he felt even to be more life-giving; he lit it and puffed with satisfaction. Ah, Life was good. A pocketful of sixpences, a fine cigar, the cool twilight of a summer's day — what could add to the sweetness of such a mixture? Only one thing, and as he thought of it, he licked his lips in anticipation.

Doctor Parker Potterson was a conspicuous figure as he threaded his way amongst the market crowds towards the *Crown and Woolpack*. To begin with, he was attired in a top-hat and a frock-coat — a costume that is not greatly in favour with Finchingfold on market day. But, apart from that, he was (and well he knew it) a man who would always command attention wherever he went. He was six foot three in height, and correspondingly broad; he really made a splendid advertisement for his Peerless Herbal Pills, which he consumed in public at the rate of a dozen or so a day. Fortunately they were quite harmless. His eyes were a bright and scintillating blue — the kind that rarely failed to fascinate a woman — and his complexion, tanned by years of open-air life, was all that a health vendor could desire.

The private bar of the *Crown and Woolpack* seemed smaller and more thronged than ever when Potterson's huge figure stepped in through the swing doors. Instinctively people made way for him as he approached the counter — instinctively people always had made way for him. He was well known, of course; George, the bartender, knew what he liked and had it ready for him without waiting for an order. "Warm night, George," he said, enjoying the first exquisite sip of the long-anticipated "double." His deep baritone carried perfectly across the room full of loud conversation. " 'Evening, boys," he added, nodding to the room in general, and a confused murmur of salutations returned to him. Everybody was staring at him, thinking about him, admiring him — and suddenly, as he glanced over the top of his glass, he perceived that among the admirers was an extraordinarily pretty young woman.

Now Potterson was extremely susceptible to pretty young women, and to exercise his charm over them was the keenest of all his vanities. Wherefore, with a deliberation and a confidence born of long practice, he smiled at her.

Faintly, yet with undeniable encouragement, she smiled back. His spirits rose even higher. She found him irresistible, of course, as all women did. But, by Jove, she *was* a good-looker — red-lipped, dark-eyed, oval-faced — an absolute beauty. From her dress and manner and the hand that rested on

the edge of the counter, he reckoned to size her up unerringly . . . working-class woman — not been married long — husband in a poor job — consequently kept short of money — consequently discontented, rebellious, eager to snatch at what life had denied her. . . . Ay, how well he knew the type, and how well he had profited by its existence!

"Thirsty weather," he remarked, looking down at her.

"Too thirsty for me," she answered, perhaps a shade crossly. Her voice, he noted, was pleasantly musical.

"Too thirsty, eh? Well, you're in the right place for that, anyway."

"Yes, if my old man would only buy me another drink."

"And won't he?"

"Not 'im. He's scared of me getting drunk. Now, I ask you, *do* I look like a woman who would get drunk?"

He wondered if she were slightly drunk already. But he replied, rather hoping she were, "Of course you don't. And have another drink with me if your fellow's too mean to give you one."

He had spoken loudly, and the crowd, as he had intended, overheard and began to titter. He liked them to be spectators of his prowess with a woman. In less than a minute he had reached that stage of jeering with her about her husband! Smart work, that!

"Ssh," she whispered, mockingly. "He might hear you, and then he'd knock you down for sayin' that! Better take care, young man!" Across the counter she snapped, "Mine's a gin, George."

The crowd's titter became a gathering roar of laughter, and suddenly Potterson glimpsed the reason for it. The woman's husband was actually standing beside her! Oh, this was really rich — something he would think of and enjoy in retrospect many a time afterwards! A little under-sized hollow-chested man, pale and careworn, shabbily dressed — the sort that is born to say "Sir" to everybody. Then it occurred to him that he had seen the face somewhere before — why — heavens, yes — he was the man to whom he had given the pills that very night, not a quarter of an hour before! What a joke! And how on earth had he managed to net such a splendid creature as that woman? Ah, but life — and especially life as he knew it — was full of such mysteries. . . .

The situation, however, added full spice to his enjoyment. He always took a keen pleasure in emphasising his own power in front of others who lacked it, and nothing gratified him more than to flirt with a pretty woman

before the very eyes of a husband who had not the nerve to object. It made him feel "big."

To the little man he said, with patronizing condescension: "Too bad, my good man, to make myself known to your wife without your permission — but then, that's your fault for having such a darned pretty wife! Somebody'll steal her from you some day, you bet — especially if you don't give her what she asks for. Anyhow you'll join us both in a drink, won't you?"

The man smiled sheepishly (how well Potterson knew his type also), and said he would have a "bitter."

Potterson went on, taking care that all the bar should hear: "Your wife was warning me about you just now — told me I'd better be careful or you'd knock me down. Glad to see you don't intend to, after all. I should hate to be knocked down."

Again the man smiled sheepishly. The crowd laughed in derision, and even the woman could not forbear a titter at her husband's expense. "I won't let him," she said, with mock pity in her voice. "He's a real tiger when he's roused — you'd never believe . . . Ain't you, Bert?" she added, sipping her gin.

"Don't give in to him," said Potterson, keeping up the banter. "He's a terrible fighter, I can see, but you'll win in the end, if you tackle him the right way. Fight and win is my motto in this world." He relapsed a little into his market-place manner. "If you want health, get it — it's there for you to have. If you want wealth — same thing — fight and win it! If you want to talk to a pretty woman in a pub — well, there's no reason why you shouldn't, is there?"

The woman giggled delightfully.

"Have another drink with me, my dear," resumed Potterson, well pleased with his rate of progress. "George, another gin for the lady and another double for me. And this gentleman will take another bitter, I daresay. . . . Yes, after a fairly adventurous life all over the world I think I can claim that I've won pretty nearly all I ever wanted to win. I'm not grumbling. Life's a grand thing when you can say that."

"But a rotten thing when you can't," put in a man's voice from the crowd.

Potterson heard and welcomed the interruption, it made him more the centre of attention than ever. "But you *can*, sir!" he thundered, fixing the crowd in general with his carefully-practised Napoleonic stare. "To a man who has red blood in his veins, life is bursting with prizes ripe for capture!"

(One of his stock phrases, that was.) "You want something — very well, if you're a man — a *Man* in the fullest sense of the word — you get it! Fight for it, if need be — but get it — that's the main thing! Why, if I were to tell you half the things that have happened in my own life —" He drained his tumbler at a gulp, and through the glass he saw the little man looking up at him eagerly, evidently contemplating some remark. "Yes?" he said encouragingly, as a schoolmaster might interrogate a small child.

"Mister," began the man, with obvious shyness and embarrassment. His voice lacked even the semblance of refinement that his wife's had. "Mister, you'll excuse me makin' bold to ask you a question — but what you says interests me a good deal. Now, I'm a bit of a readin' man — in my spare time, o' course — and I've heard about the philosophy of that German fellow Nitsky — or whatever 'is name is —"

Potterson's lip curled. Again he recognized the type — one of those down-at-heels fellows you found in public libraries poring over queer books. "Nitsky my foot!" he cried, winking boldly at the woman. "Never heard of the chap and don't want to. *I* have my own philosophy — my own rules of life — just as I have my own rules of health. And my own are quite good enough for me."

"But Nitsky says —"

"To hell with what Nitsky says. Look here, my good man, it's not a bit of use your stuffing me with the damfool nonsense of some damned foreigner. What *I* want — and what I'll listen to with pleasure — are your own ideas, if you've got any."

The man flushed under the brutality of the sarcasm. "Well, sir," he resumed, respectfully, "if you'll let me put it in my own way, mebbe I can explain. It seems to me — not being an eddicated man, o' course — but it seems to me that it ain't much use expectin' to get everythin' in this world."

"And why not?"

"Because there ain't enough of everythin' to go round."

"There's enough for you, my man, if you go in and get it!"

"But some other fellow may get it first."

"Then take it off him."

"Fight 'im, you mean, mister?"

Potterson roared as he might have done across a market place. The *naïveté* of the little fellow went to his brain as intoxicatingly as the whisky; never had he met a more perfect foil to his own self-conceit. "Yes, my good fellow,

fight him! Most things worth having have to be fought for! Lord, when I look back and think of the fights I've had —"

"You, mister?"

"Well, do you think I've never had to put up my fists to a man? *Look!*" With a sweeping gesture he rolled up his sleeve and bared his arm above the elbow. "Look at that muscle, sir! *Feel* it! Hard as iron, eh? It's years since my real fighting days, but I'll wager tonight I could kill a man with one blow of this arm of mine if I was driven to it!"

He could feel the woman's admiration on him like a warm glow; how she must contrast his splendid strength and virility with the spongy weakness of her little whelp of a husband! With her eyes so eagerly looking upwards to him, and the whisky fumes pleasantly simmering in his head, he felt a veritable Superman. Was he not a Superman? Could he not dominate a whole multitude by the magic of his voice and personality? Was not this very ordinary little public-house crowd hanging upon his every word? His heart swelled with pride; he would show them all what sort of a fellow he was. "Drinks all round on me, George," he cried, loudly, and gloried in the respectful murmur of thanks that followed. How easy it was to handle these people! A loud voice and a free drink — or a free box of pills, for that matter — and they were his entirely. . . .

"*Kill?*" he heard the woman whisper, and the awe with which she spoke the word gave him the most rapturous sensation of power. "Guess I wouldn't like to quarrel with you, then, young feller."

He liked the way she called him "young feller"; he was fifty-seven and his hair beneath the dye was an already silvering grey. He laughed loudly and put his huge hand on her shoulder — it always marked a stage when you first touched a woman. And she winced, too — how delightful that was! "My dear, you never need have any fear of me. Never in my life have I raised my hand to a woman. But, by God, if it was a man I was up against ——"

"What would you do?" she breathed in an eager whisper, her dark eyes smouldering.

"*Do?*" He took a gulp of whisky to gain inspiration. "What would I do? I think I'd better not tell you, m'dear. Not nice for a lady to know about."

Suddenly her attitude changed. She began to laugh at him — mockingly — as formerly she had laughed at her husband. She was drunk, of course — quite drunk. "Go on, young feller — but I don't believe you! You can brag about all you *would* do all right — so can anybody. But I'll bet you never

have done anything!"

"Haven't I?" He leered down at her with a sharp half-angry light in his eyes. He could not endure to be jeered at — but she looked damnably pretty over it, he had to admit. God — she was a fine little creature. If only . . . But he had to nerve himself for the mental effort of answering her. "That shows how little you know of me," he said. "I'm not a boaster. I don't go round telling everybody what I've done. I've done things, as a matter of fact, that nobody *would* believe."

"An' I'm not surprised, either. We ain't all fools, even if we do buy your sugar-and-soap pills!"

He was angry then — furiously angry, and the crowd's laugh, for the first time directed against himself, stung him in his weakest spot. "My good woman," he said, carefully controlling himself. "Like all women, you're damned unreasonable. You want to know too much. Nevertheless, I'll tell you — if you want to know, and if you don't believe it, I can't help it — it's the truth, anyway. I've not lived the life of a lounge-lizard. I've seen the world. I've lived with the raw, naked elementals of life." (Another of his stock phrases.) "I've had to fight. I've had to kill. Up the Orinoco River, when I was attacked by Indians with poisoned darts, I put three of them to sleep with my bare fists and nothing else!"

"Oh, out there — that don't count. Anythin' can happen in them sort o' places. It's over here that matters to most of us. An' if you was to kill a man in England with nothin' but your bare fists, you'd be copped by the police the next day and sent to swing within three months."

"Perhaps," he answered cautiously. "Perhaps not." He was glad that the little man was preparing for another of his plaintive interventions. He heard him say: "She's right, mister — if you don't mind me sayin' so. A feller with your strength might easily kill a chap, but the trouble begins arterwards when the cops are out agin you."

So the little man was turning on him, too? Ah, well, he knew how to deal with *him*. A little heavy sarcasm. "Cops, eh? So you're afraid of *them*, are you?"

"I daresay I might be, mister, if I'd done a murder."

"Murder! *Murder?* Who in the name of ten thousand devils was talking about murder?" For the moment his heart stopped beating — then raced on faster than ever as his brain came to the rescue. Murder? . . . Very well, if they wanted to talk about it, *he'd* show them. He said, with studied insolence

in voice and manner, "Oh, you *would* be afraid, naturally, whether you'd done a murder or not. You were born that way."

He waited for the general laugh and then continued, gathering impetus: "But let me tell you, sir, that the Man who is sure of Himself — the Man, that is, who is a Man in the fullest sense of the word" (he had used that phrase before, but no matter) — "that Man, I say, is not afraid of the police or of anything or anybody in the whole world!" He paused impressively, enjoying the echoes of his voice.

"You mean, mister, that a man oughter be able to do a murder an' not be found out?"

"I mean, sir, that a man ought to be Successful. That's my creed — my rule of life. If he commits murder, it ought to be a successful murder. And the successful murder isn't found out."

"You think it possible, then, mister?"

"Possible? Of course it's possible. Everything in this world is possible to the Man who knows his job. What do you suppose happens when a fellow pulls off a really well-planned affair?"

"You think the police don't get him?"

"My good man, the police aren't even called in. Nobody dreams of 'em. The Verdict is Accident, maybe, or perhaps even Suicide. I tell you, sir, the battle is half lost when the word murder is first mentioned."

"'Alf *lost?* You mean 'alf *won*, mister?"

"*Won?* No — lost, of course. Oh, well, looking at it from the police point of view, naturally . . . " He signalled for another drink. "Bah — the police — what are they? They ain't got an idea in their heads, most of 'em."

"Ah, but mister, they gets 'old of ideas, some'ow. It's a queer thing, the way they gets 'old of clues an' things. Now my cousin's brother-in-law's at Scotland Yard, and *'e* tells me some o' the things that goes on."

"And you believe him, of course. You *would*. Naturally what a policeman says about himself is very pleasant to hear. But all the time they know — they all know from experience — that the well-planned crime is *never* found out!"

He stopped, rather wondering what he had been talking about. He was being pretty eloquent, anyhow — he could see how closely he had seized on the attention of the whole room. Ah, yes, the question of crime and being found out — funny sort of argument to have, but taproom conversations did lead up to queer things. He took a gulp of neat whisky and added, "Yes,

sir, there are men walking the streets of this country to-day, respected and worthy citizens, who, if the truth were known, would be queuing up for the scaffold. If the truth were known, mark you. But it isn't. And it never will be. The affair was well planned."

"Though they say, mister, that somethin' always gives you away."

"Not if you've a ha'porth of brains," he snapped, contemptuously. "Of course, if you haven't, you'd better lead a respectable life." He laughed loudly and finished his glass. Strange how he had been driven to lecture a bar-parlour on such a topic! "Same again, George," he muttered.

The woman was smiling at him provokingly. "Seems to me, then, young fellow, that if I ever want to kill anybody I'd better come to you for advice?"

She was still half-mocking him, but he could see the light of admiration winning through again. It exhilarated him, made him want to renew his conquest to the full. "Well, m'dear, it's not for me to say — but I guess I can give most people good advice about most things."

"Still," continued the little man, with naïve seriousness, "I don't think I'd ever kill anybody, even if I knew 'ow. Not that there ain't some folks as deserve to be put out. My brother, f'rinstance. Lives up at Millport in a swell 'ouse — servants, motor-cars — all that. Rollin' in money — did me out o' my share when my father died. Made 'is fortune doing other people since — wouldn't gimme a penny, not if I was starvin', 'e wouldn't. Sometimes I sees 'im at the station of an evenin' — 'e 'as a factory 'ere — I sees 'im steppin' into 'is first-class kerridge on the Millport train — and I could kill 'im with my own 'ands, straight, I could."

Potterson stared at him with a certain interest; it was extraordinary that such a mild little fellow should nourish such a hatred. Hardly what one would expect — hardly even what he, Potterson, the student of human nature, would have expected. "Well, why don't you kill him?" he said, with a wink at the crowd.

"I ain't got the courage, that I 'aven't," replied the other. His frankness was so amusing. Potterson began to struggle with whiskified laughter. "Besides, mister, come to think of it, I dunno as there'd be any way. 'E's so scared of burglars nobody'd ever get in 'is 'ouse."

"Better kill him in the street, then," said Potterson, almost hysterically. Really, the fellow was as good as a music-hall.

"No, mister — that wouldn't do, either, with everybody lookin' on."

"Oh, don't — don't," Potterson cried, holding his sides with merriment.

"Oh, Lord — you make me laugh more than I've laughed for months! I think I know now why your wife married you — she thought you were the damn funniest thing she'd ever seen!" He laughed till the tears streamed from his eyes and mingled with the perspiration on his nose and cheeks. "Besides," he added, pulling himself together, "you're wrong. There *is* a way. There always is."

"No, mister. Not with 'im. Even you couldn't find one."

"Couldn't I?" Reaction, after the hysteria of laughing so much, gave him a tone that was curt and almost angry. "Couldn't I, my little fellow? Don't you be too sure what I could do and couldn't do!"

He felt the woman's hand on his arm like a bar of fire — another stage, when the woman first did the touching. "I suppose you think you could, eh?" she whispered.

"M'dear" — he began, thickly; he wondered if he might dare to put an encircling arm round her waist. He was almost doing so when she turned on him fiercely, "None of that!" What a little spitfire she was! Hopelessly drunk, of course. . . . He heard her continuing, "All talk — brag — boast — no proof — that's the sort he is!"

One or two of the crowd tittered and chuckled; he felt a dull angry flush mounting to his cheeks and stabbing his eyes from the inside. Making fun of him, was she? He'd show her — and the rest, too. "Look here!" he shouted, moving as if to take off his coat. "If there's any man here who thinks I'm nothing but a boaster, let him come up and tell me so — man to man! And if there's any woman thinks so, let her keep her damned mouth shut!"

"Rot!" retorted the woman. "I dare you to prove what you say. You say there was always a way of killin' a chap if you wanted to. Well, to prove that, you gotter take a test case. Take my 'usband's brother — 'e'll do as good as any. 'Ow would you work the trick with 'im?"

He felt the crowd veering away from him in sympathy — a thing he could never endure. "Aye, that's a fair question," he heard someone say. Other voices came to his ears — eager, critical, derisive voices. And at the same time, looking down at the woman's face so close to his own, he was filled with an overmastering, intolerable longing to subdue her, to justify himself before her, to make himself forever memorable in her life. She was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. That woman at Portsmouth — nothing to her. Nor the little French girl. Nor even Maudie Raines — Maudie who years before had driven him to such madness that . . .

"Same again, George," he muttered. Then he gritted his teeth and fortified himself for a new struggle. "You're a fine pack of fools," he cried irritably at last. "How the hell can I tell what the best plan would be when I don't know the man or his ways or anything about him?"

"I'll tell you," whispered the woman. "I'll answer anything you want to know about 'im."

Her eyes, lustrous and burning, seemed to swim into his seething brain. *She* would tell him. Could it be that she *wanted* him to succeed before her husband, before the crowd? Was she on his side? Extraordinary — there was something in her eyes — in the way she looked at him — that reminded him of Maudie Raines. . . . He began to speak loudly, in something of his market-place manner, yet with greater emphasis than he usually employed. "Ladies and gentlemen," he cried, "I accept the challenge. I'm a man of my word and I mean every single word that I say. No nonsense about Parker Potterson. He's straight — he delivers the goods. Mind you — in my opinion, this is an entirely abshurd — absurd argument — discussing how to kill a man who is living a few miles away at this preshent moment — and who, despite our friend here, is probably a very decent and respectable member of the community. It is, I repeat, an absurd business altogether — and, if I may say so, in very bad taste. It was that, and that alone, that made me reluctant at first to enter into it. But" — and here his voice acquired a rich cathedral tone — "but having had my word doubted, ladish — ladies and gentlemen — having had foul ashpershions cast upon my good faith — what can I do but take up the challenge, good tashte or bad tashte?"

"Get to the point, mister," cried a voice in the crowd, and Potterson turned upon it savagely. "I'll get to the point in *my* time, shir, and not in yours! And if you dare to interrupt me again I'll knock your damned head off!"

He paused to appreciate the silence; but, by God, he was getting them — calming them — thrilling them with his words — how marvellous it was to be able to do that! The old sense of power was on him again, but more than ever before — more than ever before in his life; a Berserker fierceness hammered at his temples. *He* would show them — never in Finchingfold would that night at the *Crown and Woolpack* be forgotten. "Ladies and gentlemen — where wash I? Ah, I remember. . . . Thish gentleman — unknown to me — who lives at Millport. . . . Very well, I accept the challenge. But" — and he leered down at the woman — "but you must always bear in mind

that because *I* could do a thing, it doesn't follow that anybody else could!"

"Never mind. Tell us how *you* would do it."

"I'm going to. I'm going to make you realize that Parker Potterson is a man of his word. If Parker Potterson saysh he can do a thing, then he can do it. Now then . . ." He turned to the little man. "Did I, shir, or did I not — hear you remark a moment or so ago that you often saw your brother at Finchingfold Shtation — shtepping into a firsht-class carriage on the train for Millport?"

"That's right, mister. 'E travels every day back'ards and for'ards."

"Good. That givesh me an idea. He musht be killed on the train."

"But 'ow, mister?"

"Ah, that'sh jusht where the brains comesh in. But it'sh ver' simple. Get into the next carriage when hish train leavesh in an evening. Make sure hish carriage and yoursh are empty — mosht likely they are, ash he travelsh firsht. Then . . ." He stopped, caught his breath rather wildly, and added: "Ishn't there a long tunnel between Finchingfold and Millport?"

"That's right, mister. You know the line, then?"

"Never you mind what I know — it'sh a deal more'n you ever will, anyway. . . . Ver' good — the tunnel, then. All you gotter do is to wait till the train entersh the tunnel, slip out of your compartment along the footboard and get in *hish* compartment, then kill your man ——"

"*Kill* 'im?"

"Yesh — *kill* him — you can't get out of that!"

"But 'ow?"

"How th'hell d'you think? Heapsh of waysh. . . . Throttle him if y'like. Or a hammer. Know how t'ushe a hammer?"

"Tidy-sized mallet might do," said the man, with fatuous simplicity. "I'm a carpenter by trade, I am, an' I'm pretty well used to a mallet."

Potterson's eyes lit up with a hectic gleam. "Shplendid! Glad to hear y'can do shomething. An' a mallet'sh all right — jusht as good as a hammer — perhapsh better."

"But what abart after that, mister? My cousin's brother-in-law, what I was tellin' you of, 'e ses to me that the real trouble abart these things is gettin' rid o' the body arterwards."

"Cousin'sh brother-in-law'sh a fool. Dishpose of the body — eashy to any man of brainsh!"

"Well, 'ow abart it?"

"Eashy, I tell you."

"But — in this 'ere case, mister — on a train?"

"Eashy. Ain't there a river to crosh — an' a big bridge — jusht before the train getsh to Millport?"

"That's right, mister. Three-arch bridge over the River Fayle."

"Dammit, then — can't y'shee? Eashy to any man of brainsh. Ash train croshes bridge, open door an' throw body over par — parapet into river! Heh? Ain't that a good plan? Now would you — would you have thought of that, hey? Or you, m'dear?" He turned to the woman, eager to taste the reward of his triumph.

She laughed. "Somebody'd see you from the tow-path, most likely."

"Ah! . . . that'sh clever of you, m'dear. Thish li'l plan o' mine worksh besht in winter. Nobody on tow-path in winter — choosh nice rainy night in December — November — Chrishmash. . . . An' lishen to me — it'sh a damn good plan, I tell you — becosh — becosh when the body comesh ashore — they'll shay — poor feller — shad accshident — fell backwardsh — mark on hish head where he hit par — parapet. An' thoshe who don't believe that'll shay — 'coursh it'sh shuicide really, on'y relativesh tryin' t'hush thingsh up . . ." God — what was he talking about — what had he been saying? Who, anyway, had begun this fool argument? He was mad; the room was whirling round and round; his brain was on fire.

The woman was still laughing. "Yes, it's a plan all right, I'll grant that. Only I'd like to see my Bert throwin' the body out, that's all! Why, 'e couldn't 'ardly throw a dead cat over a fence!"

For the second time that night Potterson laughed till the tears ran down from his whisky-sodden eyes. *Triumph!* He had scored over them all. She was laughing *with* him now, not at him; he could feel her yielding to him — realizing his power and strength as he had willed her to. Lord — what a grand world it was for those who were born to be natural lords over their fellows!

"Mebbe he couldn't!" he cried hoarsely. "But I never guar-guaranteed he could, did I? It'sh a job for a man of shtrength, not for a weakling! All th'world ish open to th'man of shtrength — shtrength and brainsh — both t'gether — an' the weakesht goesh to th'wall!" It was the eternal saga of his dreams.

"Well, mister," said the little man, "you've give me a fair answer, I'll say that. An' now p'rhaps you'll 'ave just a last drink with me?"

"Dummind. 'Nother one, Georsh."

He knew he was perfectly drunk — too drunk to know what he was doing or saying. Yet a blind insensate pride in himself made him believe that never, never had he triumphed so mightily. And all because of the woman. But for her a little idle boasting, might have been — but nothing else. It was she who had driven him to claim this strange and utmost triumph. She was the sort he would do anything for — just as he had done for Maudie Raines so many years ago. Always women had been his weakness — his weakness by making him feel so strong. There was nothing he would not have done for a woman he fancied. And there was nothing still that he would not do. At fifty-seven the same fire was in him — the same as at twenty-seven. . . .

While he was drinking he made to put his arm round the woman's waist and this time she did not repulse him. His head throbbed and sang with exhilaration. He was winning her! His arm closed round her, and again he felt that entrancing delicate shrinking of her body away from him. She shrank, but somehow diffidently, almost invitingly.

"Satishfied I'm a man of my word, m'dear?" he hiccupped, and she replied:

"I'll certainly say you are if you'll answer me just one more question. You know, they always do say that it's the little things as gets a man down, as often as not. Now take that mallet, f'rinstance. What'd you do with it afterwards? If you was to throw it into the river with the body it'd float and be washed ashore somewhere, and then, mebbe, with the bloodstains on it, it'd give you away — quite likely, anyhow. So you see, young feller, that looks to me the weak spot in your plan — that mallet. Couldn't you get rid of it some way or another?"

"Yes, mister," the little man echoed in his plaintive whine. "I 'adn't thought o' that, I admit — but my old gel — she's a regl'lar smart 'un — trust 'er for not missin' anythin'."

A murmur went round the bystanders. "Yes, I reckon 'e's got you there, mister! Tell us what you'd do with the mallet!"

The mallet. . . . What *would* he do with it? Potterson fought for coherence — for coherence to think as well as to speak. *The Mallet* . . . extraordinary that anyone should be asking him questions about a mallet!

He glanced down and saw the woman's eyes fixed on him. His brain reeled with joy; he began to tremble. She was *his;* she no longer shrank away from his touch or even tried to — he could feel her breath rising and falling like

a livid ache in his own body. It was his moment — the moment for which he had always lived.

"The mallet — the mallet — tell me!" she whispered, and he knew then that he would answer even that last question — that last question and answer that would remove the final barrier between himself and her! "*Mallet?*" he roared, in a voice that made passers-by in the market place outside stop to wonder what was happening. "Yesh — 'course you oughter deshtroy th'mallet! Think Parker Pottershon'sh fool enough t'forget important thin' li' that? Yesh . . . gotter deshtroy mallet — altogether — shomehow . . ."

"But, 'ow, that's the question, mister?" queried the little man, with that strange, half-pathetic, half-exasperating patience.

Potterson smiled then — a wide, uncanny smile from which all the light had gone out except the hideous light of evil. "That'sh right. Lemme think. How deshtroy mallet? Ah . . . Idea. Idea o' mine — brainsh full o'good ideash — heh? Ain't there a slag-heap jusht outshide Millport Shtation — one o' them burnin' shlag-heapsh near gashworksh?"

"That's right, mister."

"Then, by God, ain't it eashy — eashy as kishin' a pretty woman like yo' wife — throw mallet on shlag-heap — an' in a minute — two minitsh — all burned to shinder!"

And with a strange weakness in all his limbs he reeled towards the face that at that final moment sharply eluded his.

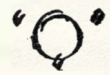
"So that's how you did it?" said the little man suddenly, speaking in a different voice and, as it were, from a different world. "I'd always had my suspicions, ever since they found that half-burned mallet on the edge of the slag-heap. You aimed badly, I'm afraid . . . " And in a more level voice he added: "Parker Potterson, alias Richard Morley, I arrest you for the willful murder of Thomas Raines on the night of December the twelfth, Eighteen-Ninety-Eight . . ."

Two of the bystanders seized his arms and led him away, the little man and the woman following. . . .

"What puzzles me," remarked the latter some hours later as she discussed the whole affair with her famous, though somewhat diminutive husband, "is why he troubled to throw the mallet on the slag-heap at all? Why not simply

have put it in a bag and carried it through the station barrier in the ordinary way? He could easily have destroyed it afterwards."

"True," answered Detective-Inspector Howard, of Scotland Yard, "but then that wouldn't have been Morley. Some criminals are not clever enough, but Morley was *too* clever. That mallet on the slag-heap was the one quite unnecessary touch of genius that let him down. And he was so proud of it that years afterwards he couldn't resist the temptation to brag about it to a pretty woman." He gave his wife an affectionate glance as he added: "Well, Maud, it was *your* triumph, chiefly — you played a dashed unpleasant part remarkably well. But it was the mallet that finished him — as surely as it finished your poor father thirty years ago."



A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Impossible Marriage

by Roy Post and Austin Ripley

"I'm afraid I can't tell you very much, Professor Fordney," Bruce Kenyon began. "And I'm sure you'll think me a conceited braggart; but the truth is, Mary Nash was infatuated with me. Me? Oh, I liked her — but that was all. During a walk in the country Tuesday she asked me if we were going to be married. I told her that was impossible. She burst into tears, told me to leave her at once, that if I didn't she'd throw herself into the river. So . . . I left. That's the last anyone has seen of her. Yes, the river was dragged." . . .

Flashlight in hand, Fordney grunted, tugged again, and pulled open the cellar door of the old abandoned house. He focused his light on the sheer drop into darkness. There were no steps, only pieces of broken and rotted wood. His stabbing light picked out a figure on the cement floor below. It was Mary Nash.

The Coroner's voice jerked like an Erie local. "Didn't see steps were gone. She fell. Broke her neck."

Odd that her bag should be so close to her head, Fordney thought. And the position of her arms — H'mmm.

"Too many oddities here, Sheriff," he said. "Why did the girl come *here?*"

"To commit suicide," Burke suggested.

The criminologist shook his head. "There are no suicide aids in the cellar, whereas in the kitchen — "

"Looks like an accident to me," Kenyon interrupted. "But I guess we'll never know why Mary came here."

"No need to guess," Fordney remarked. "Mary was *murdered!* Care to change your story, Kenyon?"

What single clue proved Mary Nash had been murdered?

Solution

Fordney had to *ing* to open the cellar door. Consequently he knew that Mary could not have fallen to the floor and pulled the door after her. Had her death been accidental, the door would have been open.

One of America's most popular authors takes us behind the scenes of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Washington and achieves a uniquely authoritative piece of crime fiction. An F.B.I. story that will instruct as well as entertain you.

SUSPECT UNKNOWN

by COURTNEY RYLEY COOPER

INSPECTOR JESSUP of the Washington Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation had been expecting the call. He smiled slightly as he listened to the telephone report:

"Agent Benson speaking from the first floor. The subject just got out of his car as a sight-seeing bus arrived for a tour of the bureau. He immediately mingled with a bunch of sight-seers, and is headed upstairs on one of the first elevator loads. Agent Torner is trailing him, subject to your orders, sir."

"Rejoin Agent Torner and continue the surveillance," commanded the inspector and hung up. A big man, sandy-haired, pleasant-featured, he shifted in his chair with a certain air of lumbering boyishness, and eyed for an instant the intercommunicating system. For once he could give thanks that he was head of the Washington office.

At other times, he had been not too delighted with his assignment. This was a "spot" job, constantly under the eye of the director; the distance between Inspector Jessup's office and the nerve center of the entire F.B.I. was only the difference between the fourth and fifth floors of the big marble building of the United States Department of Justice. Under ordinary conditions the proximity meant that the inspector's activities were subject to far greater scrutiny than those of any other like officer in the organization. But at a time like this —

He flipped a button on the interoffice system, marked: "Director." Instantly, a crisp voice answered:

"Yes, Jessup."

The inspector leaned close to the transmitter:

"Hello, Boss. The suspect in the Tilliver murder case just came into the building for another tour of the bureau."

"Good! That makes the third trip in three days."

"And that either makes me dead right on him or dead wrong. He must

figure he's got that job covered up pretty well, and wants to be sure of it. After all, once he leaves Washington, he can't run and hide like the average fugitive. He's a prominent man. He's got to stay in the open, and that takes a lot of nerve — unless a person knows that there isn't a chance of being caught. So what happens? He remembers his crook training: to stick in with officers after a crime and try to hear or see something that will tip him off as to how they're progressing with the case. That's my theory — I'll stand or fall on it."

"All right, Jessup. Go ahead with your plans."

"On the lines we talked over yesterday afternoon?"

"Definitely."

"There's a point, Boss. To do that, I'll have to divulge a certain amount of information about the case. How far shall I go?"

There was a pause. Then: "That's up to your judgment, Jessup. Your job is to place him actually at the scene of the crime. If you can do that, all our other evidence dovetails. We know he was seen in the neighborhood both before and after the murder. The witnesses we had hidden here yesterday when he went through were fairly certain on that point. We know too that Tilliver and a man who looked a lot like this fellow served a term in California together some twenty years ago on a charge of extortion by mail."

"But there's no fingerprint record to prove it."

"That's the tough part; the fingerprint files on that prison don't date back that far. So you've got to work carefully. As I see it, you figure that he and Tilliver were once crooked pals. After they got out of prison, they went different ways. Tilliver seemingly reformed. So did this fellow. You believe that neither of them did anything of the sort. Tilliver was still a blackmailer at heart, and this — what's his name?"

"Manton Kent."

"That's right, Kent. This Kent got into a small concern — handling all sorts of things — and apparently built it up to a big business —"

"But we can show by evidence that it's a house of cards. That's my idea of the motive, Boss. On the surface, it looks as if he killed Tilliver rather than pay him blackmail. But I think he did it because he figured that Tilliver knew what Kent was doing in this firm: juggling its stock, selling off its assets for his personal account, padding pay rolls — it'll take a dozen auditors to chase down the crooked things this fellow's done. Tilliver must have found this out, tried to get some blackmail as a result of what he knew — but got

killed instead."

"It's a great theory — if you can prove it."

Inspector Jessup's lips tightened.

"Yes, that's the trouble — to prove it. To put him smack into the middle of the murder scene, or get some sort of record on him through fingerprints."

"There were none at the scene of the crime."

"And no record from the penitentiary. I didn't mean that. I was hoping that I might find he'd served time somewhere else. Or been arrested for investigation, or mixed up in some bankrupt racket — anything to break through his armor. Otherwise, I haven't a leg to stand on."

"Especially since all the tangible evidence points directly away from him. Well, use your head on that, Jessup. And good luck to you."

A clicking sound was followed by silence. Inspector Jessup raised a big hand to his forehead and brought it away, the palm beaded with sweat. He wished now that he had not been so eager to work personally on the solution of this murder, that he had not been so enthusiastic in the belief that Manton Kent, following a crook's logic, was attempting to spy on those who were spying on him.

Suddenly, however, he straightened. In quick succession, he flipped the levers of the interoffice system to a half-dozen departments, and gave crisp orders. Then he glanced at his watch. It was twelve minutes past ten o'clock. The morning tour of the building had begun promptly at ten. By now, the inspector knew, the guide had explained the wide-flung activities of the bureau; he should be finishing up the tour's beginning in the Exhibit Room with a few words on the machine guns captured from gangsters, Dillinger's death mask, the red wig worn by Katherine Kelly, the kidnaper, and the vacuum jar in which her husband had hidden ransom money. The inspector pressed a button. A special agent answered.

"I'll begin at the multigraphing room," said Inspector Jessup. "See that someone is always accidentally available if I should need him."

"Yes, sir."

The inspector left the room. After a time, special agents followed.

It was five minutes later that, crowding and gawking, the morning tour of Department of Justice sightseers followed their F.B.I. guide down a wide hall on the seventh floor, toward a long room, where presses whirred, multigraphs pounded noisily, and binding machinery clattered. The guide entered

the door, walking backward that he might address the variegated group that had followed him. Here were men and women from throughout America who tonight would send home post cards saying they knew all about crime. There were small boys and girls, goggle-eyed at the thought of being in the same building with G-men. There was a sprinkling of newspapermen and women from out of town, and not a few who appeared to be business executives, or persons of responsibility interested in law enforcement. At one side, somewhat apart from the throng, was a keen-featured man of about forty-five, who bore a frank air of interest in everything about him. The guide, still walking backward, now raised his voice above the roar of machinery.

"In this room," he began, "are all the reproductive processes by which reward sheets are multigraphed, pamphlets bound, and the F.B.I.'s Law Enforcement Bulletin assembled and shipped to more than ten thousand police bodies, sheriffs, and other enforcement agencies. In a kidnaping, the lists of ransom notes are reproduced here; in one case, this room turned out a job in thirty-six hours of continuous effort that would have required three weeks of work in a regulation printing plant. Now if you will follow me —"

"Look out!" came a sharp voice. The warning was too late. The guide collided heavily with the hurrying form of Inspector Jessup, striking him against an elbow. The inspector winced; his right hand flew open, releasing a number of sheets of paper that evidently had just come from a multigraphing machine, and scattering them wildly across the smooth cement floor.

"That's all right; that's all right!" the inspector announced hastily to the guide's apologies, bending swiftly meanwhile in an effort to gather up the papers. Here and there a visitor, seeking to aid, bent also. The inspector apparently took no notice. His eyes, however, were not still.

At last he saw that the keen-eyed man, also a volunteer in the job of reclamation, was covertly peering at each sheet as he picked it from the floor. The inspector waited only a moment more, then, as with sudden realization, whirled.

"Please don't touch those papers, anyone!" he commanded. A passing agent suddenly moved in upon the scene, joining with the guide in collecting the multigraphed matter from the hands of volunteers. The inspector nodded to the guide.

"If you will move on with your party."

"Yes, sir. Please follow me." The group obeyed, and the inspector stood facing the subject of his investigation, who stood extending a sheaf of the

papers with one hand, while with the other he fumbled at a hip pocket for his wallet.

"I'm afraid that my curiosity got the better of me," he announced. "I was so terribly interested that I did not realize this might be a confidential matter."

The inspector's brow creased.

"You mean you were reading that announcement?"

"I glanced at it." His hands now free, he dug into his wallet for a card. "I do hope that my position will guarantee my ability to keep secrets. Kent is my name, sir. Manton Kent. I am president of Superior Products."

The inspector lost his worried look, extending a pawlike hand in greeting. The main group had passed out of the room now. The guide's voice echoed from down the hall:

"We are now entering the Identification Unit, where are assembled a total of more than ten million fingerprints from every part of the United States and numerous foreign countries —"

"I suppose I should catch up with that group," said Manton Kent. "Although," he laughed, "I almost know that lecture by heart."

"Oh, you've been here before?"

"This is my third trip in three days."

"Interested in law enforcement?"

Manton Kent smiled.

"I didn't realize it until I came through here the other day. Then I began to see how many features could be applied to my business. Fingerprinting, for instance, and scientific apparatus. Although, of course," he added slowly, "one only gets the barest sort of a glimpse on one of these tours."

The inspector agreed.

"I'm sorry you didn't make yourself known at the director's office. He'd have arranged for a special guide."

"You really think so?"

"Oh, yes. Persons like yourself, heads of corporations and the like, are the real ones he wants interested in the things we are doing here —"

Manton Kent shrugged.

"So what do I do? I play the boob and look at what turns out to be a confidential matter."

Inspector Jessup grinned.

"Oh, it isn't that bad. Fact is, what's on this sheet is not so terribly secret."

"I'm glad of that."

"It's a bureau matter, of course. Naturally, we don't want any investigative information to fall into the wrong hands. This just happens to be some multigraphs of reports on evidence we've picked up in a murder case here in Washington a few days ago. A man named James Tilliver was killed in his home. Ordinarily that would be a case for the Washington police, except that the government had purchased the place a few days before; Tilliver was to move out the next day. Thus he was on government soil, and that put the case in our jurisdiction."

"I noticed the report was headed 'Suspect Unknown,' or something like that."

"Yes. We always do that until we have narrowed a case down to its essentials."

Jessup glanced at his watch.

"I've a few free minutes. Perhaps I could show you around."

"That would be a great privilege."

They walked together down the long hall. The inspector folded the sheaf of multigraphed reports.

"A queer affair, the Tilliver case. We'll all be glad to get it cleared up."

"I suppose you have to chase down every tiny lead."

"Everything. For instance, you perhaps know about the finding of a woman's shoe near the curbing, and a pair of gloves, with blood on them, a half block away. Naturally, we have to prove or disprove any connection between this evidence and the identity of the murderer."

"Then you know the killer?"

Jessup shook his head.

"Oh, I didn't say that. I said we're running down these clues. The investigation isn't completed. I'll let you watch an experiment or two in the laboratory if you're interested. I don't see how it could harm the case."

"I'd be delighted."

"First we'd better dip into the Identification Unit if you want to see it again — the fingerprint section, you know." He opened a large pair of doors leading to a huge room, set with many metal filing cases. "Of course, you've been told how we classify the thousands of fingerprints received daily. Which reminds me — have you thought about introducing civil fingerprinting into your business? For identification, in case of illness, accident, amnesia, anything of that sort?"

"I've been thinking seriously about it," said Manton Kent.

"And of course, your own fingerprints are on file here?"

"You mean in the file reserved for civil fingerprints? I'm sorry to say they're not."

"Well, of course, we never urge anyone to —"

"But I'd be delighted."

"Good. If you'll just step over this way." Then at a table where stood a moist pad and a large card, clipped in a holder: "Now your right hand first — just relax; I'll roll your fingers on this pad, then on the paper; it's really quite painless, unless, of course, a person has a criminal background — just relax again, Mr. Kent. Thank you. Now, the other hand."

Manton Kent glanced at his fingers.

"I've always heard they'd be dirty from lampblack."

"No. This is a special pad, and sensitized paper. It leaves no marks on the hands. Now, if you'll just fill out this card: your name, address, whom to notify in case of accident."

Manton Kent sat at a desk.

"It gives you a feeling of security, doesn't it?" he queried. Then as he wrote:

"I've been wondering why you haven't been able to learn something by fingerprints about that murder case."

"You mean the Tilliver affair. Evidently the murderer wore gloves."

"Oh, of course."

Manton Kent finished the writing of his description and handed the completed card to the inspector. An agent happened to be passing. Jessup called him:

"File this for Mr. Kent, please. Civil fingerprints."

The agent took the card and hurried away. Inspector Jessup turned to a dissertation on the fingerprint division. At last:

"Suppose now we step into the Technical Division — the Crime Laboratory, as it is known." From a near-by corridor of filing cases, a machine began to whir. It caught the inspector's attention. "Before we leave the fingerprint section," he said hastily, "I want to show you how law enforcement has borrowed ideas from the business world."

"Yes?"

"By using an ordinary mechanical card sorter to catch crooks." He led the way to the machine, where a special agent and a fingerprint clerk were busily

feeding it large stacks of cards, each punctured with many holes.

"An indexing machine," said Manton Kent. "We have a dozen of them in my organization."

"Of course. We merely adapted it to crooks. Instead of names or addresses, the prongs of that machine are set to fit into the holes in a card which designate one certain man's fingerprint classification. That big pile of cards the men are feeding it represents a search for a certain criminal. They are the records of every crook who has a classification resembling that of the wanted man in any manner whatever. And if the crook we want is among them, this machine will find him." Manton Kent looked toward the side of the sorter, where two large slots appeared. One was rapidly filling with cards, representing rejections. The other was empty. The inspector said:

"Let's stay and see if they find the fellow."

"Certainly."

A minute passed. The machine stopped, its piles of cards exhausted. The inspector turned away without waiting for the eye signal of the special agent to tell him that a search of the entire Identification Unit in the hope of finding some criminal reference to Manton Kent had been in vain.

"I suppose that machine is infallible," said Kent.

"If a record exists in the bureau," the inspector answered. "Unfortunately, some of our enforcement bodies and prisons did not keep complete files prior to ten years ago. So, in old cases, we are always at a disadvantage."

"Unfortunate," answered Mr. Kent.

"Very. Shall we take a look at the Crime Laboratory?"

He led the way to another double door, and held it wide for his guest. They entered an anteroom, filled with exhibits of guns, an X-ray machine for looking into packages without unwrapping them, pictured histories of scientific crime detection in widely known cases.

"You've seen all this on the tours you've taken," said the inspector. "Let's go behind the scenes."

"Wonderful."

The inspector did not answer. He led the way into a big room that reeked with chemicals and stepped swiftly to a laboratory table where a sober-faced man in a white smock had apparently just completed a microscopic examination of a sheer silk stocking. Near by, on the table, lay a woman's suède shoe.

"What experiment is this?" the inspector queried.

"The shoe is part of the Tilliver evidence," answered the scientist. "The

stocking came from the room of Mrs. Bradford Bowen, in the Maytown Hotel."

Kent stepped closer.

"Oh, a suspect?"

The inspector smiled.

"Be patient now. I'll show you how scientific detection works out. This, as you have guessed, is the woman's shoe that was found outside the Tilliver house after the murder. The next morning, Mrs. Bowen reported to the hotel management that a shoe and a pair of gloves had been stolen from her room — that someone must have taken them while she was out."

"Easy enough," said Mr. Kent.

"Yes, of course. But we can't accept the palpable. So we conducted experiments to prove or dispose her story. You will notice that this stocking, which we obtained from her for experimental purposes, is of an extremely odd shade. We have determined that she never wears any other type. Therefore, microscopic examinations were made, both of the shoe and the stocking. The shoe revealed many tiny shreds of silk that match the fibers of this hose exactly. But the scientist could find no other fibers." He faced the besmocked laboratory man. "Is that correct, Mr. Moberton?"

"That is correct, sir, indicating that the shoe has not recently been on any other foot than that of this particular woman."

Manton Kent exhibited interest:

"Then you do have a suspect?"

"It begins to look that way. This experiment points suspicion either toward Mrs. Bowen or some person who may have stolen that shoe from her room, in an attempt to divert suspicion toward her."

"That makes it a woman's deal all the way round, doesn't it?" asked Kent. "I see your deduction now. Two women are possibly in love with this Tilliver. One decides to kill him. So she steals a shoe and pair of gloves from her rival and leaves them at the scene of the crime."

Jessup laughed, and slapped his man on the shoulder.

"The first thing you know, we'll be giving you an examination for the job of special agent. That's a very good deduction, except for the motive, which appears to have been blackmail — on Tilliver's part, not on that of the murderer."

Kent's eyes had widened.

"Oh, you've established that?"

"Is the evidence handy, Mr. Moberton?" asked the inspector; then, following the scientist's glance, he moved toward a few pieces of charred paper under a glass cover. "This was found in the fireplace."

"But I don't see anything on it — merely some black ashes."

"Photography, under the ultraviolet ray, brought out the writing. Evidently Tilliver was in tight circumstances, and knew somebody who was rich. Have you the photostatic copy of your experiment on this charred document, Mr. Moberton?"

Silently the scientist opened a drawer and brought out the photograph, while Kent stared as with disbelief.

"It seems impossible!"

"Oh, we do lots of impossible things," Jessup said.

"You say that this letter was sent from Tilliver to someone else?"

"Yes. It has been determined to be Tilliver's writing." He referred to the photograph. "You will notice that this fragment of the letter says: 'I need a hundred thousand dollars and you have got it to give me. And unless you do give it to me, Old Pal, the reputation you have built up over all these years will not be worth five cents.' "

Manton Kent cleared his throat. "Is that all the writing you were able to recover?"

"Unfortunately, that is all. Except for the beginning of the letter."

"You mean the name of the person to whom it was sent?"

"It was only 'Dear Pal.' "

"Unfortunate," exclaimed Manton Kent, and gave his attention to the woman's shoe. The inspector eyed him closely; Kent's demeanor was that of enthusiastic interest, and nothing more. Jessup turned.

"Suppose we see what experiments are being made with the gloves," he suggested, and led the way with a pawlike hand on the suspect's shoulders. Again he sought to break through possible armor. "Perhaps I shouldn't dismiss that letter so lightly, because it really did aid us to some extent. It showed us the motive was a quarrel over blackmail. Tilliver had sent it to an old friend, apparently. That person evidently became wild with anger, rushed to Tilliver's house, stealing the shoe and gloves on the way. There was a fight, or quarrel, at least a struggle —"

"I suppose you found chairs overturned and things like that?"

"No, nothing of the sort," the officer answered blandly and explained no further. "As I say, there was a struggle, and the murderer drew a pistol,

killed Tilliver, remembered that the letter might be incriminating evidence, threw it in the fireplace, ran from the house, dropped the shoe at the curb and threw away the gloves."

"And after that?" asked Kent.

Jessup shrugged.

"You know as much about that as I do," he answered with a grin. "Oh, here we are." He nodded to another besmocked man, who was busily dousing a pair of kid gloves in a laboratory tray filled with slightly discolored water. Jessup asked, in routine fashion: "This is an experiment with Tilliver evidence, Mr. Graves?"

The scientist, tall, freckled, sandy-haired, turned quietly.

"Yes, sir."

"Would you mind explaining it?"

"Not at all, sir. The object is to determine whether the murderer left his fingerprints on these gloves." He raised one from the tray with a rubber-shielded hand. "As you see, I have immersed the evidence in a solution of three per cent nitrate of silver. I now place it upon this large blotter and put it under this lamp —"

"Which is?"

"Ultraviolet rays, sir."

"And if there are fingerprints?"

"They will appear in a very few moments, of a brownish color, but perfectly detectable. Oh, by the way, a messenger asked me to give you this memorandum."

The inspector took it, cupping it in his hand.

"Thank you," came briefly. Then as the ultraviolet ray poured its weird light upon the saturated leather, Jessup glanced again at the memorandum:

12	25	W	100	17
	4	aW	101	13

To Inspector Jessup these numbers became ridges and lines and whorls and deltas, assembling themselves into a mental picture of the fingerprints of this dapper, coldly calm man beside him. If once, during this well-planned murder, there had been a slip, if, for instance, there had been no protective covering for Manton Kent's fingers when these gloves were stolen, then the story would now be told.

Second after second the inspector waited. Twice he leaned forward as

something brownish began to appear upon the white texture, only to draw back again.

"Only smudges," said the scientist, "from grease or a like substance."

"Yes, I see," answered Jessup. "And that was our big chance to nail him."

Kent turned swiftly.

"Him?" he asked. "Then you don't think it was a woman?"

"Suppose we go over to the comparison microscope," replied the inspector. "I'll show you something interesting."

Again a besmocked man awaited them. Jessup asked for the murder gun. It was forthcoming; an automatic, blue-steeled, ugly, with the serial number filed off, to prevent tracing. The inspector held it out to Kent, who looked at it intently.

"This was found in a trash can some ten blocks from the murder scene," said Jessup. "You will note that it is a forty-five caliber. That is an extremely heavy gun for a woman to handle."

"Yes, I suppose so. But how do you know it is the murder gun?"

"If you'll come this way." He moved a few feet to what appeared to be a double-barreled microscope, fitted with a single eyepiece. "The comparison microscope," he said. "If you will remember, my theory is that there was a quarrel. Then Tilliver was shot. After the gun was found, a bullet was fired from it into a box of cotton, so that it might be recovered. Then the lethal bullet was extracted from the body of the murdered man.

"These two bullets were put on those prongs you see projecting beneath the lenses of the comparison microscope. Now, if you will look down through that eyepiece, you will see that the rifling of the gun barrel made distinctive marks on each of those bullets so that they exactly match." Kent bent forward. "You can see better if you'll take off your hat," added the inspector.

Manton Kent obeyed.

"I don't believe I quite get what you mean," he said, staring through the eyepiece.

"Perhaps the bullets are not in alignment. Just move that thumb set either forward or backward until the bullets come together —"

"Oh, this little gadget here?"

"Yes."

"Of course! I see the bullets begin to move, coming closer together —" Suddenly, with an ejaculation, he straightened, looking about him in surprised fashion. A hand went to the top of his head. "No bees around here?"

he asked queerly.

"Bees? Why?"

"The queerest little jabbing pain hit me for an instant in the top of the head." He rubbed his scalp. "It's gone now."

"Neuralgia?"

"Probably, although I never had it before." Kent bent again to the microscope, moving the adjustment knobs until at last the two bullets seemed as one. "Remarkable!" he exclaimed.

Inspector Jessup touched him on an arm.

"Not half as remarkable as this final experiment," he said. "You will remember that I mentioned one piece of evidence as pointing to a struggle. Let's see how it is turning out in the hands of science."

With a hand on Manton Kent's arm, he led the way to another of the besmocked clan that peopled this big room. This time the scientist was a squat, pale man with a flat voice. He was surrounded by test tubes, and chemical vials; a microscope stood before him.

Inspector Jessup went through his usual preliminary:

"May I inquire, Mr. Caruth, what experiment you are conducting, and if it is the Tilliver case?"

"It is in the Tilliver case," came the toneless, precise voice, as the scientist raised a cellophane container. "I have here two human hairs, each alike in size, color, thickness, texture, chemical analyses and other characteristics both as to the fiber itself and to the follicles and adhering epithelia. One of these was found in the clutched hand of the murdered man, indicating that it had been torn from the head of the killer during a struggle. The other" — he looked up — "was, as you know, Inspector, just taken from the head of your guest as he bent over the comparison microscope."

Manton Kent gasped. He whirled, hands outstretched. Wildly his eyes sought the doorway — but two special agents stood there. Then Inspector Jessup's voice sounded, chilling in its cold courtesy:

"Will you please complete Mr. Kent's tour — by showing him to the detention quarters?"

The League of Forgotten Men

NUMBER 2

Ezra Stackpole Butterworth

In our July issue we introduced a "department" which we entitled THE LEAGUE OF FORGOTTEN MEN, the purpose of which is to bring back to you periodically a detective of fiction who has regrettably been forgotten, and whose exploits still make good, fruity reading. . . . So here is Mr. Ezra Stackpole Butterworth, No. 2 in our gallery of old-time detectives, whose acquaintance was eagerly cultivated by fans of the year 1913, in a story we know you will enjoy as much as we did.

ACCORDING TO THE EVIDENCE

by HUGH PENDEXTER

THE contest over the will of Reuben N. Asher had been followed closely by the reading public for many days, until it had aroused more than state-wide interest. The general attention given the litigation resulted largely from the personnel of those concerned in the outcome.

The decedent died at the advanced age of eighty-seven, having drawn up his last will and testament about a year prior to his decease. He was a man of long and honorable life, ripe with wholesome activities and philanthropies, though he was now assailed as mentally incompetent.

Professor Roscoe Quell, a nephew and the contestant in the case, had won enviable recognition both at home and abroad by his scientific researches, and was the author of more than one authoritative text-book. He was a man in the prime of life and already had reaped substantial rewards from his scholarly endeavors.

But perhaps the most interesting character in the little drama was the proponent, Miss Alice Asher, a niece of the testator, who received the million-dollar estate under the terms of the will, the nephew being cut off for the reason that he possessed an ample fortune while his cousin was penniless. But if the niece was bankrupt in pocket unless she profited by

the provisions of the will, she was most generously endowed with beauty and, so far as her personality during the contest could be gauged, with an extremely attractive and womanly nature. Up to the time of the testator's death the relations between uncle and nephew had been most friendly, the latter often being a visitor at the Asher mansion.

Last, but possibly not least, in focusing the attention of the press was the fact that Walter Riggsley, celebrated in surrogate's practice for successful assaults on wills where large estates were involved, appeared for Professor Quell, while the fair proponent was represented by that veteran of eccentric practice, Ezra Stackpole Butterworth, founder of the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation, whose advent in a case licensed the expectation that the ordinary routine of the law would be ignored. The appearance of Mr. Butterworth in any suit was sufficient to set the press-table to buzzing.

At the opening of the contest the Surrogate experienced a sensation of uneasiness, for he had been annoyed several times by the old lawyer, whose unexpected methods and shrewdness had more than once resulted in a reversal of the court's ruling by a higher tribunal. But as the hearing progressed and Mr. Butterworth, now the champion of normality, was compelled to confine his efforts to normal lines of proof, the court relaxed in his forebodings and at the end of the second week was wearing his official black robe with complacency.

Immediately after the formal proof of the will was offered, Mr. Riggsley began his battering attacks upon the competency of the testator, calling witness after witness to testify to the decedent's peculiar actions, and conducting himself so confidently that more than once Mr. Butterworth had warned his tall, angular assistant.

"Jethuel, our friend has something up his sleeve. Watch for it."

As the testator's roomy country mansion was somewhat isolated, the gist of the contestant's proof was based on the evidence furnished by the domestics and a few of the more immediate neighbors. For two weeks men and women took the stand and swore to the old man's unusual deportment, baldly declaring that his behavior in each sample of his alleged eccentricity had impressed the witness as being irrational. With forceful insistence and great skill Mr. Riggsley had piled up his accumulative proof until, from sheer weariness, the Surrogate burst forth,

"I do not think it is necessary to call more witnesses of this class at present, Mr. Riggsley. We are simply accumulating repetitions of what al-

ready has been received."

Mr. Riggsley smiled exultingly in the direction of his client and rejoined,

"I consider the evidence is quite conclusive as it stands, but as I have but one more witness of this class, I desire to heap up the measure."

"Very well; proceed," consented the court.

"Miss Tubbs, take the stand, please," said counsel.

Miss Tubbs, a short, heavy woman with a masculine face, slowly advanced to the witness chair and composed her features grimly. After saying that she had been the decedent's housekeeper for two years and had observed his behavior daily, she said she had not noticed anything peculiar about his actions until some three months prior to his making his will. To be exact, it was on Christmas Eve her suspicions were first aroused that his mental faculties were failing him.

"Explain the circumstance," gently prompted Mr. Riggsley, while Professor Quell fingered his short iron-gray beard eagerly and never shifted his gaze from the witness's face.

"He appeared to be very much excited and told me to ring for the stableman," said the witness.

"Were you present when the man answered the summons?" asked Mr. Riggsley, staring benignly at the ceiling.

The witness replied in the affirmative and repeated,

"Mr. Asher seemed much excited ——"

"I allowed the witness's first speculation as to the condition of the testator's mind to pass without entering an objection," drily broke in Mr. Butterworth. "And while I know her characterizations will have no weight with your honor, I suggest that she confine herself to what she saw and heard, and leave it for the court to supply the constructions."

Being instructed accordingly, the witness sullenly resumed, "Mr. Asher told the stableman to hitch three horses tandem into the jaunting-car and drive over to the junction, some three miles, and get his nephew and a friend the Professor was bringing down for the week-end."

Mr. Riggsley drew a deep breath of satisfaction and softly inquired,

"What was the weather at that time, Miss Tubbs?"

"It was snowing hard that day, with two feet of snow on the ground."

"What did the stableman say or do?"

"Do you intend calling the stableman?" asked Mr. Butterworth.

"He is out of the State and can not be located," explained counsel. "Go

on, Miss Tubbs."

"The stableman swore that master was crazy, and wound up by driving to the junction in a sleigh."

"Whom did he bring back?"

"No one. He was mad clear through when he returned. He said no one was at the junction, and that master must have dreamed it all."

"Please ask her if Professor Quell did not arrive the next morning," obtruded Mr. Butterworth.

"Don't worry; you shall have it all," chuckled Mr. Riggsley.

The witness next said that the contestant did arrive Christmas morning in a hired rig, and that her employer was delighted to see him and that the two passed a happy day together, the nephew departing on the next day.

"What was the next incident about Mr. Asher that struck you as being peculiar?" urged Mr. Riggsley.

Darting a triumphant look at the old lawyer, whom she now considered her personal enemy, the witness related,

"Shortly after Professor Quell had left, I heard a booming sound in Mr. Asher's room. I knocked on the door and asked what was the matter. He told me to enter. I found him fully dressed and seated by the table, holding on his knee a drum."

"A bum?" exclaimed the court, suddenly popping into an upright posture.

"A drum, if it please your honor," corrected Mr. Riggsley, bowing deeply.

The court frowned heavily as if the disclosure did not please him a bit, and motioned for the witness to proceed.

Much elated with the effect of her statement the housekeeper eagerly added,

"Before I could say anything, he gave the drum several loud taps and explained that was the signal I was to always answer. Then he called in other servants and instructed each as to what signals he or she was to heed."

"Did he use the drum, as you've described, up to and after the time the will was drawn up?"

"He did," replied the witness, whereat Mr. Riggsley announced he had no further questions.

Mr. Butterworth, after whispering briefly with his assistant, took up the cross-examination, first asking,

"For all you know to the contrary, witness, Professor Quell was at the junction the night your master sent a rig for him?"

"The man didn't bring him back and said he wasn't there," stiffly answered the witness.

"But for all you know he might have been there that night?" persisted Mr. Butterworth.

"I would like to ask counsel what he means by this line of inquiry?" warmly demanded Mr. Riggsley. "His questions smack of the unwholesome and constitute a veiled attack on the integrity of my client."

"I make no veiled attacks, sir!" hotly rejoined Mr. Butterworth. "But I openly aver that on the afternoon before Christmas Day Reuben Asher received a telephone communication from the junction, the speaker purporting to be his nephew and asking that the tandem rig, wheels and all, be sent, as a good joke on a friend who was visiting in this country for the first time."

Pounding the table vehemently, Mr. Riggsley declared,

"This is an insult, your honor! I demand that counsel produce his witnesses to substantiate his statement, or else withdraw it."

"Do you expect to offer proof in this connection?" severely inquired the court, upon whom the contestant's grisly beard had made a favorable impression.

Mr. Butterworth sighed and said,

"The telephone operator who was on duty at the junction that day has disappeared, and I have been unable to locate him. He has vanished like the stableman."

As he said the last he turned and smiled grimly into the red face of his adversary.

"Your honor, this — this is an infamous innuendo!" choked counsel. "He is intimating that *I* have spirited a witness away. I demand that he retract his words."

"Surely I am not in fault for stating a simple fact," softly said Mr. Butterworth. "The operator *has* disappeared; so has the stableman!"

"Gentlemen, we'll pass on to the facts connected with this case," uneasily warned the court.

Mr. Butterworth turned to the witness and gravely asked,

"Isn't it a fact that on the day he sent the stableman to the junction he had a telephone conversation with someone? On your oath, yes or no."

Before Mr. Riggsley could frame any objection, the witness wilted perceptibly and replied in the affirmative.

"And isn't it a fact," thundered the old lawyer, shaking an admonitory finger at the perturbed witness, "that you overheard his end of the conversation?"

"I didn't!" loudly denied the witness.

"And didn't he say he would send the car and three horses because he agreed it would be a good joke on the newcomer, leading him to believe that wheels were used the year round in the Asher neighborhood?"

"No, he didn't!" warmly replied the witness.

"But how do you know he didn't if you didn't hear any of the conversation?" asked the old lawyer, dropping his voice to a gentle key.

"Well, because — because I don't believe he did," faltered the witness.

"That's better, although it's immaterial," smiled Mr. Butterworth. "Now for the drum. Don't you know that Mr. Asher was passionately fond of music, that he played the snare-drum in his younger days, and even in after years that he spent much time rehearsing with the village band?"

"I knew he was fond of music," admitted the witness after some hesitation.

"And don't you know that Professor Quell, his nephew, brought him the drum as a Christmas present and suggested to him that he use it in summoning the servants instead of ringing the bell?"

"Your honor," broke in Mr. Riggsley in his most dramatic voice, "I resent this cowardly attack upon my client. Counsel practically charges him with plotting to gain possession of this property, whereas he appears here only to establish his rights against this young woman, who, tempted by the bait of gold ——"

"We mask none of our charges, your honor!" exploded Mr. Butterworth. "We openly assert that Reuben N. Asher was surrounded by oddities and eccentricities by that person who hoped to profit by his seemingly irrational conduct and gain control of this estate! We insist that the testator never displayed the least trace of irrationality except after some visit from his loving nephew, and that his intellect was as clear as mine when he did those things which the servants and outsiders, not knowing what had prompted him, construed as symptoms of a failing mind."

"This is strong language, gentlemen," sternly cried the court, pounding his gavel loudly. "I insist that you abandon this unworthy exhibition of temper and proceed with the hearing."

As the old lawyer took his seat, Mr. Riggsley, now angry in earnest, ex-

pressed a desire to put another question to the witness.

"Tell us about the letter, Miss Tubbs."

"One day I found him in tears, holding a piece of paper in his hand. He said he had just got word from a hospital that his niece was there, seriously injured. I took the paper from his hand, and it was blank! There wasn't a word on it. I showed it to him and he was greatly upset, but insisted he had just read it."

"Would you like to question the witness further?" jeered Mr. Riggsley.

"No," slowly replied Mr. Butterworth, "but I am very glad to receive the last bit of information. However, I suppose it would be useless to ask the witness if she believes that an expert chemist could prepare a paper, or an ink, so that a written communication would be but transient in its legibility if exposed to the light."

"We rest our case, your honor," said Mr. Riggsley.

"I ask for an adjournment until to-morrow, when I will call our principal witness, Dr. Elisha W. Pinkey, who is now out of town and will not return till to-night," said Mr. Butterworth.

"Court will take a recess till to-morrow morning," announced the Surrogate.

II

It was generally believed by those who had followed the evidence that the calling of Dr. Pinkey was the pivotal point in the case. Miss Asher would win or lose as the result of his testimony. Dr. Pinkey was celebrated the length of the land as an alienist, and his testimony had been determinative in many a similar contest. It was obvious that Mr. Butterworth would be unable to substantiate his charges that there had been a plot to surround the decedent with every semblance of mental weakness, because of the disappearance of two or more witnesses.

And while the old lawyer had cleverly combated the various points scored by his opponent, he had offered no corroboration of his suspicions. But if the alienist took the stand and came out flat-footed in favor of the proponent, the contestant would be hard-put to maintain any advantage accruing to him through the recitals of the domestics. For Dr. Pinkey was one whose word could not be impeached and whose opinion could not be purchased.

Ordinarily Mr. Butterworth and his taciturn assistant would have relied implicitly upon this witness and would have considered all that had gone

before as so much skirmishing, if it had not been for the deportment of Mr. Riggsley at the opening of court in the morning. The contestant's counsel moved to and fro inside the enclosure continuously, yet his whole bearing was one of exulting expectancy rather than of uneasiness. The founder of the Bureau read his mood in a glance, and nodded shortly when Jethuel whispered,

"Riggsley seems very confident, sir."

After a moment's meditation the old lawyer observed,

"He believes he's fooled us in some manner, and yet he knows the strength of our witness. I wonder what he's up to. I wonder!"

The Surrogate now entered the bench and after a brief conference with the clerk nodded to Mr. Butterworth to proceed.

"I am waiting for our witness to arrive, your honor. His office informed me he would be here promptly at ten."

"Here he comes now," hoarsely informed Jethuel in great relief.

Dr. Pinkey was a stout, choleric appearing person, whose incisive bearing bespoke a man who had his own way in the world. He knew he was the dread of lawyers appointed to cross-examine him. As a result of this realization, he entered the crowded court-room with a slight smile of cynicism on his strong face, and eagerly cast about to learn who was the opposing counsel.

With no delay Mr. Butterworth ushered his witness to the stand, where the Surrogate warmly greeted him. The court's wealth of cordiality should have caused Mr. Riggsley to squirm uneasily, but the gentleman simply smiled in a good-natured manner and turned a whimsical countenance to his opponent. Professor Quell, from his obscure corner, leaned forward with glistening eyes, as if waiting for something sensational to happen. The press-table rapidly resharpened pencils and motioned for their messenger-boys to stand ready for the first batch of copy.

Dr. Pinkey answered the preliminary questions in short, sharp barks, as if annoyed at queries concerning his name, age, occupation, and was quite haughty as he qualified as an expert. Then with the court beaming upon him, with the spectators staring at him in mingled awe and admiration, he told in jerky sentences how he called on Mr. Asher the day before the will was drawn up. As the servants had been given a holiday to spend in merry-making at certain maple-sugar camps on the estate, the witness arrived early in the morning and took the testator for a long drive, remaining out all day with the exception of the lunch hour spent at the Country Club.

From his professional observations on that day he was able to pronounce the decedent absolutely qualified to draw up his will, or transact any business, being complete master of his faculties.

"Would it have been possible for him to have undergone a change in his mentality overnight, serious enough to have incapacitated him for drawing up his will?" asked Mr. Butterworth, trailing one eye to scan the cheerful Mr. Riggsley.

"No, sir," boomed the witness; "not unless he suffered from a shock. I will add that I remained overnight at his home, and found him perfectly rational in the morning. I saw him two days later, and he was entirely *compos mentis.*"

The press-table wrote frantically, and Mr. Butterworth said,

"I believe that is all I care to ask."

As Mr. Riggsley rose, notebook in hand, the witness stiffened and smiled grimly. He was used to such encounters and hugely enjoyed them. He believed that counsel, following the usual mode of procedure, had been cramming up for the cross-examination under the tutelage of some other alienists. Lawyers had essayed to trip him at his own game before, and he hungered for the fray.

"Returning to the day when you brought Mr. Asher home from his delightful sleigh-ride," began Mr. Riggsley, "did you go to bed early, or did you remain up several hours after Mr. Asher had retired?"

The witness gave the slightest perceptible start, and after a moment's hesitation coldly answered,

"I remained in the smoking-room several hours after my host had retired."

"The windows of that room look out on a field, do they not?" next asked counsel.

"The witness has not qualified as an architectural expert," reminded Mr. Butterworth, studying his rival keenly.

"I do not see the relevancy, but the witness may answer if he knows," directed the puzzled court.

"They do," answered the witness, his defiant eyes becoming worried.

"And as you smoked you stood at the window and gazed out on the landscape, did you not?" persisted counsel.

"Dr. Pinkey was called here as an alienist," gravely rebuked Mr. Butterworth.

"What do you expect to show?" curiously asked the court.

"I expect to establish the fact that this witness is not competent to give expert testimony as to the mental condition of Reuben N. Asher!" boldly informed Mr. Riggsley.

Had the tower on the city hall walked across the square and invited the statue of justice over the front entrance of the courthouse to go a-strolling, the court and others could not have been more astounded. Mr. Butterworth was the first to recover from the attack and, as there was but one course for him to pursue, he blandly said:

"I am keenly desirous to have my friend attempt to establish his fact. I shall be greatly interested in studying his mode of procedure."

But despite the assurance expressed in this mocking challenge, the old lawyer was rather disturbed. For some inexplicable reason Dr. Pinkey was shrinking from the ordeal.

"Then, with the court's permission, I will proceed to gratify my friend," observed counsel. In a low, even voice he next asked, "Doctor, I want you to tell me what you saw when you gazed from the window. Anything that impressed you as being unusual, extraordinary?"

The witness licked his dry lips for a few moments while the court-room strained in amazed attention, and in a husky voice finally replied,

"I thought I saw an ostrich lying on the snow."

The Surrogate slumped back in his chair and plucked vaguely at the hem of his gown. At last he managed to direct,

"Stenographer, read the answer."

"'I thought I saw an ostrich lying on the snow,'" complied the stenographer.

"Lord bless me!" gasped the dazed court.

"An ostrich?" murmured Mr. Riggsley, as calmly as if it were the most natural object in the world to behold in a winter landscape. "What else, pray?"

"I saw the figure of a man, with arms outstretched," mumbled the witness, wiping beads of sweat from his brow. "Near him was a large heart — that is, something of the shape of a heart, such as we see on valentines."

"Do I understand the witness to say he saw a valentine?" exclaimed the bewildered court.

After counsel and the stenographer had put his honor right, the former coaxed,

"And what else did you see?"

The witness shuddered and with great difficulty confessed,

"I next noticed the word 'Insane', printed in tall letters across the snow."

The gaze of the court became glassy as it rested on the witness. Only Mr. Riggsley and Mr. Butterworth seemed entirely composed. The former again prompted,

"And what did you do?"

"I was much upset," muttered the witness. "I procured a lantern from the stable and went out to investigate."

"Tell us all about it," urged Mr. Riggsley. "What did you find?"

"Nothing," groaned the witness. "The snow was unbroken, except for a few tracks. There was nothing on the snow." Without waiting to be questioned he rapidly stated that he returned to the house and on entering the servants' door met Professor Quell, who had arrived at the mansion after Mr. Asher left the house on his sleigh-ride. Professor Quell asked what had taken him abroad at such an hour, and remarked on his show of agitation. "I asked the Professor to accompany me to the smoking-room, where I again saw the same objects on the snow. I called him to the window and requested him to tell me what he saw. He displayed much surprise and said he saw nothing but snow."

"Isn't it probable that the objects you believed you saw were the result of shadows?" hopefully inquired the court.

"There was no moon at that hour and there were no shadows," wearily replied the witness.

"That's all," said Mr. Riggsley. "I now ask that the entire testimony of this witness be eliminated from the record, as by his own evidence he is incompetent to give expert testimony in this case."

"Wait a bit," mildly requested Mr. Butterworth. "I wish to ask the witness if he has any explanation for this experience."

"I can only set it down to a phantasm, an optical illusion," sadly confessed the witness. "I never experienced it before or since."

"After being deceived by your visual sense, when your mind should have been tranquil and composed, do you mean to say you were not grossly deceived in your estimate of Mr. Asher's mental condition?" demanded Mr. Riggsley.

"I must have been the victim of some passing mental disorder," wildly cried the witness. "But I still insist that Mr. Asher was sane and competent to transact any business."

"I insist that the testimony be allowed to stand, as it is a matter of record that a man may be deceived by his senses in one instance without his whole mentality being tainted," earnestly argued Mr. Butterworth. "No two eye-witnesses can give a similar description of any street scene. Objectively we are constantly being tricked. Dr. Pinkey's eyes deceived him for the moment, but his mind was as acute as ever and he instantly detected the trick, evidencing a higher degree of perception than the average man possesses."

"Yet very few persons, at liberty, see ostriches and hearts and printed words on March snowbanks," interrupted Mr. Riggsley curtly.

"Mr. Butterworth, this is a very serious matter," sorrowfully observed the court. "Have you any witnesses to corroborate what this witness has told us concerning the mental condition of Mr. Asher?"

"I have not, your honor," sorrowfully admitted Mr. Butterworth. "This evidence came as a great surprise to me, as I have not talked with the witness for several weeks. I simply knew he was a friend of Mr. Asher and had observed him closely."

"Then I fear I must strike out the evidence as being untrustworthy," regretted the court. "Ahem. Had he believed he had seen the figure of a man skulking about the premises, or a — a sled — something attuned to the lonely — huh — environment — huh — and the season of the year. But — huh — an ostrich!"

"I ask the court to adjourn the hearing one week, postponing any decision till the return day," requested Mr. Butterworth. "It is possible that in the meanwhile counsel and I may reach some agreement, tending toward a composition of the entire matter, and making unnecessary the need of taking further evidence."

"I shall be pleased to have the court convenience Brother Butterworth to that extent," readily assented Mr. Riggsley, rubbing his hands joyfully as he read a complete surrender in the old lawyer's petition.

As the veteran was gathering up his papers, Jethuel whispered,

"Do you suppose they'll agree to a compromise, or will they demand their full half?"

"Hum!" grunted Mr. Butterworth, frowning heavily as he wrote on a desk pad. "On your way to the office stop at the reference library and get me Ganot's 'Eléments de Physique,' Atkinson's translation. Also, all of Professor Quell's works on chemistry which you can find."

III

The ensuing week was a busy one for Mr. Butterworth, although so far as his anxious assistant could discover his activities consisted largely in trotting about on mysterious errands at unseasonable hours. Among other things he directed his servants to prepare a cozy dinner for a few of his friends, to be served at his country place. Jethuel could not recall another instance when the country place was thrown open in winter.

Miss Asher had come to the office once to discuss the advisability of taking the witness-stand, but the old lawyer did not inform his assistant what he had decided on this point. In fact, he did not mention the will except as he observed on the afternoon preceding the return day,

"His eyes registered falsely, he insists, but he rejected their testimony. If he is rational enough to detect a flaw in his visual sense, how can he be put down as being incompetent to give expert testimony?"

"Do you remember the case of Hiram Tanker's third personality?" grimly reminded Jethuel. "Your stand in that litigation established a precedent that would now be cited against you. But why didn't he inform us of his uncanny experience?"

"He was ashamed," replied Mr. Butterworth. "He hoped he would not be questioned on that point. He had to tell the truth when questioned because he is an absolutely honest man, and because Roscoe Quell knew of his experience. Anyway, I'm glad there's no bad blood between Professor Quell and me. We're good friends now, thanks to the mediation of Riggsley."

This information was far from soothing to Jethuel's outraged mind, and he sullenly shifted the conversation by asking,

"Any orders about to-night's dinner?"

"No orders, except be there at six-thirty sharp. It will be very informal. The Surrogate, Mr. Riggsley and Professor Quell will be among the guests. It will be a good time to patch up all our differences."

Once alone, Jethuel growled,

"If the old chap thinks this little dinner will soften the demands of the opposition any he's awfully mistaken. I wonder if he knows how Riggsley has publicly boasted his client will not accept less than half of the estate."

Whatever may have been Mr. Butterworth's motive in giving the dinner, his guests acknowledged it as being an amiable one by presenting themselves prompt to the minute, wreathed in smiles. The Surrogate was happy, as the invitation evidenced the old lawyer bore him no ill-will, although informed

that to-morrow's decision must go against him. Mr. Riggsley was in excellent spirits, as Mr. Butterworth had assured him he would seek no compromise, but would abide by the ruling of the court. Professor Quell was quite fascinated by his host's cordiality, and it almost appeared as if the dinner were given in honor of the learned litigant.

In a lull in the conversation, after the soup, Mr. Butterworth directed a servant to run up the window-shades, whimsically remarking,

"By a coincidence this room faces toward the north, as does the smoking-room in the Asher mansion. It happens that the atmospheric and climatic conditions tonight approximate those of that other night a year ago. I wonder if Dr. Pinkey were here if he would see more visions in the snow."

Professor Quell and his counsel laughed heartily at what appeared to be proof of Mr. Butterworth's resignation to the inevitable, while the Surrogate smiled feebly, undecided whether to maintain his official rôle, or compromise on a semi-serious demeanor. The other guests whispered their admiration of the old lawyer's graceful surrender.

As the conversation lapsed again, Mr. Butterworth abruptly addressed Professor Quell,

"By the way, Professor, would you be kind enough to inform me to how many causes the various phenomena of phosphorescence may be referred?"

Professor Quell, suspending his fork in mid-air, opened his eyes in surprise and then narrowed them and intently gazed at the speaker, and replied,

"Five."

"That's what I had in mind," murmured Mr. Butterworth. "You class them as what, if you'll good-naturedly condescend to teach me?"

"I class them as Ganot does," quietly returned the professor. "There is spontaneous phosphorescence, such as in certain vegetables and animals. Phosphorescence by elevation of temperature, as best observed in species of diamonds, and particularly in chlorophane, a variety of fluorspar, which, when heated to three or four hundred degrees, suddenly becomes luminous, emitting a greenish-blue light."

"Thank you, thank you," cried Mr. Butterworth, while the other guests politely counterfeited an interest. "You have refreshed my recollection greatly. The next in order is phosphorescence by mechanical effects, such as by friction, percussion and cleavage, as seen when two quartz crystals are rubbed together in the darkness, or when a lump of sugar is broken. My

faith, it seems only yesterday I was deep in my books! Let's see, phosphorescence by electricity is the fourth cause, such as results from the friction of mercury against the glass in a barometric tube. By George, Surrogate, I'll wager you can't recall so much of your chemistry, eh?"

"No, no; hardly," laughed the Surrogate. "But come, you're a boaster. You haven't finished yet. The professor said five causes. Name the fifth, huh."

Mr. Butterworth fumbled his chin in perplexity, to the great enjoyment of his guests, and finally surrendered,

"I know it, but I can't recall it. The Professor will have to come to the rescue again."

Professor Quell stroked his short, stubby beard with thoughtful deliberation and was silent for some moments before he said,

"The fifth cause is phosphorescence by insolation, or exposure to the sun."

"An example, please," challenged the Surrogate playfully.

In a class-room voice the Professor continued,

"A large number of organic substances, after being exposed to the action of the solar light, or of the diffused light of the atmosphere, emit in darkness a phosphorescence, such as dry paper, silk, cane-sugar, milk-sugar, amber, and the teeth."

"Bravo!" applauded Mr. Butterworth. "Do you know I love chemistry and have always regretted I did not turn to it instead of the law. There's nothing prosaic in chemistry, no ruts, no routine, no beaten path of precedent. Every chemist is an explorer. But, Professor, I observe you've left out one of the most universal phosphorescent effects under the fifth cause."

"I did not assume to be exhaustive," hastily obtruded the Professor.

"But what one does our host refer to?" rallied Mr. Riggsley.

"I referred to *snow!*" slowly replied Mr. Butterworth, in a loud voice.

Professor Quell bent a mathematical stare upon the speaker and settled back in his chair. The intensity of his gaze would have been commented upon had not the white-haired butler at this juncture thrown the party into confusion by crying out,

"Oh, come to the windows at once, gentlemen, I beg of you! Look! look!"

With a muttered exclamation Mr. Butterworth pushed back his chair and the others quickly followed his example and rushed to the windows.

"What is it? Make room for the court! I'll hand down an opinion. Bless my soul!" exploded the Surrogate, backing from the window and blinking

rapidly and then flattening his nose against the pane.

A volley of ejaculations and excited queries radiated from the clustered heads as the guests stared forth incredulously into the night. Then the butler turned off the lights so that the men might see the better. What astonished and filled the gazers with wonder was the figure of a gigantic ostrich just beneath the windows and apparently in pursuit of a huge human skeleton. Farther away, sharply outlined in black against the soft gray whiteness of the snow, was the startling interrogation, "Are we all insane?" And what caused new conjecture was the boldly printed direction, "Read Quell on 'Winter Phenomena.' "

"What kind of a joke is this?" exclaimed Mr. Riggsley, his heart sinking as he feared the dinner had been planned for a wide-reaching purpose.

"Bless me! An ostrich!" babbled the Surrogate, rubbing his eyes.

"Great Scott!" bawled a young assistant corporation counsel from the end window. "Come down here. Here's an elephant!"

"There's an alligator chasing a rabbit!" shouted a third.

"Can it be possible!" stuttered the Surrogate. "Upon my soul, I believe this is a trick!"

"You're more suspicious than poor Dr. Pinkey was," laughed Mr. Butterworth, switching on the lights. "He believed he was the victim. Why, where's Professor Quell?"

A hasty scrutiny of the room failed to discover that learned gentleman.

"Now that's too bad — he's taken fright and run away. As I got my hint from his book on 'Winter Phenomena' it's no more than right he should be here to take the credit."

"What does this mean, Mr. Butterworth?" hoarsely demanded Mr. Riggsley, who was utterly dumfounded by the disappearance of his client.

"Professor Quell's work informs us how the action of sunlight on the snow creates a phosphorescence," blandly replied Mr. Butterworth. "Snow is one of the substances that becomes phosphorescent in darkness after insolation, or exposure to the solar light. Professor Quell suggests that one take a blanket and spread it on the snow during a sunshiny day and then remove it at sundown. The square of snow thus shut off from the solar light will retain its shape accurately at night, having no phosphorescence, and will show up in sharp contrast with the surrounding phosphorescent areas. Should you approach the dark square it will not disappear. It would be the same as if you were gazing at a black shadow. You could make accu-

rate measurements of it. But, of course, should you approach with a lighted lantern it would vanish and you'd find nothing but white snow."

"This foolery leads to what, sir?" harshly demanded Mr. Riggsley, pale with passion as he began to believe he had been thoroughly duped.

"It gives a rational explanation of Dr. Pinkey's irrational testimony," quietly answered Mr. Butterworth. "It explains how he saw things in the snow, yet found the surface unmarred when he investigated. In short, someone, desirous of impeaching his testimony in some instance like the Asher will-contest, took advantage of the servants' absence from the mansion, plus Mr. Asher's absence, and placed figures, probably made of cardboard or paper, on the snow beneath the smoking-room windows. The figures were removed before anyone returned home. Then, sir, as evening advanced and the great snow areas responded with the ghostly light stored up in their cold bosoms during the day, the patches covered by the cardboard or paper had no phosphorescence to throw off, and as result the doctor saw things and even reached the point of condemning his own intellect."

"Is it possible!" ejaculated the Surrogate.

"Not only possible, but deplorable that Professor Quell should use his great talent in a miserable attempt to defraud a girl!" emphatically denounced the old lawyer. "What's more, I have located the telephone-operator and stableman. By them I can prove Quell telephoned from the junction in person, suggesting the tandem hitch and the jaunting-car; that he brought the drum to Mr. Asher, and that it was Quell who wrote the letter informing the old man his niece was at death's door in the hospital. He used a dilute solution of chloride of cobalt, which was invisible when dry and in a normal temperature. He bribed the stableman, who carried the mail, to heat the letter in the oven so that it would be perfectly legible when presented to Mr. Asher. By the time the housekeeper reached the room it had faded out again."

"This is monstrous —" weakly began Mr. Riggsley.

"It is monstrous, and I am pleased to state that Mr. Riggsley believed his cause an honest one," announced Mr. Butterworth. "But let us take the lanterns and make the test Dr. Pinkey did. He must be thoroughly exonerated from his self-accusation and be put right with the public."

"The court finds that the evidence of Dr. Pinkey is wholly reliable, and must stand. The clerk will furnish the gentleman of the press with a state-

ment of some interest, given out in justice to Dr. Pinkey. Have you any further evidence to offer, Mr. Riggsley?"

"None, your honor," sadly replied Mr. Riggsley.

"Then the court rules that the objections are not substantiated by facts and are hereby overruled, and that the will of Reuben N. Asher is duly admitted to probate. Call the calendar, Mr. Clerk."

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Eternal Triangle

by Roy Post and Austin Ripley

"What chance do you think you would have with the wealthy Lucille Powell and her socialite family, if they knew you had served a term for dope-peddling?" cried beautiful young Reba Marion, the dancer.

"But you wouldn't," Eric Courtney growled.

"If *we* aren't married this week, I will!"

"All right!" The young actor's face was grim. "I'll write Lucille myself — now — and tell her everything. If she won't have me then, well — life won't be worth living. I will *not* marry you. I don't love you." . . .

"I stopped in to say goodnight at 11 o'clock — my apartment is on the same floor," Reba explained, "and found him as you see him."

"Touch anything?" Professor Fordney asked.

"Only that letter he wrote," Reba indicated the several pages the Professor held. "I thought it might be to me."

At 11 o'clock Courtney, a bullet in his brain fired from his own gun, had been dead not less than two hours.

"See him before tonight?"

"No. Not since rehearsal this afternoon."

The criminologist read the letter the actor had written to Lucille Powell. Reba's thumb print had smudged Courtney's signature and there were several other of her prints on it. There were Courtney's, of course, and his own. A clip mark on the second sheet and several blue stains on the stationery interested him. Were they significant?

Fordney walked to the desk where Courtney sat. The revolver on the floor was about a foot from the actor's dangling right hand. He turned to the dancer.

"Why did you kill him?" he asked.

What single clue told Fordney Reba's account was a lie?

Solution

The fact that Courtney's signature had been *smudged by Reba's thumbprint* was proof she had handled the letter almost *immediately* after Courtney finished it. Yet, the actor had been dead "*not less than two hours*" at 11 o'clock when Reba said she handled the letter! This convicted her.

Burning with jealousy Reba snatched the letter from Courtney (shortly after 8 o'clock) smearing the signature as she did so. She read it, took Courtney's gun from his desk and killed him, leaving the letter of confession, wherein he had written that life wouldn't be worth living without Lucille, to supply a suicide motive. She then left the apartment to return at 11 o'clock and "discover" the tragedy.

In the judgment of your Editors, this tale by the creator of Average Jones and author of "It Happened One Night" is one of the very best short short crime stories to appear during the entire year 1938.

THE UNRECKONABLE FACTOR

by SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

THE plan lay before Bassil, outlined in his fine, precise writing. It was part of his scientific training to diagram as an aid to the elimination of possible error. This is what would confront the authorities:

Positive Data — Professor Adrian Gohl, the chemist, found dead in his private laboratory at 9 A.M. Sunday. Cause of death, chloroform. Time of attack, 6.49, as established by victim's watch, broken in his fall. Small cabinet containing papers showed evidence of tampering. One of two cars kept in garage beneath laboratory, gone.

Negative Data — No papers nor equipment missing. No fingerprints other than those of the dead man. No tire marks except those of missing coupé.

Place and Circumstances — Owner's laboratory at the Gohl house, five miles from the Gohl Chemical Works at Nutley, New Jersey. On Saturdays, Gohl worked all night there, interruptions being strictly prohibited until he was called for breakfast. The body was found by the servant who went to call him.

Probable Sequel — The missing car might later be found, empty, at the bottom of the Hudson River, off an abandoned junk yard near Yonkers.

The erosion of the water would have removed all marks identifying the driver.

Bassil sealed his plan in an envelope and locked it in his safe. It would be an intellectual satisfaction afterward to check it off, step by step, against the developments. Grant that there was one chance in a million against him. He could meet it. It was his sincere conviction that he was one man in a million. His supereminent talents he had forged into a weapon for fighting his way to merited but inexplicably delayed rewards.

And now to be put to the door by old Gohl after years of faithful, valuable, and meagerly compensated service! What if a copy of some of his

chief's precious formulas *had* been found among his papers? They couldn't prove anything against him. Not legally.

In those "borrowed" records the assistant had struck pay ore. Dovetailed with certain subsidiary formulas to which he had been assigned and upon which he had done invaluable work, this information for which he had risked so much gave him almost all that he needed. Almost; not quite all. The missing link could be nowhere but in the old man's private laboratory. For the completed formula and working process any rubber company in the world would pay a fortune. Bassil meant to have that fortune.

Five o'clock. Time to make the first strategic move.

In the office of Dr. Dorman, beneath his apartment, he described a sudden attack of vertigo, shortness of breath. Making note of his gaunt and sallow face, his bony, twitching fingers, the physician diagnosed nervous indigestion, wrote a prescription.

"Thank you, doctor. I feared it was my heart." (Perfect!)

He was able to get a front seat on the bus. At the New Jersey end of the great river bridge workmen were stringing colored bulbs.

"Tonight?" Bassil heard the driver ask.

"Surest thing you know," replied the ticket taker.

Bassil got off at Newark. He took a late train for Passaic. It was almost two o'clock when he reached the Gohl place on foot. The laboratory was lighted up. The sliding door to the garage was open on the side where stood the coupé. This was luck! He could push the car noiselessly out, coast down the slope to the road, and turn on the engine only when out of earshot.

He mounted the stairs and knocked.

"It's Bassil, professor."

The old man opened. "What brings you here?"

"I have no job. Isn't there a chance for me?"

Professor Gohl said sternly: "This is not the time. I bid you good night."

He turned away. Bassil struck.

Putting on his gloves, he soaked the cloth and bound it over the limp figure's mouth and nostrils. After anxious search he located the formula and copied it in a concentrated fury of toil. When it was finished he took out the dead man's watch, set it forward to 6.49, and crushed in the crystal.

One final inspection, and he closed the door upon his carefully fabricated mystery. Now the car slid out under his impulsion. He turned into the

highway.

When he had crossed the bridge, he would turn north on the New York side to the deserted junk yard, which he had thoroughly explored, and let the empty coupé glide into the river. Then home. At seven o'clock call up the physician.

"My heart again. . . . It's very bad. Please come at once."

Seven o'clock; eleven minutes after and twenty-six miles from the murder as the police would reconstitute it. A perfect alibi.

The glare of the bridge confronted him. There were colored lights giving a weird effect to a group of people at the entrance: bridge policemen, a state trooper, several civilians. Braking down, he held out the exact toll. His hand was seized and shaken. There were shouts and handclapping. A flashlight exploded, almost blinding him. Another. A third. Men crowded about him.

"Name and address, please." A smiling official, having taken down the car number, made the request. What did it all mean? What *could* it mean? Was that his voice, that dry clack, asking?

Friendly replies came from all sides, confusing his tortured mind. The millionth? The millionth? What had a million to do with him? The official explained. His was the millionth toll ticket issued on the bridge. Tomorrow there would be a presentation, a memorial gold watch.

Yes; and tomorrow there would be the newspaper flashlights of him, the murderer, in the murdered man's car. The millionth car. The one chance in a million!

In Bassil's safe the investigating police came upon his schedule. It had been faithfully followed.

Professor Gohl's coupé was found embedded in Hudson River mud, as the outline had specified. There was but one deviation from the original plan:

Bassil was in it.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE MOUSE'S BLOOD

An Original Radio Detective Drama

By ELLERY QUEEN

The Characters

ELLERY QUEEN . . . . . *the detective*
NIKKI PORTER . . . . . *his secretary*
INSPECTOR QUEEN . . . . . *his father*
SERGEANT VELIE . . . . . *of Inspector Queen's staff*
SAM BUCKLEY . . . . . *a sports commentator*
JOHNNIE KILGORE . . . . . *heavyweight contender*
LOUIE . . . . . *his manager*
MEMPHIS SLATS MAYO . . . . . *baseball pitcher*
PEEWEE ROBBIN . . . . . *famous jockey*
DOTTY DALE . . . . . *famous woman-swimmer*
and FIGHT FANS — BASEBALL CROWD — RACING FANS — DETECTIVES, *etc.*

Scene

The Garden — The Stadium — The Park — and
A Private House in Flatbush

SCENE 1: *The Garden, Ringside*

BUCKLEY: And while Referee McGinniss is giving the two men their last-minute instructions in the ring, let me remind you, folks — this is Sam Buckley, your Champion Clothes announcer, at the Garden ringside, about to bring you a blow-by-blow account of the final bout in the heavyweight eliminations to determine who'll meet the Champ this fall. The final tonight, between Johnnie Kilgore and Rocky Logan, is being broadcast through the courtesy of Champion Clothes, "The Clothes That Win — One Quality, One Price, From Coast to Coast . . ." (*There is a roar from the crowd.*) There go the men to their corners! Handlers hopping out of the ring! (*The gong sounds.*) And there's the gong for the first round! (BUCK-

LEY *speaks swiftly and tensely.*) At the bell both men come out cautiously, circling each other, feeling each other out . . . Johnnie Kilgore's famous right hand is cocked . . . Logan is in a crouch . . . they're taking no chances, either of them . . . still feeling each other out . . . both men pack a deadly wallop and they respect each other . . . ! (*The crowd roars madly.*) Ughnnn! Johnnie landed a *terrific* right to Logan's jaw — Logan's in trouble! Knees shaking, right over my head here — eyes glazed — Logan's trying to clinch — Referee McGinniss separates them — (*Another roar.*) Ooh! There's another right to Logan's jaw — another — another — Logan's in a bad way — Kilgore's like a tiger — looks like the best right-handed puncher since Dempsey — ooooh! a right, another right — (*great pandemonium*) *Logan's down! he's down!* Two, three . . . looks like the end! . . . five, six . . . Logan's on his face on the canvas . . . seven, eight . . . may be the world's record for a quick knockout . . . (*roar*) *He's out! Logan's out!* (*People mill about* BUCKLEY.) Knocked out by Johnnie Kilgore in the record-breaking time of . . . Johnnie Kilgore gets his shot at the Champ's title in October . . . this is Sam Buckley announcing the Kilgore-Logan heavyweight elimination bout for Champion Clothes . . . wait a minute! I'll see if I can't get Johnnie to say a few words — Johnnie! Johnnie Kilgore! Ed — get this mike up in the ring! Johnnie, say a few words to the radio audience!

SCENE 2: *Kilgore's Dressing Room*

(*Kilgore's dressing room is the scene of wild confusion and hilarity as he is besieged by reporters, photographers, etc.*)

MANAGER: Okay, okay, boys, you got enough now. Let the kid take his shower — go on, Johnnie, git into the shower-room.

KILGORE: Okay, you ol' lady. (*He laughs and goes into the shower.*)

MANAGER: Lemme turn it on for you, Johnnie. (*He turns the shower on.*) How you feelin', kid?

KILGORE: I knew I could take that palooka, Louie! Comes October, I'll be Champ, Louie — the big cheese!

MANAGER: You'll mopolize that mugg, Johnnie — get yer trunks off —

MOUSIE: (*Enters with a leer*) Hey, Johnnie! Johnnie Kilgore.

KILGORE: (*Laughing*) Yeah? (*Abruptly.*) Oh! Mousie.

MANAGER: (*Contemptuously*) Who

let you in, you small-time chiseler? Git ahdda here! Go on — grab the air!

MOUSIE: (*Slyly*) *You* wan' I should grab de air, Johnnie?

KILGORE: Louie. Lemme talk to this guy — alone.

MANAGER: You're boss t'night, Johnnie. But why you should wanna chin wid a cheap Broadway chis'ler . . . the Mouse! (*He turns to leave.*) Ain't even big enough ta be called Rat! (*The* MANAGER *exits, slamming the showerroom door.*)

MOUSIE: (*Softly*) Turn off dat shower, Johnnie.

KILGORE: (*Hotly*) You tellin' *me* what to do, Mousie? (*Sullenly.*) Okay. (*He turns off the shower.*) Now whadda ya want?

MOUSIE: Mazuma. Hay. Yer hot, Johnnie. Yer gonna make a million bucks. Johnnie Kilgore, da next champ! We're gonna cash in — huh, Johnnie? (*He snickers gleefully.*)

KILGORE: (*Desperately*) Listen, Mousie. Be a right guy. . . .

MOUSIE: (*Sharply*) Aw, cut da baloney! You kin make a lotta tickets, Johnnie — *if ya don't stop fightin'*. An' I kin fix it so you *gotta* stop fightin'! An' you know it. (*Ironically.*) Johnnie *Kil*gore . . . Dat ain't yer handle! Yer an ex-con — ya did a stretch in Leavenwoit'!

KILGORE: (*Scared — low*) Mousie, fer cripe's sake — pipe down!

MOUSIE: (*Loudly*) If da Boxin' Commission knew dat, dey wouldn't okay de October fight, huh? Huh, Johnnie?

KILGORE: (*Passionately*) I got a good mind to break every bone in yer body, you dirty — chiselin' —

MOUSIE: You touch me, I sing! I'll tell da papuhs! I'll tell da Commission! (KILGORE *glares at him.*)

KILGORE: (*Defeated*) Whadda ya want from me, rat?

MOUSIE: Five G's *on account* — see? I'll give ya till Friday night, Johnnie — here's my address — I got a liddle shack in East Flatbush. You *be* dere, Johnnie!

KILGORE: (*Panting*) You ain't gonna get away with this, Mousie!

MOUSIE: No? You'll show, Kilgore. (*He goes, laughing.*) Friday night, Johnnie — an' bring five juicy G's wit' ya . . . sucker! (MOUSIE *exits.*)

KILGORE: (*In a low voice*) I'll — be — there.

SCENE 3: *The Stadium*

(*It is a fine baseball day. The fans keep up a continuous shouting.*)

BUCKLEY: Sam Buckley, your baseball broadcaster, folks, and here's a situation we've already had twice this season! Ninth inning,

two out, Memphis Slats Mayo, the sensational right-hander, on the mound . . . and all Slats has to do is get this last batter out to have a — no, mustn't say it! Might put the well-known whammy on Slats!

FAN: C'mon! Play ball!

BUCKLEY: Here's McCoskey walking up to the plate, swinging two bats — and there's Slats Mayo on the mound, chewing away, cool as — (*He laughs.*) What's he cool as, Harry? (*A radio man chuckles:* "*Cucumber, isn't it, Sam?*") Yes, sir, if Slats gets past McCoskey, he jumps right into Baseball's Hall of Fame . . . (*The crowd roars.*) Umpire Jackson's dusted off the plate — McCoskey jiggling his bat a little . . . (MAYO *pitches. The crowd groans.*) *Ball One!* Man, I've got a temperature! (MAYO *pitches again. Again the crowd groans.*) *Ball Two!* Come on, Slats! Make believe it's just another ball-game! (MAYO *pitches once more. The crowd yells.*) *Strike One!* Look at Slats grin down there! (*Another pitch.*) *Strike Two!* McCoskey cut himself a piece of air that time! Wow! This one may be the pay-off . . . Slats is toeing the rubber — his arm goes back — here it comes . . . (*Another pitch. The Crowd says:* "OOOOOOOH!") *Ball Three!*

RADIO MAN: Don't know how I'm going to stand the suspense, Sam!

BUCKLEY: I'm kind of limp myself, Harry. Get set, fans — you're seeing history in the making — maybe! . . . Big one coming up! (*Now the crowd is silent.*) Nobody's breathing . . . there goes Mayo's mighty right arm . . . he's taking his wind-up . . . *here it comes* . . . (*A mighty roar goes up.*) *Strike Three! The game is over! Slats Mayo's pitched a no-hit, no-run game!* The fans are going crazy — both clubs have rushed onto the field to surround Slats — Harry, take this mike while I see if I can't get through to Slats Mayo!

SCENE 4: *Under the Stands at the Stadium*

(MOUSIE *comes into the scene humming* "*Take Me Out to the Ball Game.*" MOUSIE *stops humming as he hears* SLATS MAYO *approach. No one else is about.*)

MOUSIE: (*Gaily*) Hi, Mr. Mayo. Swell game ya just pitched.

MAYO: (*He is a tall lean Southerner.*) How come y'all sent me this here phony check to the clubhouse? Signed with some name . . . Homer Cooley . . .

MOUSIE: It brought ya out under da stands to see me, di'n't it, Slats? Now why'd you do dat, I wonder?

MAYO: What's yo' name? Who are yuh?

MOUSIE: Da Mouse. My pals call me "Mousie."

MAYO: Well?

MOUSIE: Mr. Slats Mayo, what you done today's gonna make you da highest-priced pitcher in baseball. Now I'm a right guy, see? I wanna protec' yer future. This here sample check I sent ya wit' my note — it was jus' to remind ya of a little check ya once signed back home in Memphis 'fore ya got into big-time baseball. Ya signed dat check, but not wit' yer own name — no, sir, ya signed da name Homer Cooley, yer ol' lady's neighbor. Da story never come out. Never will, neither — 'less I tell it!

MAYO: (*Hoarsely*) How'd y'all know that? Ah thought that was dead an' buried!

MOUSIE: (*Softly*) I got de original check, Slats. Dat's my bus'ness — collectin' souvenirs. (*Sharply.*) If dat forged check gets in da Commissioner's hands, yer t'rough. He won't stand fer no scandal in baseball — dey don' want no crooks in dis game! (*Slyly.*) Maybe I oughta spill anyways, like a good baseball fan . . .

MAYO: (*Hoarsely*) Ah hadda do it, Mistuh. It was fo' mah mothuh. Muh dad died, an' Ah was jest a kid . . .

MOUSIE: Aw, stop it. Yer breakin' my heart.

MAYO: (*Abruptly*) What yuh want?

MOUSIE: A pay-off. Say two grand on account. Just ta keep me happy till ya cash in next season, see? Here's my address, Slats — I'll be home all Friday night — drop aroun'. (*He shuffles off, laughing.*)

MAYO: (*In a hard, low voice*) Ah'll — drop — around, Mistuh Mouse!

SCENE 5: *The Track*

(*The crowd shouts "They're off!" and we hear thunderous thudding of horses' hooves passing the announcer's booth.*)

BUCKLEY: . . . and they're all bunched passing the stand . . . fighting for the rail. Bloodstone's made it! Bloodstone out front, Jiminy and Lord Stanley right behind him. . . . There's Firefly, a rank outsider, coming up strong! He's passing Jiminy . . . Lord Stanley . . . he's half a length behind Bloodstone . . . rounding the turn . . . this is Sam Buckley, your sports announcer, bringing you the Great Eastern Handicap . . . Bloodstone's running strong — Firefly at his heels — rest of the field are strung out behind — looks like a two-horse race . . . Bloodstone's the heavy track favorite, public's backed

him to the hilt. . . . At the far turn Firefly's gaining . . . creeping up. . . . If Bloodstone's nosed out, it's a big day for the bookies. . . . Going into the stretch they're neck and neck! Wait — yes, here it comes! — everybody's been expecting it — Peewee Robbin, Bloodstone's jockey, is using his whip hard — Bloodstone always has to taste the whip in the stretch — yes, there's Bloodstone pulling away from Firefly — one length . . . two lengths . . . (*The crowd gasps.*) *The whip's fallen out of Peewee Robbin's hand!* Without the whip Bloodstone's just another nag — there's Peewee desperately slapping Bloodstone with his right hand — but it's no go — the thoroughbred won't respond — he needs that whip — There's Firefly running magnificently — neck and neck — pulling ahead . . . *HE'S OVER!* (*Great yells.*) Well, folks, it's Firefly by half a length, Bloodstone second, Golightly third, Lord Stanley fourth. . . .

SCENE 6: *The Jockeys' Clubhouse*

(*There is a happy knock on* PEEWEE ROBBIN'S *door.*)

PEEWEE: Come in! (MOUSIE *enters.*)

MOUSIE: Greetings, Peewee!

PEEWEE: Don't I feel bad enough losin' my race without havin' to look at that ratty moosh o' yours? Shove off, Mousie! Every time I think of how I dropped my whip —

MOUSIE: You feel bad, huh? Ts, ts, ts, ts! Peewee, I woulda swore ya dropped yer whip on poipose.

PEEWEE: So Bloodstone'd lose, I s'pose. Why, you short-change, shifty, boot-lickin' tout —

MOUSIE: Yeah, so Bloodstone'd lose. (*Sharply.*) I got ya cold, Peewee. You — Bloodstone's jockey — you laid a five-grand bet undercover on *Firefly* ta win! It's a fix!

PEEWEE: (*Excitedly*) Who told ya? Who sez so? It's a lie!

MOUSIE: Never mind who tol' me, Mr. Peewee Robbin. Da Mouse — sees all, hears all, says nuttin' — fer a price!

PEEWEE: Aaaah. Who'd believe *you?*

MOUSIE: Da Stooards, Peewee — dey might not believe *me*, but dey'd believe da guy you sent ta lay da bet fuh ya! I got his signed statement! An' what would ya do wit' da bet ya're gonna collect — pickle it? Peewee, ya're gonna gim*me* dat dough, see? Den yer okay! If ya don't, I spill! (*There is a pause.*)

PEEWEE: (*Sullenly*) I ain't collected yet.

MOUSIE: But ya'll have yer dough by Friday, Peewee. So Friday night you be at my house —

here's my address — ready to pay off. See? (MOUSIE *laughs and exits.*)

PEEWEE: (*In a whisper*) I . . . see, Mousie. (*Savagely.*) But maybe *you* won't!

SCENE 7: *A Street in East Flatbush, Brooklyn*

(ELLERY QUEEN *and* NIKKI PORTER *are seated in a car parked unobtrusively at the curb.*)

NIKKI: Ho-hum! You take me to the most thrilling places, Mr. Q.

ELLERY: (*Chuckling*) Bored, Nikki?

NIKKI: Well . . . Ordinarily I wouldn't mind sitting in a parked car with you on a dark street in East Flatbush, waiting for goodness knows what, if you'd only pay a little attention to me.

ELLERY: (*Chuckling*) I can't pay attention to you and Mr. Mouse's East Flatbush dwelling at one and the same time, Nikki.

NIKKI: Don't I know it! But why are we watching it, Ellery?

ELLERY: I don't exactly know. Sam Buckley, the sports writer and commentator, phoned and begged me to pinch-hit for him tonight until he could get here. He's late.

NIKKI: You've got *more* begging friends . . . (*Darkly.*) The Mouse! Any relation to Mickey?

ELLERY: (*Grimly*) From what Sam Buckley said . . . I think not. (*A car is heard roaring up, and a screech of brakes.*) This must be Buckley now. (*A car door opens in the street.*) Sam?

BUCKLEY: (*From the street*) Knew I could count on you, Ellery! Open this door and let me into your car. (BUCKLEY *gets in. He is startled by* NIKKI.) Who's this —?

NIKKI: Don't faint, Mr. Buckley. It's only me.

BUCKLEY: Whew! (*Tensely.*) Ellery, you've been watching Mousie's house across the street all evening?

ELLERY: Faithfully, Sam.

NIKKI: And can Mr. Queen watch! The original Argus.

BUCKLEY: (*Eagerly*) Mousie have any visitors?

ELLERY: A grand total of four, Sam.

BUCKLEY: Four! Was Johnnie Kilgore one of 'em? You know Johnnie — knocked out Rocky Logan in jig-time the other night?

NIKKI: What a man. Those muscles . . . Simply Tarzan.

ELLERY: Kilgore was the first visitor, Sam.

BUCKLEY: (*Groaning*) I *told* Johnnie not to come here tonight!

ELLERY: What's this all about, Sam?

BUCKLEY: Mousie's a small-time Broadway hanger-on, cheap gambler, tin sport. Kilgore got into trouble as a kid a few years ago. Mousie got wise, and he's been shaking the poor kid down. John-

nie appealed to me to help him.

ELLERY: And does this prize-fighter merit your help, Sam?

BUCKLEY: Yes, Ellery. Johnnie Kilgore's shooting straight now, and he's worked hard in the fight racket. He deserves a break.

NIKKI: Then Mr. Queen won't be able to resist — not Mr. Queen!

BUCKLEY: Here's my plan, Ellery. Mousie's yellow. You've got a rep in this town. I want you to put the fear of God into that blackmailing rodent!

ELLERY: Sounds like a delightful assignment. But why has Mousie been having other visitors, Sam? I recognized two besides Kilgore — the jockey, Peewee Robbin, and Slats Mayo, the baseball pitcher.

NIKKI: And *I* recognized Mr. Mouse's fourth visitor tonight, Mr. Buckley — it was Dotty Dale.

BUCKLEY: Dot Dale! The swimming and diving champ?

NIKKI: The gal they call the greatest woman sports star since Helen Wills and Sonja Henie.

BUCKLEY: (*Softly*) So Dotty's caught by the Mouse, too. I wonder what he's got on *her*.

ELLERY: She arrived a few minutes ago, Sam. She's still inside the house.

NIKKI: Sh! There's Dotty Dale now! Just coming out!

ELLERY: Miss Dale's in a great hurry, isn't she? (*The woman athlete gets into her car and races off.*) Coast is clear! (*They get out of* ELLERY'S *car and begin to cross the street.*)

BUCKLEY: (*Grimly*) They must have all come here tonight to pay Mousie off. You'll have to talk to that rat like the Pied Piper, Ellery.

ELLERY: Nikki. Better go back to my car, and wait for us.

BUCKLEY: There's no telling what a cornered rat will do.

NIKKI: With two great big he-men to protect me? Not on your life! (*They reach the house.*) Front door's ajar. (ELLERY *pushes the door, and they enter.*)

ELLERY: Miss Dale didn't close it. And it's dark in here.

BUCKLEY: (*Calling*) Mousie! Mousie? (*Pause.*) *Mousie!* (*Pause.*) Funny . . .

NIKKI: (*Nervously*) What's funny, Mr. Buckley?

BUCKLEY: Ought to be a light-switch in the hall here somewhere . . . Here it is. (*Click.*) What the —!

ELLERY: Lights don't work! Fuse blown.

NIKKI: Isn't that a dim light down there? — I suppose it's at the other end of this hall.

ELLERY: It's flickering . . . must be a candle in a room at that end of the hallway. Nikki, stay here at the front door. Don't move! (NIKKI: "*I won't!*") Come on, Sam. (BUCKLEY *and* ELLERY *stumble along in the dark.*)

BUCKLEY: Confound this black hole. (*He gasps.*) Ellery! What's that on the floor? — lying across the threshold? (*He cries out.*) *It's Mousie!*

NIKKI: (*From the hall.*) What's the matter there?

BUCKLEY: (*Calling*) Stay there, Miss Porter! Where you are!

ELLERY: Stabbed in the chest . . . ugh . . . what a mess . . .

BUCKLEY: Is he . . . Ellery, is he . . .

ELLERY: Buckley, get to a phone and call my father at Police Headquarters. This man's been murdered!

SCENE 8: *Mousie's House*

(*There is a great hubbub of detectives.*)

VELIE: Qui-*et!* (*Hubbub continues.*) *Silence*, you mutts! (*It grows quiet.*) Homicide Squad! More like ol' women. Go ahead, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: So you and Nikki saw this man they called the Mouse, or Mousie, come home alone. (ELLERY *and* NIKKI *agree.*) During the course of the evening you spotted four visitors — Johnnie Kilgore, the fighter; Peewee Robbin, the jockey; Slats Mayo, the ballplayer; and Dotty Dale, the woman swimmer, in just that order? (ELLERY *and* NIKKI *agree.*) Each one stayed just a few minutes — right? Now let's get the physical set-up. Velie, how about the windows?

VELIE: All locked on the inside, Inspector, includin' cellar an' attic. No signs of tampering.

INSPECTOR: Doors?

VELIE: Ditto on the doors, exceptin' the front one.

ELLERY: And Nikki and I had the front door under constant observation from the time Mousie entered this house alive, dad, until *we* entered it to find him dead.

INSPECTOR: Only other thing to check is the possibility someone was laying for Mousie before he got home and before you kids got here yourselves. Hiding in the house all the time.

VELIE: Yeah, then he coulda give Mousie the business an' slipped outa the house by the front door when Mr. Queen an' Miss Porter an' Sam Buckley came in, leavin' the front door unguarded . . .

INSPECTOR: How about that, son?

ELLERY: Impossible, dad. Nikki did *not* accompany Sam and me up the hall.

NIKKI: Ellery made me stay at the front door, Inspector, and nobody got past me. (*Grimly.*) Don't worry — in the state I was in, a ghost couldn't have floated past me!

INSPECTOR: Okay. Then the murderer's got to be one of Mousie's four visitors tonight. Question is: Which one? Fighter, ballplayer, jockey, or swimmer?

VELIE: Ask sonny-boy — he always knows! Incident'ly, the man from the electric company who just fixed the lights says there was a short in the circuit somewhere — accident.

ELLERY: Then the darkness was not part of the murderer's plan. Mousie found his house dark when he came home, lit a candle in the room at the end of the hallway, and waited for his visitors.

INSPECTOR: And was stabbed with his own paper-knife from a desk in that room at the end of the hall. No prints.

VELIE: I wish *somebody'd* leave prints *some* time . . .

ELLERY: What did Dr. Prouty say when he examined the body?

INSPECTOR: Mousie died instantly. That letter-knife's sharp, and every stab went into his heart.

NIKKI: (*Shuddering*) You wouldn't think one dried-up little man could . . . bleed so much . . .

ELLERY: No luck yet in locating this Dotty Dale, the swimmer?

VELIE: Nope. We got two men out lookin' for her. (*He laughs.*) Maybe they're swimmin' after her right now!

NIKKI: I saw you hammering away at the fighter, the jockey, and the ball player, Inspector. Any results?

INSPECTOR: Results! They won't talk at all. Those three tough lads had a get-together before we caught up with 'em tonight . . . I'll bet my best bib-and-tucker!

VELIE: It's a con-spi . . . con — it's a plot.

ELLERY: Very interesting.

INSPECTOR: Sticking together like shipwrecked mates on a raft. But *why*, for pete's sake?

ELLERY: We know Mousie was blackmailing all of them, dad. I have an idea he was holding *documentary proof of their past slips* over their heads! In that case, whichever one of them murdered Mousie tonight *found* the damning documents on Mousie's body.

NIKKI: And I'll bet called a conference!

INSPECTOR: Sounds likely. He'd make a deal with the others: If they all kept quiet and protected him, he'd give 'em their papers back.

ELLERY: Yes . . . Come into the

hall here. I want to show you something. (*They follow him.*) The hallway runs east and west, the western end opening onto the room where Mousie was stabbed to death. (*They stop.*) Now look at the *north* wall of this hallway.

VELIE: A straight line o' bloody smears —

NIKKI: All the way down the hall about shoulder-high!

VELIE: How come we didn't spot this blood-trail before?

INSPECTOR: Because the repair man just fixed the house-lights, you cluck! Well, well. Blood-smears run from the murder-room practically to the front door . . .

VELIE: These marks were left by somebody's *hand!*

NIKKI: The *murderer's* hand!

ELLERY: Exactly. He stabbed Mousie, thrust his hand into the dead man's inside breast pocket probably to look for the documents. The wounds were bloody and we know Mousie's vest and coat are badly stained . . .

INSPECTOR: So the killer got Mousie's blood on his hand and in the bad light from the candle, and in his excitement, didn't realize it!

VELIE: Then he wants to make his getaway, goes back through the hall . . . it's dark, so he's got to feel his way along . . . keeps follow in' the wall, touchin' it with his hand, an' leaves this bloody trail of smears on the wall!

NIKKI: All right, he did. Where does that get us?

INSPECTOR: (*Dryly*) Exactly nowhere. Marks are no good for fingerprints. Just smear-lines at regular intervals. Great discovery, son — (*A* DETECTIVE *enters.*) Well, Piggott?

DETECTIVE: We found the Dale girl, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: It's about time. Get her in here.

DETECTIVE: (*To woman entering*) In you go, baby.

MISS DALE: (*She is young, vigorous*) Take your hands off me, you! What do you think you're doing?

VELIE: Lay off, Piggott. Come 'ere, Miss Dale. Inspector, she ain't even wet! (*He chuckles.*) So I s'pose she didn't try to swim away after all.

MISS DALE: I don't know why I was picked up, Inspector — or Lieutenant, or whatever you are! I don't know anything about this case.

INSPECTOR: (*Softly*) No? Miss Dale, you visited Mousie this evening — you were his *last* visitor, in fact. That makes you a pretty lively suspect for his murder.

MISS DALE: Oh, rubbish. Are you through? Because if you are, I'd like to go. I'm just not talking.

VELIE: (*Dryly*) Too late!

NIKKI: (*In a low voice*) She's been reached, too!

ELLERY: (*Same*) Looks like it, Nikki.

NIKKI: I wonder what Mousie had on *her*.

INSPECTOR: (*In a friendly tone*) Miss Dale, you're making a lot of money giving swimming and diving exhibitions. I understand you've just been offered a fat Hollywood contract, too. Publicity involving you in a cheap little murder right now would just about ruin your career. How about a deal? Tell me what you know, and I'll do my best to keep you out of the papers.

MISS DALE: (*Bored*) May I go, please? I have a date with —

INSPECTOR: (*Bluffing*) You have a date with Police Headquarters! Velie, arrest this girl! (VELIE *growls*.) Book her on suspicion of murder, and call the newspaper boys in!

VELIE: Yes, sir. (*Gruffly*) Let's go, sister. This is gonna be a one-way ride. (*She starts to weep suddenly*.)

INSPECTOR: Oh, you don't like that, Miss Dale! Then suppose you tell me what went on here tonight. (INSPECTOR QUEEN *and* VELIE *keep this up in the background*.)

NIKKI: (*Low*) But Ellery, the Inspector hasn't a thing on her! How can he arrest her?

ELLERY: (*Chuckling*) Dad's bluffing . . . the old owl!

INSPECTOR: Make up your mind, Miss Dale. Walk or talk!

MISS DALE: (*Sobbing*) Please . . . I'll be ruined . . . I was married three years ago — it was a mistake, and I got a divorce . . . it was all kept so secret. Now I'm married again, and this — this Mousie, he came to me last week and said my divorce was no good — there was some kind of technical reason for it, I don't know what, but Mousie had the proof on paper. He wanted money to keep quiet, because he said I'm a bigamist . . . asked me for five thousand dollars!

INSPECTOR: Yes, Miss Dale? Get it all off your chest.

MISS DALE: (*Sobbing*) I came here tonight prepared to pay, and . . . I found him d-d-dead! (*She chokes*.) I was so scared I ran. Please, Inspector. That's all I know! Don't tell the papers — I didn't know I was doing anything wrong — my husband's in Europe now — he's a foreign correspondent — don't arrest me for bigamy . . . let me go . . .

ELLERY: Miss Dale, who is your *first* husband? Or rather, the man Mousie claimed you're still legally married to?

MISS DALE: The sports commentator, Sam Buckley. (*They all exclaim in astonishment.*)

ELLERY: Does Sam know Mousie's been blackmailing you?

MISS DALE: Sam doesn't know a thing! He doesn't even know our divorce was illegal — I didn't dare tell him. (*She cries again.*)

ELLERY: Dad, I'd like to talk to you.

INSPECTOR: Sure, son. Velie, put Miss Dale in some room here where she can't be reached by the press, and . . . (*Low*) have a man watch her!

VELIE: (*Low*) Gotcha. (*Louder.*) Come on, Miss Dale. (*He takes her arm.*) We'll make you nice an' comfy . . . (*They exit.*)

NIKKI: Well, we're in the usual mess, aren't we? Four suspects — all four had opportunity — all four had motive —

INSPECTOR: And all four could have bumped Mousie off! Very nice. What did you want to speak to me about, Ellery?

ELLERY: (*Calmly*) The murderer of Mousie.

INSPECTOR: Whaaaat? (*Groaning.*) No. I don't believe it!

NIKKI: Ellery Queen, you mean to stand there and say you know who stabbed Mousie to death tonight?

ELLERY: (*Chuckling*) Of course!

ELLERY QUEEN *has just said he knows who murdered* MOUSIE. *Do you? You can have some additional fun by stopping here and trying to solve the crime before* ELLERY *gives the solution. Naming the criminal correctly is not enough, if you play the game fairly. You must get the correct reasoning, too. . . . Now go ahead and read* ELLERY'S *own solution to "The Adventure of the Mouse's Blood."*

The Solution

SCENE 9: *The Same, Later.*

ELLERY: This has been my simplest case in a long time.

VELIE: Thar she blows!

INSPECTOR: Pipe down, Moby Dick! Go on, son. Simple, eh?

ELLERY: Extremely. Who left that trail of bloody hand-smears on the wall of the hallway? Mousie himself? No, Mousie died instantly, according to Dr. Prouty's report. So the blood-trail was left by Mousie's killer. Does the trail tell us who that killer was? Yes, indeed.

NIKKI: Just like that! May I ask how, Mr. Queen?

ELLERY: (*Chuckling*) Geography, Nikki, geography. Visualize the hallway. I said it runs east and west — that the room in which Mousie was murdered is at the *western* end of the hall — that the killer, in feeling his way along the

hall in the dark as he fled from the scene of the crime left bloody hand-marks on the *north* wall . . .

VELIE: Whoa! Lemme get this. Hall runs east an' west — marks are on the *north* wall . . .

INSPECTOR: Killer's leaving . . . he's going *east*, *facing* east . . . his hand keeps touching the *north* wall . . .

ELLERY: If he's facing east, to which side of him *is* the north wall?

NIKKI: His left side! He was feeling his way along the north, or *left*, side of the hall!

ELLERY: Yes, and when a person feels his way in the dark, which of his hands will he inevitably grope with?

INSPECTOR: The hand he always favors, of course.

ELLERY: Of course. So if the killer felt his way along the *left* side, he was using his *left* hand — consequently, *we know the killer is left-handed.*

VELIE: That's right, by gosh. A southpaw! We gotta look for a southpaw.

INSPECTOR: (*Thoughtfully*) We've already narrowed the list of suspects to just four: Prizefighter Kilgore, Ball player Slats Mayo, Jockey Peewee Robbin, and Swimmer Dotty Dale . . .

NIKKI: But which one of the four is left-handed?

ELLERY: Let's see. Johnnie Kilgore, the prize-fighter? No! Remember Sam Buckley's broadcast of the Kilgore-Logan fight? Every one of Kilgore's punches was a *right-hand* punch — in fact, Buckley characterized Kilgore over the air as "the best right-handed puncher since Dempsey!"

VELIE: So Kilgore's right-handed an' *he's* out. How about —?

ELLERY: Slats Mayo, the pitcher? Well, in the ninth inning of that no-hit game Mayo hurled, Buckley described Mayo's pitching delivery — how he raised his "mighty right arm" to throw the ball that struck out the last batter! Buckley even described Mayo as "the sensational *right-hander!*"

INSPECTOR: So the baseball player's not left-handed, either. How about Peewee Robbin, the jockey? I don't seem to recall —

ELLERY: Again Buckley's broadcast gave us the clue, dad. In the stretch the jockey had to use his whip on Bloodstone. When he dropped the whip, Buckley described Peewee as slapping the horse *with his right hand!* So the jockey, too, is right-handed.

NIKKI: So that leaves . . . Oh, dear!

ELLERY: (*Grimly*) Yes, Nikki — *the swimmer, Dotty Dale.*

VELIE: But we gotta find out if she's

left-handed, Mr. Queen —

ELLERY: *I* didn't have to, Sergeant. Three of the four suspects being right-handed, I knew Dotty Dale, *being the only remaining possibility*, *must* be left-handed . . . *must* be Mousie's killer. Yes, it was that girl who stabbed Mousie, took the blackmail documents in his possession, escaped, and then called the three men-victims together and in return for their particular documents got them to promise to protect her by keeping quiet. Miss Dotty Dale killed Mousie to protect her career . . . and as usual when people take the law into their own hands, all she actually accomplished was to ruin it forever.

(*The music comes up.*)

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the 6 Corridors

by Roy Post and Austin Ripley

Looking through the back of the "false" mirror into the next office of the Map Section, Professor Fordney *heard* (through his listening device) the two men as they took papers from the files. There had been suspicion but no proof of the theft of important government information and the professor had undertaken a secret investigation. That afternoon he had entered the building before closing time and waited. It was now 11:32 P.M. The men were leaving — with papers. They would be trailed.

After three minutes Fordney followed. Not even the guards knew he was in the building; no chances of a leak were taken. He was to leave by a small door at the bottom of the laboratory steps.

As he approached the hub of six intersecting corridors, where he must turn off, the professor uttered an exclamation of dismay. This was the first time he'd been in the vast, rambling building with its maze of halls. Those two must have been suspicious. For they had overturned the sign standard, with its arrows and names, that had stood in the center of the hub!

He picked up the standard, turned it about and stared helplessly at its arrows and signs: AUDITING OFFICE, MAIN ENTRANCE, MAP SECTION, PURCHASING DIVISION, LABORATORY, ENGINEERING DIVISION. But *which* corridor led to the laboratory?

He *had* to get out quickly. He *couldn't* call the guards. The embarrassment — and his reputation! What a dilemma. Suddenly he chuckled. Of course! Five minutes later Fordney left by the laboratory steps.

How did he know* which *corridor led to the laboratory?

Solution

Fordney simply set up the standard with the sign, MAP SECTION, pointing to the corridor from which he had come! This placed *all* signs in their proper positions.

Edgar Wallace's best detective is J. G. Reeder, a character well-known to American mystery addicts. Perhaps Wallace's next-best detective character is Chief Inspector O. Rater, known familiarly (from his name) as the Orator, whose exploits have never been published in America. Here is a sturdy, clever example of the Orator's detective work — in an Edgar Wallace short story given to the American public for the first time in any form whatsoever.

THE MAN NEXT DOOR

by EDGAR WALLACE

WHEN Mr. Giles walked into Chief Inspector O. Rater's room, he did so with a cheerful assurance. His attitude proclaimed the fact that he had nothing whatever to fear from Scotland Yard or its genii; there was a smile on his red face and a frank geniality in his blue eyes which would have been proper to a man whose past was beyond reproach.

"*Good* morning, Mr. Rater: it's very good of you to see me, I'm sure. When I wrote, I said to myself: 'I wonder if the gov'nor will spare me a minute?' The fact is, I've been trying to make up my mind to write to you for some time."

"Sit down, Farmer," said the Orator, gently. He whose rubicund countenance and expansive manner, no less than the accident of his surname, had earned him the nickname, smiled wider than ever and drew a chair to the inspector's table.

"You know what things are, Mr. Rater! When a man's had a little bit of trouble with the police and is starting all over again to build up his reputation, he sort of shrinks from getting in touch with the police or authorities, if I may use that expression."

"Straight now, Farmer?"

The Orator's steady eyes were coldly sceptical.

"Ab-so-lutely! The other game doesn't pay, Mr. Rater. *You* know that. Yes, I've had a bit of luck. An uncle of mine set me up in business. Naturally, he doesn't know the jokes I've been up to ——"

"What kind of business?"

"Farmer" Giles dived into a pocket and extracted a pocket-case. The Orator took the large card which was handed across to him:

J. GILES & Co.
(LATE OLNEY, BROWN & STERMER)
AGENTS
479 CANNON STREET, E.C.

"'Agent' tells me everything!" said Mr. Rater. "What are you — a bookmaker?"

But it appeared that the Farmer was the proprietor of a prosperous general agency.

"The business is increasing every month," he said, enthusiastically. "I've worked it up in eighteen months to double what it used to be. My uncle — well, I'll tell you the truth, Mr. Rater — I bought it with my own money. Twelve hundred of the best. I've always been a very careful man, as you know, and I've put money aside. What's the use of my telling you lies? It was my own money, got on the cross, most of it . . . you're too wide to believe it wasn't. I've been making up my mind to come and have a chat with you ——"

"I recognised you in the city, and you know I recognised you," interrupted the Orator. "Yes, the business is O.K. I've had you taped up."

The Farmer beamed.

"Trust you! I said to my wife — quite a lady, Mr. Rater — she was in business herself when I picked her up — I said: 'Molly, if there's anybody wider than Mr. Rater, I don't want to meet him!' My very words!"

"Married, eh?"

Mr. Giles nodded.

"Eighteen months. I'd like you to come down to tea one Sunday. She's as pretty as a picture. It's not much of a neighbourhood — 908 Acacia Street — and we've got a few queer birds living in our road. One of these days I'll get a flat up West, but I always say 'Creep before you crawl!'"

He was a man given to the employment of trite maxims.

"908 Acacia Street!"

The Orator had two causes for astonishment. Acacia Street he knew. It was a long avenue of very small houses, the last thoroughfare in which you might expect to find the residence of J. Giles & Co. (late Olney, Brown & Stermer), Merchants of the City of London.

"This is my point, gov'nor." The Farmer was anxious to explain the modesty of his habitation. "I'm trying to make an honest living. I'm earn-

ing good money, but what happens if I come up West and take a flash flat? First of all, the police start making enquiries; secondly, I meet my old friends, and that starts me wrong."

"Very creditable," murmured Inspector Rater; "also you're not known in Brockley."

"Exactly!" said the other.

He took up his hat from the floor where he had placed it and smoothed the crown.

"Do you know a man called Smith — George Smith?" he asked.

The Orator looked at the ceiling.

"It's an uncommon name," he said; and the Farmer grinned.

"You will have your joke, gov'nor! He lives next door to me, and I wouldn't be surprised if he wasn't a lag. He's a sanctimonious sort of fellow, and goes to church; but all I know is that the night the boys did that jog at Blackheath and got away with eight thousand quid worth of sparklers, he was out all night; I happened to know because I saw him come home at five."

"You having worked at your office all night?" murmured the Inspector, and for a moment the caller was disconcerted.

"No. To tell you the truth, I'm an early riser."

"You always were, Farmer," said Mr. Rater, and offered a limp hand.

908 Acacia Street! And at 910 lived a certain man who was a wood carver by trade and who dabbled in electrical contrivances.

A coincidence: a portent, probably — Mr. Rater found material for speculation.

Giles went back to his office in Cannon Street. He had some rooms on the second floor of a business block, and attended to the more intimate side of his affairs. He had in truth purchased the wreckage of a once prosperous concern, but with little intention of putting it to a legitimate use. Even when that remarkable order had been cabled to him from a client of the old firm, and he had been notified by the bankers that £6,000 had been placed to his credit for the purpose of making the purchase, his first inclination had been to draw the money and vanish gracefully. He had, however, taken over two clerks with the business, and one of these explained that the money could only be drawn on presentation of the invoices for the goods; thereupon Mr. Giles most virtuously, and with the assistance of the clerk who knew something about the execution of orders, carried out his duties, received his

small commission and was more or less content.

It so happened that the order he filled was an advantageous one, and at the end of six months' trading he found his clientele had increased threefold.

He was only mildly interested in the phenomenon, for his interests lay elsewhere than in the pure paths of commerce. J. Giles & Co. was really the head clerk, who conducted all negotiations and did no more than bring cheques to be endorsed or signed (the former operation was carried out by Mr. Giles willingly, the latter suspiciously), and he left to his employer other negotiations more delicate than the head clerk imagined.

The shipping of second-hand motor-cars to India and the Far East is a lucrative business, if you do not pay too much for the cars. And Mr. Giles paid next to nothing. He had a stabling yard adjacent to the London Docks, where cars would be crated, and it was on the shipment of these machines that his fortune was founded. He had got the strength of this graft from a man he met in Dartmoor, and he might have accumulated a fortune on the disposal of the stolen machines — he was on his way to being the biggest car fence in London — and from the legitimate profits of his business, if that unfortunate spirit of adventure which was his downfall had remained dormant.

On the night before he had interviewed Mr. Rater, he had visited Sunningdale in a stolen car, and, accompanied by two willing helpers, had lifted from a locked house some £1,500 worth of silver, and that was not his first job.

The modus operandi of the little gang can be simply described. A motor-car left unattended was "knocked off" by one of the confederates; the other two were picked up in a quiet suburban street, and the car was driven to the house which had been marked down for attack. He had found some little difficulty in securing assistance. Higgy James, whom he eventually secured, voiced the objection of his kind.

"You're a good workman, Farmer, but what about that gun of yours? If you're carrying one, miss me out. You've done a seven for shooting at a copper, and the next time it'll be life, and anybody who's with you may get the same. I'm not playing unless you cut out the shooter."

The English criminal's horror of being found in possession of firearms is natural. The pistol-embellished burglar receives an automatic addition of five years for his armament should he find himself interviewing one of His Majesty's judges.

The silver from the overnight raid had already been melted, and in bar form would be disposed of by J. Giles & Co. (late Olney, Brown & Stermer), Merchants & Shippers. He finished work early and went to Acacia Street, having a certain matter to settle. As he passed No. 910, where his offending neighbour lived, he scowled at the unlighted window. No. 910 was built against his own house, which was of a semidetached order. Giles opened his own door with a key, and strode into the dining-room. The girl who was sitting by the side of the fire, sewing, got up quickly, and a stranger observing the scene, with no knowledge of their relationship, might have supposed that she stood in terror of him, for all the smile she forced. If she was not as pretty as a picture, that was entirely Farmer Giles' fault, but the bruise had almost disappeared, he was pleased to note — pleased because that old so-and-so Rater might very easily take it into his head to accept the invitation he had given.

"Get my tea," he said, curtly.

"Yes, dear."

As she moved to the door he called her back.

"Has that fellow next door been smarming round?"

"No, dear; he hasn't spoken to me; I haven't seen him . . ."

"Don't tell me no lies!" His voice rose menacingly. "You let me come back and catch you gossiping over the garden wall and see what happens to you, my girl!"

She did not answer; fear struck the colour from her face as she stood tense, waiting.

"I picked you up out of the gutter, so to speak," said J. Giles. "A bit of a shop gal, up to your eyes in debt. Why I married you I don't know: I must have been crazy with the heat. I've given you a home and all the luxury that the heart can desire."

"Yes, dear; I'm very grateful." She hastened to speak, but he silenced her with a wave of his hand.

"My tea," he said.

He often woke up in the morning with a dismal sense of his lunacy in marrying this girl. Men should stick to their own game, and his game was burglary and not bigamy. Here was a handle for the "busies" if they ever got to know about his first marriage; and just as he was making good, and had three thousand "ready" stowed away in the Northern and Southern Bank. The more he thought about his danger from this source, the more he hated

her. It was inconsistent in him that he objected to the attentions of the man next door. If the old fool hadn't knocked on the wall in the middle of the night, and later come with an overcoat over his pyjamas to ask what was the meaning of the screams, he might have used Mr. Smith for his own purposes. He wasn't a bad-looking fellow, either, though rather grey and sombre. When the Farmer had caught him by the throat and had attempted to throw him into the street, the intruder had pinned him as though he were a child, had shaken off the grip and flung the Farmer the length of the passage.

Joe Giles brooded before the fire till the girl brought in his tea and placed the tray on the table. For a long time he ignored her presence, and then, without looking at her:

"If a fellow named Rater calls, he's from Scotland Yard — a friend of mine. I know everybody at Scotland Yard — I have to, in my business; but you needn't tell him anything about me, do you hear?"

"Yes, dear."

A long silence; and then:

"What's that fellow next door do for a living?"

"I don't know, Joe."

"'I don't know, Joe!'" he mimicked her. "Do you know anything?"

She shrank back from the threat of his uplifted hand, and he laughed.

"You behave yourself and I'll behave myself," he said. "I've got a gentleman calling on me to-night: when he comes, you go up to the bedroom. If I want you I'll send for you."

He looked at his watch and yawned, and, going up to the bathroom, washed himself and announced his intention of going out for an hour. Once, in the early days of their marriage, she had made the mistake of asking him where he was going, but that folly had not been repeated.

She waited until the door slammed on him, passed quickly into the drawing-room with its bow window, and through the curtains watched him till he disappeared; then she went through the kitchen, leaving all the doors open so that she could hear, knowing that her neighbour would have heard the door slam.

He was waiting in the garden, a dark figure in the gloom.

"I had to lie to him, Mr. Smith," she said. "I said I hadn't spoken to you. What am I to do?"

Her voice was vibrant with despair; and yet she found a certain dismal happiness in talking to him. Every night the girl went out at the same hour,

and every night she made her way to the garden to discuss a problem which had been hopeless at its outset and was hopeless yet.

"Well, you hadn't seen me to-day." His voice was rough but kindly. "Has he beaten you again?"

She shook her head: he could just see that gesture.

"No, he hasn't struck me since you came the other night. I don't know what to do, Mr. Smith, I'm so terrified of him. He gives me no money, so I can't run away from him. If I went back to my old job at Harridge's he would follow me. He terrifies me. Sometimes I think I shall put my head in the gas oven and end it all."

"You're talking like a fool." The man's voice was sharp, but almost instantly he became his gentle self. "I'll find a way out for you ——"

"Who is Mr. Rater of Scotland Yard?" she asked, suddenly.

"Why?" He had obviously been startled by the question.

"Joe was talking about him; said he would be likely to call. Do you know him?"

A pause.

"Yes, I know him. I met him once. When is he coming?"

His tone was anxious, and she wondered what Rater stood for in his mind.

"I don't know if he's coming at all. Joe only said that he might be calling. He wants to know what you do for a living."

She heard a chuckle from the other side of the wall.

"He does, does he? Well, you can tell him the truth: I'm a working woodcarver — he's seen me at the bench often enough; and I've another job, which is my own private affair and I never talk about it."

"I'll bet you don't, you dirty trickster."

The girl screamed and turned in horror, to find her husband standing almost by her side. He had crept back without a sound, and had overheard the last part of the conversation. She would have fled past him, but he caught her by the arm in a grip that made her scream again.

"You wait here. So this is what you do when I go out in the evening, eh? I'll settle with you later, Smith."

He dragged the girl inside and bolted the door. Mr. Smith, who was by no means a squeamish man, made a little grimace as her cries came out to him. . . .

She lay huddled on the bed, too weak, too stunned even to cry. Mr. J. Giles buttoned his wristband and put on his coat.

"Now you can go to bed, my girl, and be thankful you're alive," he said.

He locked the bedroom door on her and went downstairs into the kitchen and chose an empty soda-water bottle. Then he went out of the house and knocked at Mr. Smith's door. He was glad to notice that the hallway was in darkness. He heard the footsteps of the man, and then the door was pulled wide open.

"Well?"

Evidently Joe had been recognised.

"I thought I'd come to see you, Mr. Smith" — Giles' manner was polite, even deferential "— and ask you as a great favour to me not to talk to my wife. She's a very foolish girl, and I don't want to get her into trouble of any kind, and ——"

His tone was so conciliatory, his manner so completely subdued, that Smith was off his guard. He saw, only for the fraction of a second, the weapon in the man's hand, and ducked his head as the soda-water bottle struck him. He went down on his knees and collapsed in a heap on the floor, and Mr. J. Giles closed the door carefully and went back into his house to spend an uncomfortable half-hour. Suppose this bird went to the police . . . that was the second mad thing he had done.

From time to time he pressed his ear against the thin party wall, and had the satisfaction of hearing the stumbling feet of his victim. Taking up a position in the parlour where he could watch the front door, he waited for the man to emerge; but half an hour and an hour passed, and nothing happened. The Farmer smiled. There was probably a very good reason why the man should not go to the police.

Towards ten o'clock the man he expected called. It was "Higgy," the best of runners and the most loyal of assistants. There was a job ready for the working — a big house on the outskirts of Horsham. The family were away; there were seven maidservants and two elderly men.

"The old lady who owns the house is down at Bournemouth, and keeps all her jewels in the safe. You can't see it because it's let into the wall behind the head of the bed. 'Stokey' Barmond went through the house yesterday — he got pally with a gel servant — and he says it's easy. A French safe that you could open with your fingernails, and lashings of jewellery — old-fashioned, but the stones are extra."

"What's the best way for the car?" asked Mr. Giles.

"Higgy" explained. There was a side road where it could be parked, and

from there over a low boundary wall into the grounds was "a step." He produced a fairly accurate plan, for "Higgy" in his youth had been apprenticed to a cartographer. This the Farmer scanned carefully.

"It looks good. Get 'Stokey' to knock off a car to-morrow night, and pick me up at the top of Denmark Hill."

"No shooters," said "Higgy." It was his conventional warning.

"Is it likely?" demanded the Farmer.

It was his conventional reply.

Nevertheless, when he went up to his room he took his Browning from a locked drawer, and slipped in a full magazine. He knew better than any that his next stretch would be a lifer, and he would as soon hang.

That morning he had seen Smith with a bandage round his head. He was standing at a little iron gate that shut off the forecourt of his house from the road. For a moment, at the sight of him, the heart of J. Giles had quailed and he had gripped the loaded cane he carried.

"Good morning," said Smith. "I've got a bone to pick with you."

"Pick it when you like," said the Farmer, keeping his distance.

The man shook his head.

"I think you'll choose the time yourself," he said, and with the mysterious hint they parted.

All day long Mr. Smith considered his position, and in the evening, after the Farmer had gone to his nefarious work, the man next door went out to find a telephone booth and Rater. For the party walls were very thin, and Mr. Smith, who made a hobby of wire and other electrical contraptions, had made for himself a small microphone. . . .

"You've left it rather late, Smith," said the Orator; but anticipated Smith's explanation.

"It's a queer thing for me to do, sir. I can't very well go into the box, and that's been worrying me all day."

The Orator only waited long enough at Scotland Yard to get into touch with the Sussex police before he boarded a swift tender and took the Worthing road.

The Farmer's gift of organisation was of a high order. Almost to the minute he was picked up at the top of Denmark Hill by a light car, the proprietorship in which had undergone a change in the previous hour. "Higgy" was at the wheel, their companion in the seat behind.

"You picked a good 'un," said the Farmer graciously, which was high

praise for him.

They passed through Horsham in a blinding shower of rain which would have made police observation a difficult business even if "Higgy" had not already changed the number-plate of the stolen car and covered its radiator with a muff.

As they approached the scene of their exploit, "Higgy" asked, not without anxiety:

"You haven't brought your shooter, have you, Farmer?" and Mr. Giles turned on him savagely.

"What's the matter with you? Would *you* get a stretch for my gun? It's me that's got to go through it if we're caught — not you!"

Nevertheless, "Higgy" persisted stubbornly.

"Have you got a gun or haven't you?"

"I haven't," snapped the Farmer.

"Higgy" said nothing, but he was not convinced. It was his task to stand by the car, and at the first sound of a shot — well, "Higgy" knew his own graft best. He'd be half-way to Horsham before the Farmer reached the road. He had already got his excuses ready for his desertion.

The car turned into the side lane, moving silently on the downward slope with its engine shut off till "Higgy" braked the machine to a jolting standstill. There was a whispered consultation. Crossing the wall, Farmer and his assistant disappeared into the night. "Higgy" loosed the brakes, and, by pushing and pulling, managed to turn the nose of the machine about without switching on his engine. He waited for ten minutes to pass, trod on the starter and set the engine going. A quarter of an hour, and he was half-dozing at the wheel, when he heard the squelch of a footstep, and a light was suddenly flashed in his face.

"Step down and don't shout," said a terse voice. "Higgy" was conscious that the lane was full of uniformed policemen, two of whom were already crossing the wall.

The Farmer had reached his objective, and with the assistance of a convenient porch had forced a window which brought him to the bedroom. The safe proved to be almost as easy money as he had anticipated. In a quarter of an hour he had wrenched the little door from its hinges and had stowed away in his several pockets the valuable contents. When he came out on to the porch his watcher had disappeared. Swinging over the balustrade, he slid down a pillar. . . .

A hand gripped his arm tightly, but he wrenched it free. He saw, dimly, the shape of a helmet against the copper-red sky, dodged under an outstretched arm and ran. He was within a dozen paces of the wall when his pursuer leapt forward and, tackling him low, brought the thief sprawling to the ground. In an instant he was on his feet, grinning with rage, and as the constable scrambled up with him . . .

"Here's yours!" said the Farmer, and shot twice from the hip.

He didn't wait to see the man go slithering into the mud, but darted for the wall and threw himself over, into the arms of the Scotland Yard men who were waiting for him.

"It's a cop," said the Farmer, and hastened to establish his innocence. "We were struggling for the gun and it went off by accident."

"The jury will be interested," said the Orator, icily.

The murder was a commonplace, vulgar one. Only the profession of the victim gave it a public interest. The Farmer appeared first at the local police court, before a bench of magistrates, then before an Assize Court. £3,000 in the bank gave him the right to the best legal advice, and his case was argued with great eloquence by a brilliant leader of the Bar. The value of such assistance was that it prolonged the trial from one to two days, but the result was inevitable. The reporters sharpened their pencils, the bored ushers leaning against the wall, the morbid sightseers — even the stolid jury knew it was inevitable before the curtain rose on the last act of the drama. Only the judge and the counsel for the defense offered a similitude of conscientious doubt. And when sentence was promulgated, and he was taken to Wandsworth Prison, handcuffs on his wrists and three warders in attendance, there was, felt the Farmer, still hope.

He had not seen his wife since his arrest. She had come up once at his earnest request, but since he was not allowed to interview her except in the presence of a prison official, he could not give her instructions as to certain rather incriminating articles which must be done away with (such as two full boxes of ammunition in the right hand side of the chest of drawers); she wasn't of much use to him, and the sight of her white, drawn face exasperated him to such an extent that when she came again he declined to see her.

The Court of Appeal dismissed his case summarily. And then it was he bethought him of sending for the Orator. Mr. Rater saw him in his cell, a

growth of red beard on his redder face, and the Farmer grinned his greeting.

"You've got me to rights, Rater — why did you let 'Higgy' off with a three?"

"Higgy" had certainly escaped with three years' penal servitude.

"And that fellow Smith — he thinks I'll be leaving that woman of mine a bit of money and that he'll marry her. Now I'm telling you, Rater, she's not my wife. I was married before. She's not entitled to a farthing — she won't get it either."

He gave particulars of his early marriage. It was not in a spirit of contrition, but rather, as he explained, with satisfaction, "to put her in her place."

"My point is that I don't want that woman to go claiming anything from me. She's been a curse to me," he added, but did not explain how. Nor, thought Rater, could a logical explanation be forthcoming.

It was out of sheer malice that he had sent for the Orator, who suggested as much, and the condemned man nodded and grinned.

"She's not going to marry Smith — not on my money."

"You needn't worry about Smith ——" began the Orator, but stopped. He was on delicate ground.

"That man's a crook," said the Farmer. "I've had him 'taped' for a long time. He's always going out at nights, and staying away a couple of days. He lives alone, and I'll bet if you 'fanned' his house you'd find lashings of stuff."

"I shouldn't be surprised," said the Orator, who was glad to leave his victim.

The man next door was a sore point with the Farmer. He discussed him with his custodians, the warders who watched him night and day. He did almost all the talking, and they the listening; but they were good listeners.

"I wish I'd knocked his brains out," he said, amiably. "They can only hang you once, even for fifty thousand murders. I'll bet he carries that mark I gave him to his grave! I caught him here . . ." He illustrated the blow, and the warders were only faintly interested.

And then came the morning of mornings, and Mr. J. Giles submitted patiently to being prayed over. He was still red of face, hardly moved by the horror which awaited him in the little cell that opens immediately opposite the one in which he was confined. When the parson had finished, he rose from his knees with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Now let's see your ——"

And then the man next door walked swiftly into the cell, and he had a black strap in his hand. Giles stared at him open-mouthed. There was a livid scar on his forehead. No doubt at all, it was Smith . . . the man next door!

"Good Gawd!" he gasped. "That's what you meant, was it? We'd meet again and you'd be the fellow that brought it off!"

Smith, the hangman, did not answer. He never spoke in business hours.

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the 3 Suspects

by Roy Post and Austin Ripley

Three of the guests at Lakeview Lodge had no alibis between 7:30 and 8:00 the previous evening when Walter Lawton had been shot and killed in the woods.

John Ward hoped that pictures he had taken and developed of an easily identifiable spot would prove his statement that he had been on the north shore of the lake, four miles from the murder scene, between 7:30 and 8:00.

Professor Fordney considered them excellent, especially two of some beautiful maples, whose branches overhanging the lake cast long shadows shoreward. Of course he would visit the spot though the others agreed the photos were taken on the north shore.

"And you, Miss Brewster?" the criminologist asked suddenly.

"I . . . I. . . . that is we . . . I mean. . ."

"Yes?"

"Well," the girl spoke slowly this time, "Joe Matson and I were on Sandy Point — that's a mile from here. We had an argument and Joe left me. I stayed there until after 8:00 and walked to the Lodge." The girl looked frightened.

"Suppose I'm next," smiled Vincent Nelson. Fordney nodded soberly.

"Well, about 7 o'clock I started out for a run through the woods on my motorcycle. Got about two miles in the *opposite* direction from the murder scene — when the engine died. I tinkered with it for an hour, finally gave up, walked back here, called a garage, and they brought it in."

The Professor inspected the machine. New front tire, badly worn rear tire, only three tools in kit. The garage said the gas line had become plugged.

Professor Fordney knew which one had lied.

How did he know? And who had lied?

Solution

Shadows in the photos which Ward said he had taken between 7:30 and 8:00 on the *north* shore were cast *shoreward*. As the sun was in the west, these shadows, if taken where the pictures had been and *when* he said, would have been out *over the lake* — proving he was lying; and had no alibi. He later said he killed Lawton in self-defense, and was convicted of manslaughter.

Introducing Nick Noble, one of the oddest detectives to grace a modern work of fiction — in a jolting, muscular crime mystery by the author of "The Case of the Baker Street Irregulars," Anthony Boucher, whose latest mystery novel, "The Case of the Seven Sneezes," was published by Simon & Schuster in May, 1942. . . . "Screwball Division," we are happy to inform you, has never before been published in any form, at any time, anywhere.

SCREWBALL DIVISION

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

DETECTIVE Lieutenant Donald MacDonald, L.A.P.D., was newly commissioned and inexperienced. He had never been inside a priest's study before. For the matter of that, he had never seen a murdered priest.

While he listened to the housekeeper, he tried to keep his eye on the diocesan map of parishes, on the unfinished poster announcing a Baked Ham Dinner with Bingo, on the glaring chromo of the Sacred Heart; but his gaze kept shifting back to the body.

"The poor dear old man all alone in the house," the woman was saying. "Father Guerrero off on a sick call, and me hurrying out to the Safeway because we was that near out of flour and he did love his coffee-cake of a morning, the saint that he was."

There was no point in staring at the body. The photographer had taken it from half a dozen angles. The surgeon hadn't got there yet. The body was their business between them. But a black cassock with a stiff white collar, a thin peaceful old face with a fringe of gray hair — these didn't go with murder.

"I'll never forgive myself, that I never will. To leave him alone with the world full of Nazzies and Kingdom People and suchlike!"

MacDonald brought his eyes back to the witness. "And you were gone how long?"

"That I can't tell you, Officer, not to the minute. That nice young man at the Safeway, the blond one, he was showing me snapshots of his youngest and —"

"But roughly?"

"Well, say ten minutes. Fifteen maybe."

"And what time was this?"

"I'm not one to look at the clock day in and day out, Officer, like my poor sister's husband that never held a job six months in his life, God rest

his soul, but it was before dinner, that I know, because it was all in the oven and a good half-hour to go yet."

"And dinner was at what time?"

"Six o'clock sharp, and Father Guerrero gets his sick call five minutes before I left, and he'll come home without a bite in his stomach, the poor lamb, to find his pastor . . ."

The woman had wept before, and it had taken ten minutes to bring her back to the questions. MacDonald hastily interposed, "That would make it about five-thirty you left?"

She gulped a little. "Yes, Officer."

"You got back some time around quarter of six?"

The gulp was stronger. "Yes, Officer."

"And found Father Halloran . . . ?"

The gulp won. She nodded silently and turned her streaming face away.

MacDonald damned the surgeon's delay and doubly damned the fascination of that hassocked corpse. The housekeeper was huddled in silent sorrow. MacDonald could catch the dry clicking of her lips as the beads of a rosary slipped through her fingers. He forced himself to stare at the body with what he tried to make an impartial and experienced eye, and lined up the facts.

Entrance of bullet below heart to the right. Exit in left shoulder blade. Bullet found in back of chair. Priest had been sitting. Murderer then must have been kneeling to achieve angle of shot. Query: false pretense of confession? Memo: find out mechanics of confessional positions. Time of death: 5:30 to 5:45, pending surgeon's report. Memo: check time with blond Safeway clerk. Time . . .

Lieutenant MacDonald bent over the corpse and pushed back the black sleeve on the left arm. Wristwatch. A bare chance . . .

MacDonald rose and looked at the praying woman. There was a new and speculative quality in his stare. The broken wristwatch had registered exactly 7:06.

Detective Lieutenant Dan Barker, L.A.P.D., felt no compulsion to stare at the body on the bed of the seedy Skid Row lodging house. There was more blood on the face of the questioned witness. There was blood on the floor too, and on the luridly prophetic tracts proclaiming the Kingdom; and the corpse had bled very little.

Barker let another short right jab light on the unshaven jaw of the witness and watched the head bobble on its scrawny neck. "Come clean, friend," he grunted. "You can't get away with it."

The witness tried to stem his nosebleed with what might once have been a handkerchief. Barker slapped his hand down. "Come clean," he repeated.

"Honest to gar, copper, I don't know nothing. I hears the shot and I looks in here and I says, 'Wow! This is where the bulls come in.' So I runs downstairs and I finds Finney on his beat and he takes a gander and calls in you boys. And honest to gar, copper, that's all I know."

Barker looked him over reflectively and decided on the nose. A light tap jerked the head back and set the blood flowing at a doubled rate. "We've got you cold, friend. Why'd you kill this Marsden jerk?"

The witness leaned over to let the red stream hit the floor. A drop splashed on Barker's right shoe. The officer raised his foot and swung it at the witness's fleshless left shank.

"Keep your blood to yourself, friend." His voice was toneless. "What'd you do with the rod?"

The witness hopped on his right leg and held both hands clasped to his left shin. He moaned. His hopping left bright discs of blood around the floor with spatter-drops radiating from them.

"The rod, friend," Barker went on calmly. "We've got you cold without that, but maybe we could make things easy if you'd help us."

"Honest to gar, copper . . . Oooo . . . !" The witness's voice wavered like an air-raid warning as he hopped about.

"Stand still and on both legs, you yellow-bellied stork."

The witness stood. "Honest, I don't see no rod. I hears the shot and I says, 'Cripes, that screwball next door took the short cut home,' but then I looks in and I don't see no rod so I goes for Finney just like I says."

Barker smiled now. "You don't see no rod, is that it, friend?"

"Sure, copper. Just like I tells you. Honest to —"

"For gar's sake forget about gar for a while. And you didn't see the murderer come out of this room either, friend?"

"I don't see nobody. Hell, copper, I ain't covering for nobody. If I see 'em, I'd sing. I play ball. You ask Finney."

"I'm asking you. You don't see nobody?"

"Nobody. Honest to —"

Meditatively Barker drove a right against the witness's left ear. The

head described a long arc on its skimpy neck and met Barker's left at the end of the arc. The neck stood straight again. The head wobbled and the eyes were glassy. Barker laid a flat palm against the chest to prop up the body, and swore as blood dripped on his sleeve. His other palm slapped the bristly cheeks until a little life came back to the eyes.

"O. K., friend. Now listen to what you've said. This room's at the end of a hall. You're in the next room down. You hear a shot, you think this Marsden creep has killed himself, you run out and look in here. You don't see no rod, you don't see nobody." He mimicked the witness's wavering pipe. "So, my friend, honest to gar, *you* killed him."

The witness started to open his mouth. A backhand slap closed it and opened his lower lip. Barker had more reasons than vanity for wearing a heavy ring.

"You're listening now, friend," Barker reminded him. "You thought stashing away the gun was smart; they couldn't pin it on you that way. That's where you were wrong. A gun, and it could be suicide. No gun, and it's murder. And you're the murderer, because anybody else would have had to pass you in the hall." Barker paused. "There's one other thing that's phony," he added. "How can you be so cockeyed sure of the time?"

The split lip thickened the witness's speech. "I used to work in a watch factory. Sometimes I do repairs for Joe's pawnshop over on Main."

Barker laughed. "Repairs. O. K. We know Joe's a fence. You alter identifications for him. That'll help you."

The witness decided not to argue. "So I'm setting this watch, see, when I hear the shot. That's how I know what time it is. It's just 7:06 when they get him."

Detective Lieutenant Herman Finch, L.A.P.D., sniffed the aroma of the secretary's obviously custom-made cigaret and lit his corncob defiantly. Twenty years on homicide had still not put Finch completely at ease in any dwelling assessed at over $15,000.

"And you don't know of any threats against the Judge?" he puffed.

The young man smiled disdainfully. "Judge Westcott did not move in circles where threats against one's life are a commonplace, Lieutenant."

"Social-like, maybe not. But all the same the Judge was on the bench. I've never known a court officer yet didn't get threatened some time by some poor sucker."

The secretary tapped his cigaret into a delicate glass ashtray. "Judge Westcott was never threatened. I'm certain that in my confidential capacity I'd have been aware of such a development."

"Horsefeathers!" muttered Finch, whose slang never managed to catch up with the times. He looked around the lavishly furnished room. "What do you know about the Judge's will?" he demanded abruptly.

The supercilious youth was unmoved. "I am afraid that's a matter on which you should consult —"

"Sure, formal-like, but you could save me a lot of trouble if you knew."

The secretary shrugged. "Very well. The servants and I receive nominal bequests. The residuary estate is divided among several charities. If you care to know their names . . . ?"

"Later on, for the record. No family?"

"None to my knowledge. Judge Westcott was an orphan and a widower."

Finch poked his index finger into the corncob bowl. "Nominal," he said.

"I beg your pardon, Lieutenant?"

"Nominal. What's it mean?"

"What — ? Oh, the bequests. As to the servants, I don't know. In my case, as I have gathered from the Judge's hints, it means something between five and ten thousand. Surely . . ." He hesitated.

Finch let the silence grow, then drawled out a "Yes?"

"Surely you could not consider such an insignificant sum as providing me with — well, a motive?"

Finch said nothing. There isn't anything you can say to people who call five or ten grand insignificant.

"I'm sorry not to be more helpful."

Finch roused himself. "No way you can narrow the time? Damned doctors always shillyshally — helpful if you can check up on 'em."

"No. The Judge regularly spent the hours from six to eight in his study alone. He often dozed off. I found him when I went in to rouse him for dinner."

"Ground floor, French windows, large grounds. . . . I can see how anybody might slip in all right. But how about the noise?"

"The curse of civilization," the secretary sighed. "A shot can be so easily confused with —"

"I know," Finch cut in. "A backfire. Criminenty! If I had me a buck for every time I've heard a witness talk about backfires, I'd be retired and doing

right nicely, thank you. But the shot wasn't all. There was pretty much of a brawl in there."

"I heard nothing, and most of the time I was here in this adjoining library."

"You must have heard it. Hell of a rumpus."

"Then it must have happened before I came in here, around six-twenty, or after I went upstairs to dress at seven-thirty."

"Uh-huh." Finch nodded abstractedly and walked over to the study door. The room was a shattered mess. Chairs overturned, ashstand spilled, telephone sprawling, clock . . .

Finch puffed harder on his corncob and strode over to the clock. It was electric, and the struggle had jerked it loose from the wall plug. "Hot ziggety zag!" he murmured. The clock had stopped at exactly 7:06.

Detective Lieutenants MacDonald and Finch, holders of the newest and oldest lieutenant's commissions on the force, decided on another cup of coffee.

Finch glanced up at the clock in the all-night lunch wagon. "They say the stuff keeps you awake. But when you finish work after midnight, you'll sleep all right."

MacDonald frowned at the counter. "You know," he said, "I had the damnedest thing happen to me tonight."

Finch grinned. "Watch it, Mac."

The younger officer half-answered the grin. "I know. You always say murder's enough in the day's business; keep it quiet after hours. But this is funny. I'd just like to know if it happens much."

Finch stoked up the corncob and said, "Shoot."

"I know it crops up in fiction, but it seems too blamed helpful to be a usual thing. I actually did have a corpse where the wristwatch broke in the fall and established the time."

"Check with the medical evidence?"

"Close enough. You know doctors. But not with the one witness. Housekeeper claims she found the body an hour earlier, fainted, and didn't get around to calling us for years. Puts me on a spot. I'd like to believe her; I'd like to believe the watch. Did you ever have anything like that?"

"Can happen. Matter of fact, something like it cropped up today. Electric clock pulled out of the wall, stopped at 7:06 sharp."

MacDonald choked on a swallow of coffee.

"Too hot, Mac?"

"No. Only . . . That's the same time as mine. The wristwatch. 7:06, exactly."

Finch removed his pipe.

"What goes, friend?" a man down the counter called over.

Finch waved a greeting. "Hi, Barker. Damnedest thing. Mac and I were both out on homicide cases today, and there were stopped timepieces in both cases. But that isn't enough: they were both stopped at six minutes after seven."

Barker announced sharply that he would be violated in an unlikely manner.

"Me too," Finch agreed. "Can you tie that?"

"Tie it? Friend, I can make it look sick. I arrested a Skid Row bum today for shooting the crum in the next room. He claims it was an accident and all he did was hear the shot — at exactly six past seven."

"Criminenty!" Finch muttered. MacDonald was speechless.

"Wait a minute, friends," Barker went on flatly. "That ain't the half. While I'm booking this bum, a call comes in from a prowl car squad. They've just dragged a dentist out of his burning office. Toasted up pretty, he was, and a nice handy little smashed wristwatch to show he collapsed at I'll give you one guess what time."

There was a dead silence. Then Finch spoke, and with a certain quiet authority. "Barker, come over here." He lowered his voice when the other approached. "Look. There's something haywire, and if we three play our cards right we can make sense out of it. Four men don't die at exactly 7:06 just for the hell of it. There's a pattern here."

MacDonald nodded, but Barker let out a snort. "Nuts," he grunted.

"Look, Barker. I know you're smart. You've got a sweet record of convictions, and we won't talk about how you got 'em. But I've been in this game since you were kneehigh to a grasshopper, and I know a screwball setup when I see one."

"Nuts," Barker insisted. "It's chance."

"Four men's too many for chance."

"Friend, nothing's too many for chance. I've been at Padrino's joint when the red came up twenty-three times running, and me with my money on the black all the time till I switch to red on the twenty-fourth. Then bingo!

she's black. That cured me. There's no patterns. It's all chance."

"Play in with us on this, Barker, and I'll swear it won't do your rating any harm."

"Deal me out, friends. I got better things to do tonight than play games with you. Or maybe you wouldn't understand about that? Anyway, I've got my murderer, all locked up and softened and ready to sing. So nuts to you, my friends."

Finch scarcely glanced after the departing officer. He headed straight for the pay phone and dialed the familiar number. "Finch speaking, homicide. . . . Look, boys, I need some dope. I reported a shooting tonight — Judge Westcott. Has the ballistics report come in yet? . . . O. K., when it does I want it checked with the reports on the cases of Lieutenants Barker and MacDonald. . . . Check. Can you dig up now the report Barker just filed? . . . O. K., read me the high points." He listened, nodding and adding an occasional query. "Thanks. And I want all the dope you can scrape up on a dentist that a prowl car found burned tonight. . . . No, that's all I know; you can dig it out of the records from that. All the details you've got on the man, and an extra careful autopsy. Five'll get you ten there's a bullet in that body; check it against the other three. . . . No, I'll phone back in an hour. . . . Check."

MacDonald started as Finch took his hat off a peg. "Where are you going? I thought we were going to talk this thing over?"

"You're coming with me, Mac."

"But where?"

"Son, I've sort of shown you the ropes, like, around this department. You know all about the vice squad and the chem lab and the ballistics department and the burglary division and God knows what else. But there's one section you never saw before tonight."

"And that's where we're going?"

"On the nail, Mac. We're now headed for the Chula Negra café, sometimes known as the Screwball Division, L.A.P.D."

MacDonald got the picture as a rapid walk took them up North Main Street to the Chula Negra. A scandal and political shakeup in the department a dozen years ago. A captain who was in it up to the neck but pulled enough wires to get clear. A lieutenant who took the rap.

Nick Noble, the lieutenant's name was. He'd broken more big cases than

any other man in the department, and half of them some completely screwball setup that usually has the police rocking on their heels. Like the university professor who objected to the existence of one-eyed beggars, and took measures accordingly.

Nick Noble's wife was sick when the shakeup came. She needed an operation badly. She didn't get it. Broke, disgraced, a widower . . .

"It's no wonder he took to drink," Finch said, "but it's hell he had to do it the way he did." Nick Noble was a wino, the lowest and soddenest kind of drunk that even the Skid Row of Los Angeles can exhibit. Nobody knew where he lived or what he lived on. Nobody knew anything except that he hung out at the Chula Negra and that he could still think.

The one thing that interested him beside his cheap sherry, the one hold life still had on him, was the fascination of his old profession. And he could still give cards and spades to any man in the department when it came to the freakish, the outrageous, and the unbelievable.

Nobody bothered to consult Nick Noble much any more save the old-timers of Finch's generation. The younger men trusted mostly to the laboratories or, like Barker, to their own fists and maybe a rubber hose. "Not that you can't crack ninety-nine of your cases with a lab or a hose," Finch added. "But the hundredth one needs a man like Nick Noble, and Mac, this looks like the one in a hundred."

The Chula Negra didn't run to barflies or juke boxes. It catered to nothing but the single-minded eating and drinking of the local Mexicans. Finch walked over to the third of the ramshackle booths and, motioning MacDonald after him, slid in.

MacDonald had expected a fat and bloated hulk. But alcoholism makes some thin, and Nick Noble was one of these. He was a wizened man whose sharp nose seemed trying to push out of his dead white skin. His hair and heavy eyebrows were white too, and his eyes so pale a blue as almost to match them.

There was a water glass half-full of sherry before him. He took a long swig and made a swipe at his nose before he saw the officers. "Herman!" he said softly, and looked sidewise at MacDonald. "Friend?"

"Friend. Lieutenant MacDonald, homicide."

"Glad," said Nick Noble, and struck again at his nose. "Fly," he explained. "Stays there." There was no fly.

"I'm afraid," Finch began, "it's up to you again, Nick."

A pale light glittered in the dead blue eyes. "Give," said Nick Noble.

Finch gave.

Nick Noble finished another glass of sherry while Finch talked, and chased the invisible fly away from his nose six times. That nose seemed to grow sharper as he drank, and his pale eyes paler.

"Through?"

Finch nodded. Nick Noble leaned back and rested his head against the flimsy partition. A film glazed his eyes. He was silent so long that young MacDonald frowned and looked from the empty glass to Finch. But Finch shook his head.

Finally Nick Noble spoke. "Questions."

"O. K., Nick."

"Man on Skid Row. Lige Marsden. Occupation?"

"None, unless you count standing on street corners passing out pamphlets."

"Pamphlets for what?"

"Kingdom something."

"People of the Kingdom?"

"Check."

The pale eyes glazed again. MacDonald remembered the minor sect. The priest's housekeeper had mentioned it. Strange sort of anarchic idealism — civic disobedience as a religious principle. Denial of all rights of authority.

The eyes opened, and Nick Noble asked another question. "Dentist. No name?"

"Not yet. In a minute I'll phone back and check."

"Find out all about him. Especially Draft Board."

"Draft Board?"

"Was he a member?"

Finch nodded. "What else, Nick?"

"Nothing."

MacDonald started. "Aren't you interested? Aren't you going to —?"

"Interested? Oh yes. Pretty problem. Pattern. Thanks, Herman. Proof tomorrow."

Finch grinned. "Don't mind him, Mac. He can't help grandstanding."

"No grandstand. Murders tie together. Motive for time not quite clear yet. Only one murderer possible."

MacDonald half-rose. "You mean we can — ?"

"Tomorrow. Don't rush it."

"But if there's a murderer loose — Damn it, Noble, our main job isn't catching criminals; it's preventing crime. And if —"

Nick Noble smiled faintly at Finch. "Young," he said. Then to MacDonald, "All right, boy. No danger. No more murders. Not possibly. Check tomorrow. Now phone, Herman."

When Finch came back, his grin spread from ear to ear. "Criminenty, Nick, you can always pull a rabbit out of the sherry bottle. You've done it again, you son of a biscuit-eater."

"What did you find out?" MacDonald demanded.

"Ballistics check. Same gun killed all four of 'em. And that means the times are phony. Whole damn 'struggle' at Westcott's was probably just to make that clock look plausible. But where Nick comes in with the Noble touch is this: The dentist's name was Dr. Lyle Varney, and he was on his local Draft Board. In fact, he was chairman."

Nick Noble nodded. "Good. Go home. Tomorrow, boys, I'll show you your murderer."

Half an hour and one sherry later, Nick Noble entered the lodging house on East Fifth Street. His slight figure, his pale worn features, his shabby once-respectable suit all seemed to belong there. The clerk didn't give him a glance. They come and go.

There were two corridors on the second floor. From the end of one came laughter and clinkings. Two rooms at the end of the other were dark, silent. Nick Noble's white hands fiddled for an instant with the lock of the last room. He went in, closed the door, and switched on the light.

The room was any one of a thousand others. All that distinguished it was the absence of ashes and beer bottles and the presence of blood on the floor and the bed. And the pamphlets.

There was a stack of these left undistributed, a stack that reached from floor to table level. Nick Noble picked up the top one and leafed through it. He set it down, then picked it up again, found a page, and reread the heading over a prophetic article:

THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST AGAIN

Nick Noble said "Six" three times, and his eyes glazed. He stood motionless. Then his eyes came alive. He put the pamphlet back, and nodded.

There were steps far down the hall. Nick Noble switched off the light. The steps came as far as the next door and halted. Then they moved on. The door of the dead man's room opened. The beam of a flashlight coursed around the walls, clicked off. The door closed.

Nick Noble crawled out from under the bed. He swatted at the fly that wasn't on his nose and thereby knocked off the cockroach that was on his sleeve. He heard the door of the next room open and shut. He listened, but there was no click of the light switch.

He left the dead man's room without a sound. He paused before the next door, the door to the room of Barker's prisoner. A light came and went in the crack under the door. He drew back to the hinge side.

The door opened in a minute, covering him. Through the crack he saw a man coming out, a man he had never seen before. He carried a flashlight in one hand and something heavier in the other. This man set them both down on the floor and fished a tool out of his pocket, the same tool that Nick Noble had used on the other door.

The strange man closed the door. Nick Noble moved with agility. His hand was on the automatic on the floor when the stranger's right connected.

This time Nick Noble's eyes were glazed somewhat longer.

He was still in the hall when he came to. He felt his way into the dead man's room and doused his head with stale water from the pitcher. He switched on the light and peered into the cracked mirror. The blood had clotted by now, black on his white skin. He looked closer. That was a heel mark on his cheek. His thin lips set tight.

Lieutenant MacDonald, reporting for duty next morning, was greeted by Finch. "For once, Mac, old Nick slipped up. He said no more murders. They found Padrino early this morning."

"Padrino?"

"That's right. Maybe you wouldn't know. He runs a bigtime gambling setup. Roulette and the works. Official-like, we don't know about him here. But he was shot sometime between one and three and his watch was broken and set to 7:06. Bullet checks, too."

MacDonald gaped. Finch frowned as he loaded his corncob.

Lieutenant Dan Barker was filling out his report on the latest sweating of the bum he had arrested. He yelled admittance when he heard a knock

on the door.

A uniformed sergeant came in. "Old screwball here insists on seeing you, Lieutenant. Got a minute?"

Barker glared distrustfully at the slight old man behind the sergeant. "All right," he growled.

Nick Noble came in quietly. When the sergeant was gone, he said his name. "Maybe you've heard of me."

Barker's expression changed. "Hell, yes. You're the wino the old-timers tell the tall stories about. What's on your mind?"

"Tried to see Finch or MacDonald. Out. You had the other case. Talk with you."

Barker eyed the heel-bruised old face suspiciously. "O. K., friend. What's the angle?"

"All solved. All the cases at six after seven. No use for me — credit better go to the force."

"You've heard there's another one?"

"Yes. That, too. Want to hear?"

Barker shifted in his chair. "Why not?"

Nick Noble pulled a bottle from his coat pocket and filled the water glass on the table with sherry. "Drink? Sorry. Forget regulations. Well: Look at murders. Pattern. Leave out Padrino now. Just yesterday's. Three deaths timed mechanically. Fakes. One death timed accidentally. Your case. Time true."

"So where does that get you, friend?"

Nick Noble made an attempt on the fly. "Look at men. Three represent authority. Priest, authority of church. Judge, authority of law. Dentist, authority of state. Draft Board. Guessed that. Likeliest kind of authority for professional man. Other man, no authority. Your case. People of the Kingdom. Hates authority."

Barker grinned a lazy grin. "So still what?"

"Look at time. Six after seven. What's that to six?"

"Huh?"

"What's five minutes of seven to six?"

"Six fifty-five."

"And seven sharp?"

"Oh. I get you, friend. Six sixty."

"And six after seven."

"Six . . . sixty-six."

"Six sixty-six. Number of the Beast. Apocalypse. Tied up in all prophecies. Great number with People of the Kingdom. Beast means State, Church, everything they despise."

Dan Barker's heavy body squirmed. The chair creaked. "Smart stuff, friend. What next?"

"Easy. Your man's the murderer."

"The jerk I've got in the can? Hell, he killed Lige Marsden all right, but he didn't kill the others."

"Not him. Lige Marsden. Your corpse. Only motive. Nobody could want to kill him *and* the others, but *he'd* want *them* dead. Other times faked, his real. Crazy gesture in suicide, same time as the phonies."

"Nuts! How about the gun?"

"Your prisoner. Hid it in his room. Chance for quick money. Worked with a fence. Won't admit it now; scared of murder rap."

Lieutenant Barker leaned back and eased open the drawer in front of him. "Pretty good, friend. Damned smooth. And crazier'n hell. How about Padrino? Marsden didn't crawl out of the morgue to kill him."

"I know. Why I'm here. No use hounding a dead man. Live murderer now." There was no flicker in Nick Noble's pale blue eyes as he added, "What did Padrino have on you, Barker?"

Barker's hand rested on the open drawer. "You're drunk." His voice was cold with contempt.

"Marsden had to be murderer," Nick Noble went on. "So somebody else killed Padrino. But it fitted the time pattern. Not authority pattern. So pattern faked to shift guilt. Who knew time pattern? Finch, MacDonald, and you."

Barker's hand slipped into the drawer. "Nuts. Cops don't murder, friend. Might as well pin it on MacDonald or Finch."

"Cops murder crooks who might talk too much. Lieutenant Becker, New York. And it wasn't Finch or MacDonald I saw coming out of a room on East Fifth Street."

Barker's hand came out of the drawer. It wasn't empty.

Nick Noble sat still. "Keep your head, Barker. You can't kill me here at headquarters."

"Nuts," said Detective Lieutenant Dan Barker levelly. "Everybody knows you're a dipso. The worst kind: a wino. You've been brooding all

these years about getting booted off the force. You came in here and raised hell to get revenge. I had to defend myself." His trigger finger was tense.

"You were afraid of noise last night when I saw you steal the gun. Besides, you thought I was just another bum, and what was my word against a Lieutenant's? Different now."

"Everybody's got his own way of suicide, friend. Yours is being too damn smart. So now you're through."

The crackle of glass blended with the two shots. The sherry, glass and all, hit Barker in the face just as he pulled the trigger. The glass splintered on the floor. The first shot went where Noble's head had been. From the floor Nick Noble saw the second shot burrow into Barker's right hand. Barker's gun lit in the fragments of glass.

Lieutenant MacDonald stood planted in the doorway staring at his service automatic. Shooting a Detective Lieutenant was something else he wasn't experienced at.

A sergeant put the cuffs on Barker and another sergeant handed a notebook full of pothooks to Finch.

"Hot ziggety zag!" said Finch. "That was a sweet trap, Nick. The Screwball Division pulls it off again."

"Easy. Find the pattern. See what isn't pattern. That's all."

"Horsefeathers! You're the best blame detective on or off the force, and you know it."

"Nuts," snorted Barker. The sergeant cuffed him backhanded across the mouth. The sergeant too had more reasons than vanity for wearing a heavy ring.

"I need a drink," said Nick Noble. He fished out the half-empty bottle. It was wholly empty by the time Finch had finished booking Detective Lieutenant Dan Barker, L.A.P.D., for murder.

Curiosities In Detection

NUMBER 1

Department of Detective-Story Discoveries

In this issue we begin our own C.I.D. — Curiosities in Detection. Our researches have turned up numerous discoveries in the field of detection, mystery, and crime literature; but occasionally we make a discovery so astonishing that it requires a separate classification altogether.

Such a discovery is "The Compliments of the Chief," by Lincoln Steffens, venerated author of "The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens" — newspaper veteran, wit, and man of American letters.

We dug "The Compliments of the Chief" out of Ainslee's Magazine, issue of July, 1900!

Judged purely on its merits, of course, Mr. Steffens's 42-year-old tale can scarcely bear comparison with modern detective stories. Yet it has a significance out of all proportion to its value as a story. In it lie buried the tiny seeds of that school of detection literature best exemplified — a whole generation later! — by the work of Dashiell Hammett and other exponents of so-called "modern" realism. Mr. Steffens paints a truly remarkable picture of real-life crime detection in the City of New York — a quaint city it seems! — at the very tail of the 19th Century. His Chief of Police Reilly shows you how policemen of the year 1900 went about solving crimes . . . in an era in which Sherlock Holmes and his multitudinous imitators of the romantic school dominated detective fiction.

Therefore Mr. Steffens's yarn is authentic Americana, and as such we pass it on to you to be cherished and preserved.

THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE CHIEF

by LINCOLN STEFFENS

THE Chief of Police lay on the great, leather-covered sofa in his office alone. He wasn't tired. His barber had shaved him and gone; the mail was attended to; routine business was over for the day. It was pleasant to lie there that way in his shirt sleeves, his collar, cuffs and boots off, and be comfortable. Everything was all right, and for an hour, until noon, the Chief was not to be disturbed.

A light tap at the door and his sergeant came in, a smooth-moving little man, with eyes sometimes light blue and innocent, sometimes dark blue and sharp. The Chief knew no one else would enter then, so he did not look up.

The sergeant showed a card, "Mr. Wayland Morrison Ball," but the Chief wouldn't read.

"Who is it, Mac? What does he want?"

"It's a squeal, Chief, about a gold watch."

"Well, why don't it go to the detective bureau?"

"Just read the name, Banker Ball."

The Chief rose to his feet, hastily pulled on his boots, put on his collar, cuffs, and snapped on his cravat, while the sergeant held the coat. When the Chief had wound down into that, he went to a glass, buttoned up the uniform, touched his hair and went to his roll-top desk. When he was seated, he leaned his head on his hand, put on a dreamy, far-away look, and the sergeant nodded.

"All right, then, send him in," said the Chief.

And so Mr. Ball found him, pondering and absorbed. The sergeant retired.

"Chief Reilly?"

No answer.

"Mr. Reilly, I believe."

The Chief nodded and waved the gentleman to a chair. A minute more of brown study, and the Chief pushed a button three times.

A detective came in and stood beside the desk at attention, till the Chief came out of his pre-occupation.

"Where are the men who are working on that jewel robbery now?"

"They are shadowing the thief along the water-front."

"At this moment?"

"At this moment."

"Well, you warn them that the thief will take the Pennsylvania ferry and buy tickets in Jersey City for Washington. Arrest him on this side."

The man saluted and went out.

The Chief seemed satisfied that that case was disposed of. He rose, thought a moment more, and nodded approval. His hand was playing with the banker's card; his eye happened to catch it, read it, then turned slowly up under his heavy brows at the banker who had got up on his feet with the Chief.

"Mr. Ball?"

"Wayland Morrison Ball."

"Banker?"

"Eleventh National Bank."

"Right," the Chief said, slowly nodding his head. "Eleventh National Bank." He went to the window, his back to the banker, then he came about, leaned against his desk.

"Did you ever get back," he said, indifferently, "the bonds — three, I think, yes, three C. B. & Q.'s — stolen two years ago?"

"No."

"Might just as well. They were negotiated in Chicago a week before you missed them, got into circulation, and were soon in reputable hands."

The banker was amazed. That case had never been reported to the police. A detective agency was called in, and though its men worked hard, they never got the slightest clew to the thief or the property till the railroad company's transfer clerk caught the bonds at dividend time.

"The boy made a fool mistake, didn't he, taking bonds?" asked the Chief, still rather absently. "Never stole again, I suppose?"

"Why, we never knew who took them," the banker said. "Do you mean to say the thief was an employee? Is an employee?"

"He will never do it again, I think," the Chief said. "I should dismiss all thought of it. Take that chair."

The Chief sat down at his desk, leaned his head in his hand, but this time he set his eyes keenly on the banker's face, all alert and attention.

"Now," he said, "what is the trouble today?"

The banker had gathered himself and was taking the chair indicated. It was near the desk and the light fell on the banker's face; the chief's was in the shadow.

"Robbed?"

"Yes, of a gold watch, given me by my father, and as a present from him I treasure it beyond its true value. But ——"

The Chief lifted his hand deprecatingly.

"Where were you and how did it happen?"

"I was crossing the bridge, and ——"

"One moment, Mr. Ball. Which way were you going?"

"From Brooklyn here. I hardly ever go to Brooklyn."

"What time did you reach the bridge?"

"Eleven-fifty-five. I know that because I looked at my watch as I took the bridge car. That's how I know I lost it on the bridge. You see ——"

"When did you miss the watch?"

"As I stepped off the car on this side."

"The car was crowded, ladies and gentlemen and some workmen. The watch was taken from the chain and the clasp and the chain was put back in place. This was last night?"

The banker was nodding affirmatively to each statement, and his eyes flattered the Chief as he loved to be flattered, by astonishment and wonder shown as a child shows these emotions.

"Your name was on the case inside, and your father's?"

"Yes. 'John Henry Ball to his son, Wayland Morrison Ball. Dec. 3, 1879.' It is a heavy hunting case Geneva watch ——"

The Chief got up and walked to the window.

"Everybody in the car — except the working people — was talking ——"

"Talking and laughing in the several groups ——"

Chief Reilly turned back, thinking again.

"Can you be in your office to-morrow at 12:30 o'clock?" he asked at length.

"Yes."

"The watch will be delivered to you then."

The banker knew how to behave in most of the crises of life, but he was uncomfortable now. He would have liked to ask some questions, to express some thanks, to praise the official a little frankly; but the Chief seemed to be absorbed already in something else, so Mr. Ball stepped back, bowing.

"I shall be obliged, Chief Reilly, for this service, I assure you. Good-day."

The Chief dropped his head as if mechanically bowing, and the banker reached the door. It opened before him, and he went out to his carriage, which bore him swiftly away to his office.

"Mac," said the Chief, when the sergeant returned to him, "who's working the bridge now?"

"I don't know, unless it's the Keg Kelly mob; but no, you told them to haul off, didn't you?"

"Yes, and after that I warned the Hen and Chickens off."

"Maybe they've gone back."

"Send Thompson in."

Thompson came, hurrying up from court. He was a fat, but clean man of forty, and he looked more like a thief than an actor, for his face, though square and smooth shaven, was red and irregular, with small, damp pink

eyes. His "plain clothes" were a bit "tough" in style.

The Chief eyed the detective up and down, slowly, angrily.

"Some of your friends on the bridge have been robbing a friend of mine, Banker Ball. A fine, big gold watch, with the man's name on it."

Thompson moved uneasily from one foot to the other, he rolled his hat around his hand — and he hung his head. He glanced up shiftily twice, as if he thought of an answer, but he made none.

"I want it," said the Chief. "I want you and the watch here at ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

The detective went out. The Chief pulled off his boots, coat and collar and lay down on the lounge.

When Thompson left the Chief's office, he went down in the basement where half a dozen detectives were lounging about. He spoke to them, asking first the same question the Chief put to the sergeant, "Who is working the bridge?" All offered suggestions, and Thompson discussed them with his friends. Then he walked down to the Criminal Court building, where his "side-partner," Tarney, was. Tarney was on the witness stand, so Thompson moved about among the lawyers in the court-room. He spoke to each alone, earnestly, inquiring first, then saying something emphatic. They all seemed to answer in about the same way, each shook his head, lifted his hands helplessly and then nodded. When Tarney was told to "step down," Thompson drew him out into the corridor, and they held a long consultation leaning up against a pillar. They whispered, speaking eagerly, then silent, then enthusiastically again, till they separated.

Tarney, following one clew, visited each court-room in the building and talked with every likely lawyer he saw. He went out into the street and called on other criminal law firms in the neighborhood. Sometimes he met men on the sidewalk with whom he talked. Now and then he stepped into saloons, looked around and either left with a shrug or jumped at some man to whisper to him. This part of his work done, Tarney spent the rest of the day dashing into and out of pawnshops. He never stayed long in a place; just long enough to say a few stern words, make a few gestures, and to write down the one word "Ball."

"The old man wants it, see?" That was the only sentence he spoke aloud.

Thompson went to the bridge. At the New York end he spoke to a man who stood idly watching the crowd, then to a policeman. Each told him something that interested him, but he went on across the bridge afoot,

stopping twice on the way over to address ordinary-looking persons. At the Brooklyn end also he addressed men who knew him. A short, swift tour of the pawnshops in lower Brooklyn, and he rode back to New York. He called at several saloons and a few more pawnshops.

"And the old man wants it back," was the way Thompson closed the interviews.

At five minutes to six, Tarney emerged from the crowd in Twenty-third Street and approached the southeast corner of Sixth Avenue. A big policeman was standing there, but at sight of Tarney, he moved off without a sign of recognition. The detective leaned against the corner. At three minutes to six Thompson arrived. They turned off at once to a restaurant, where Thompson led the way to a corner table, and taking the chair which commanded a view of the whole room, he sat down. Tarney sat opposite him. They ordered a course dinner, with wine, and, saying nothing, ate it. Over the cigars, they exchanged a few words.

"Been to the Hen and Chickens?" Thompson asked.

"Nope. Everywhere else. Left that till tonight. You stop at Kelly's?"

"Nope. No use till to-night."

It was eight o'clock when Thompson, walking alone in the shadow of the tenements on a dark side street, turned suddenly into a noisy saloon. He pushed open the swinging fly doors and stood still between them, holding off a wing in each hand. The room was full of men, some at tables, others at the bar, others again in a back room. All stopped whatever they were doing, and looked at Thompson. There was silence. They stared, and half raised glasses were put down on the bar. The bartender was the first to recover.

"'Lo, Tom," he said. "Have something?"

A man in the back room went quickly out of the side door. Another followed him slowly.

"Keg here?" Thompson asked.

"Yes," said a voice, and a short, well-dressed man came out of the back room. His face was hard, though the skin was soft and pale, and his hands were long and very fine.

"Want me?" he asked.

Thompson came in and let the doors swing shut.

"No, I don't 'want' nobody," the detective said, smiling a little.

The whole atmosphere of the room changed. The crowd relaxed. Interrupted drinks were swallowed, and liquor flowed, everybody laughed.

"Come here," said Thompson.

He caught Keg Kelly by a buttonhole and drew him into the corner, and Thompson talked for one minute with great firmness.

"And the old man wants it back again," he said at last. "Good night."

The next morning at 9 o'clock Thompson stood on the corner of Mott Street and Houston, Tarney at Mott and Bleecker, with the rear entrance of police headquarters between them. They seemed to be holding receptions. Queer old foreigners, dilapidated loafers, "sports," out-and-out "toughs," went up to them one at a time. Most of them made apologetic gestures, were cursed, and slunk away; a few smiled, spoke a few words and delivered small parcels.

The detectives left their corners simultaneously, and approaching police headquarters, went together down into the basement. There they looked over "the stuff," as they called it, eleven watches of all sizes and shapes. Thompson took off Tarney's hat and held it out while Tarney put his watches in, then he gave it to Tarney while he "unloaded."

" 'Wall,' " he said, "Microwitz wasn't sure of the name. Take it back to him."

Tarney put it in his pocket.

" 'Ball.' Maybe that's it," said Thompson, looking at the next watch, "but it's pretty small. I'll let the old man see it." He kept that. "And here's another 'Ball.' I guess that's it. Keg sent both of these. Beaut', ain't it? Here's a 'Call.' Take it, and this, too, 'Wahl.' Say, here's a 'Hall.' It is a haul, sure enough; regular poem. What's this, another 'Hall.' Those other little ones are n. g. Keep 'em. I'll let the old man take his pick of these two 'Balls.' But I guess this big fellow is the one he passed the word for."

Mr. Wayland Morrison Ball had a few friends in to lunch with him in his office at noon that day. He had promised to show them something interesting, and had explained enough to make them all very much interested to hear more. They looked at the clock when they came in.

"Exactly 12:20, he said," Mr. Ball repeated, "on the minute. He's a remarkable man. Why, I tell you he told me things I didn't know myself — who were in the car, what they did, which ones sang, which ones talked, and ——"

A shrewd little broker smiled.

"Well, he did," Mr. Ball insisted. "He even described how the watch was taken off the chain, exactly. And that other case of ours here, you know. He

asked me about that, but he thought I knew more than I did. He knows who took the bonds." Mr. Ball lowered his voice. "And we don't know that to this day. He told me what the thief did with them, where they went, through whose hands they passed. It was the most astonishing thing."

The bankers and brokers didn't half believe Ball. They ate of the lunch, drank a sip of tea or water or wine, and glanced up at the clock. Some of them tried to tell detective stories they had read, but Ball said such tales were all rot.

"This is the real thing," he insisted. "Chief Reilly — you ought to have seen the way he looked at me, and the questions he asked — sharp, keen. He's a wonderful man, wonderful. Everything right to the point, every word, every gesture, every glance ——"

It was 12:20, and everybody knew it. They were silent, watching the clock or looking at their watches. Some of them stopped eating. The next ten minutes dragged, but they passed, 12:25, 12:26, 27. The men were all nervous now, and serious. At last it was 12:28. There was no sign, and Mr. Ball was anxious, but he smiled confidently. "It isn't time yet," he said.

A minute more crept by; you could hear the clock tick above the ticker. The long hand on the clock moved on slowly till it was against the figure VI; not a sign. It was over the VI.

A rap at the door. Everybody started, and the company laid down their napkins to look, but remembered, and turned their eyes away.

"Come in," said Mr. Ball, rising expectantly.

"Two — two men — gentlemen to see you ——"

"Show them in."

The clerk slipped aside. Thompson and Tarney entered side by side, as solemn as undertakers.

"Mr. Ball?" said Thompson, looking at the banker.

"I am Mr. Ball."

"The compliments of Chief Reilly," the detective said. He laid the watch on the table. Then he and Tarney turned and went out.

The watch lay there on the table, every eye fixed upon it. No one moved. The gentlemen glanced around at one another, then up at their host. Mr. Ball smiled a little, rather proudly.

"O"

Those of you who are Chesterton enthusiasts (and who among us have not been charmed by G.K.C.?) are undoubtedly familiar with detectives Father Brown, Horne Fisher, and Mr. Pond. But have you ever read the exploits of Basil Grant? Here is a little-known, delightful, and mystifying tale by the old master.

THE TREMENDOUS ADVENTURES OF MAJOR BROWN

by GILBERT K. CHESTERTON

RABELAIS, or his wild illustrator, Gustave Doré, must have had something to do with the designing of the things called flats in England and America. There is something entirely Gargantuan in the idea of economizing space by piling houses on top of each other, front doors and all. And in the chaos and complexity of those perpendicular streets anything may dwell or happen, and it is in one of them, I believe, that the inquirer may find the offices of the Club of Queer Trades. It may be thought at the first glance that the name would attract and startle the passer-by, but nothing attracts or startles in these dim, immense hives. The passer-by is only looking for his own melancholy destination of the Montenegro Shipping Agency or the London office of the *Rutland Sentinel*, and passes through the twilight passages as one passes through the twilight corridors of a dream. If the thugs set up a Strangers' Assassination Company in one of the great buildings in Norfolk Street, and sent in a mild man in spectacles to answer inquiries, no inquiries would be made. And the Club of Queer Trades reigns in a great edifice hidden like a fossil in a mighty cliff of fossils.

The nature of this society, such as we afterwards discovered it to be, is soon and simply told. It is an eccentric and Bohemian club, of which the absolute condition of membership lies in this, that the candidate must have invented the method by which he earns his living. It must be an entirely new trade. The exact definition of this requirement is given in the two principal rules. First, it must not be a mere application or variation of an existing trade. Thus, for instance, the club would not admit an insurance agent simply because, instead of insuring men's furniture against being burned in a fire, he insured, let us say, their trousers against being torn by a mad dog. The principle (as Sir Bradcock Burnaby-Bradcock, in the extraordinarily eloquent and soaring speech to the club on the occasion of the question being

raised in the Stormby Smith affair, said wittily and keenly) is the same. Secondly, the trade must be a genuine commercial source of income, the support of its inventor. Thus the club would not receive a man simply because he chose to pass his days collecting broken sardine tins, unless he could drive a roaring trade in them. Professor Chick made that quite clear. And when one remembers what Professor Chick's own new trade was, one doesn't know whether to laugh or cry.

The discovery of this strange society was a curiously refreshing thing; to realize that there were ten new trades in the world was like looking at the first ship or the first plough. It made a man feel what he should feel, that he was still in the childhood of the world. That I should have come at last upon so singular a body was, I may say without vanity, not altogether singular, for I have a mania for belonging to as many societies as possible. I may be said to collect clubs, and I have accumulated a vast and fantastic variety of specimens ever since. In my audacious youth I collected the Athenæum. At some future day, perhaps, I may tell tales of some of the other bodies to which I have belonged. I will recount the doings of the Dead Man's Shoes Society (that superficially immoral, but darkly justifiable communion); I will explain the curious origin of the Cat and Christian, the name of which has been so shamefully misinterpreted; and the world shall know at least why the Institute of Typewriters coalesced with the Red Tulip League. Of the Ten Teacups, of course, I dare not say a word. The first of my revelations, at any rate, shall be concerned with the Club of Queer Trades, which, as I have said, was one of this class, one which I was almost bound to come across sooner or later, because of my singular hobby. The wild youth of the metropolis call me facetiously "The King of Clubs." They also call me "The Cherub," in allusion to the roseate and youthful appearance I have presented in my declining years. I only hope the spirits in the better world have as good dinners as I have. But the finding of the Club of Queer Trades has one very curious thing about it. The most curious thing about it is that it was not discovered by me; it was discovered by my friend Basil Grant, a stargazer, a mystic, and a man who scarcely stirred out of his attic.

Very few people knew anything of Basil; not because he was in the least unsociable, for if a man out of the street had walked into his rooms he would have kept him talking till morning. Few people knew him, because, like all poets, he could do without them; he welcomed a human face as he might welcome a sudden blend of color in a sunset; but he no more felt the need of go-

ing out to parties than he felt the need of altering the sunset clouds. He lived in a queer and comfortable garret in the roofs of Lambeth. He was surrounded by a chaos of things that were in odd contrast to the slums around him: old, fantastic books, swords, armor — the whole dust-hole of romanticism. But his face, amid all these quixotic relics, appeared curiously keen and modern — a powerful, legal face. And no one but I knew who he was.

Long ago as it is, every one remembers the terrible and grotesque scene that occurred in ——, when one of the most acute and forcible of the English judges suddenly went mad on the bench. I had my own view of that occurrence; but about the facts themselves there is no question at all. For some months, indeed for some years, people had detected something curious in the judge's conduct. He seemed to have lost interest in the law, in which he had been, beyond expression, brilliant and terrible as a K. C., and to be occupied in giving personal and moral advice to the people concerned. He talked more like a priest or a doctor, and a very outspoken one at that. The first thrill was probably given when he said to a man who had attempted a crime of passion: "I sentence you to three years' imprisonment, under the firm, and solemn, and God-given conviction that what you require is three months at the sea-side." He accused criminals from the bench, not so much of their obvious legal crimes, but of things that had never been heard of in a court of justice, monstrous egoism, lack of humor, and morbidity deliberately encouraged. Things came to a head in that celebrated diamond case in which the prime minister himself, that brilliant patrician, had to come forward, gracefully and reluctantly, to give evidence against his valet. After the detailed life of the household had been thoroughly exhibited, the judge requested the premier again to step forward, which he did with quiet dignity. The judge then said, in a sudden, grating voice: "Get a new soul. That thing's not fit for a dog. Get a new soul." All this, of course, in the eyes of the sagacious, was premonitory of that melancholy and farcical day when his wits actually deserted him in open court. It was a libel case between two very eminent and powerful financiers, against both of whom charges of considerable defalcation were brought. The case was long and complex; the advocates were long and eloquent; but at last, after weeks of work and rhetoric, the time came for the great judge to give a summing-up; and one of his celebrated masterpieces of lucidity and pulverizing logic was eagerly looked for. He had spoken very little during the prolonged affair, and he looked sad and lowering at the end of it. He was silent for a few moments,

and then burst into a stentorian song. His remarks (as reported) were as follows:

"Oh Rowty-owty tiddly-owty
Tiddly-owty tiddly-owty
Highty-ighty tiddly-ighty
Tiddly-ighty ow."

He then retired from public life and took the garret in Lambeth.

I was sitting there one evening, about six o'clock, over a glass of that gorgeous Burgundy which he kept behind a pile of blackletter folios; he was striding about the room, fingering, after a habit of his, one of the great swords in his collection; the red glare of the strong fire struck his square features and his fierce gray hair; his blue eyes were even unusually full of dreams, and he had opened his mouth to speak dreamily, when the door was flung open, and a pale, fiery man, with red hair and a huge furred overcoat, swung himself panting into the room.

"Sorry to bother you, Basil," he gasped. "I took a liberty — made an appointment here with a man — a client — in five minutes — I beg your pardon, sir," and he gave me a bow of apology.

Basil smiled at me. "You didn't know," he said, "that I had a practical brother. This is Rupert Grant, Esquire, who can and does all there is to be done. Just as I was a failure at one thing, he is a success at everything. I remember him as a journalist, a house-agent, a naturalist, an inventor, a publisher, a school-master, a — what are you now, Rupert?"

"I am and have been for some time," said Rupert, with some dignity, "a private detective, and there's my client."

A loud rap at the door had cut him short, and, on permission being given, the door was thrown sharply open and a stout, dapper man walked swiftly into the room, set his silk hat with a clap on the table, and said, "Good-evening, gentle*men*," with a stress on the last syllable that somehow marked him out as a martinet, military, literary, and social. He had a large head streaked with black and gray, and an abrupt black mustache, which gave him a look of fierceness which was contradicted by his sad, sea-blue eyes.

Basil immediately said to me, "Let us come into the next room, Gully," and was moving towards the door, but the stranger said:

"Not at all. Friends remain. Assistance possibly."

The moment I heard him speak I remembered who he was, a certain Major Brown I had met years before in Basil's society. I had forgotten

altogether the black, dandified figure and the large, solemn head, but I remembered the peculiar speech, which consisted of only saying about a quarter of each sentence, and that sharply, like the crack of a gun. I do not know, it may have come from giving orders to troops.

Major Brown was a V. C., and an able and distinguished soldier, but he was anything but a warlike person. Like many among the iron men who recovered British India, he was a man with the natural belief and tastes of an old maid. In his dress he was dapper and yet demure; in his habits he was precise to the point of the exact adjustment of a teacup. One enthusiasm he had, which was of the nature of a religion — the cultivation of pansies. And when he talked about his collection his blue eyes glittered like a child's at a new toy, the eyes that had remained untroubled when the troops were roaring victory round Roberts at Candahar.

"Well, major," said Rupert Grant, with a lordly heartiness, flinging himself into a chair, "what is the matter with you?"

"Yellow pansies. Coal-cellar. P. G. Northover," said the major, with righteous indignation.

We glanced at each other with inquisitiveness. Basil, who had his eyes shut in his abstracted way, said, simply:

"I beg your pardon."

"Fact is. Street, you know, man, pansies. On wall. Death to me. Something. Preposterous."

We shook our heads gently. Bit by bit, and mainly by the seemingly sleepy assistance of Basil Grant, we pieced together the major's fragmentary but excited narration. It would be infamous to submit the reader to what we endured; therefore I will tell the story of Major Brown in my own words. But the reader must imagine the scene. The eyes of Basil closed as in a trance, after his habit, and the eyes of Rupert and myself getting rounder and rounder as we listened to one of the most astounding stories in the world from the lips of the little man in black, sitting bolt upright in his chair and talking like a telegram.

Major Brown was, I have said, a successful soldier, but by no means an enthusiastic one. So far from regretting his retirement on half-pay, it was with delight that he took a small, neat villa, very like a doll's house, and devoted the rest of his life to pansies and weak tea. The thought that battles were over when he had once hung up his sword in the little front hall (along with two patent stew-pots and a bad water-color), and betaken himself

instead to wielding the rake in his little sunlit garden, was to him like having come into a harbor in heaven. He was Dutch-like and precise in his taste in gardening, and had, perhaps, some tendency to drill his flowers like soldiers. He was one of those men who are capable of putting four umbrellas in the stand rather than three, so that two may lean one way and two another; he saw life like a pattern in a freehand drawing-book. And assuredly he would not have believed, or even understood, any one who had told him that within a few yards of his brick paradise he was destined to be caught in a whirlpool of incredible adventures such as he had never seen or dreamed of in the horrible jungle or the heart of battle.

One certain bright and windy afternoon, the major, attired in his usual faultless manner, had set out for his usual constitutional. In crossing from one great residential thoroughfare to another, he happened to pass along one of those aimless-looking lanes which lie along the back-garden walls of a row of mansions, and which in their empty and discolored appearance give one an odd sensation as of being behind the scenes of a theatre. But mean and sulky as the scene might be in the eyes of most of us, it was not altogether so in the major's, for along the coarse gravel footway was coming a thing which was to him what the passing of a religious procession is to a devout person. A large, heavy man, with fish-blue eyes and a ring of irradiating red beard, was pushing before him a barrow which was ablaze with incomparable flowers. There were splendid specimens of almost every order, but the major's own favorite pansies predominated. The major stopped and fell into conversation, and then into bargaining. He treated the man after the manner of collectors and other mad men — that is to say, he carefully and with a sort of anguish selected the best roots from the less excellent, praised some, disparaged others, made a subtle scale ranging from a thrilling worth and rarity to a degraded insignificance, and then bought them all. The man was just pushing off his barrow when he stopped and came close to the major.

"I'll tell you what, sir," he said. "If you're interested in them things, you just get on to that wall."

"On the wall!" cried the scandalized major, whose conventional soul quailed within him at the thought of such fantastic trespass.

"Finest show of yellow pansies in England in that there garden, sir," hissed the tempter. "I'll help you up, sir."

How it happened no one will ever know, but that positive enthusiasm of

the major's life triumphed over all its negative traditions, and with an easy leap and swing that showed that he was in no need of physical assistance, he stood on the wall at the end of the strange garden. The second after, the flapping of the frock-coat at his knees made him feel inexpressibly a fool. But the next instant all such trifling sentiments were swallowed up by the most appalling shock of surprise the old soldier had ever felt in all his bold and wandering existence. His eyes fell upon the garden, and there across a large bed in the centre of the lawn was a vast pattern of pansies; they were splendid flowers, but for once it was not their horticultural aspects that Major Brown beheld, for the pansies were arranged in gigantic capital letters so as to form the sentence

"DEATH TO MAJOR BROWN"

A kindly looking old man with white whiskers was watering them.

Brown looked sharply back at the road behind him; the man with the barrow had suddenly vanished. Then he looked again at the lawn with its incredible inscription. Another man might have thought he had gone mad, but Brown did not. When romantic ladies gushed over his V. C. and his military exploits, he sometimes felt himself to be a painfully prosaic person, but by the same token he knew he was incurably sane. Another man, again, might have thought himself a victim of a passing practical joke, but Brown could not easily believe this. He knew from his own quaint learning that the garden arrangement was an elaborate and expensive one; he thought it extravagantly improbable that any one would pour out money like water for a joke against him. Having no explanation whatever to offer, he admitted the fact to himself, like a clear-headed man, and waited as he would have done in the presence of a man with six legs.

At this moment the stout old man with white whiskers looked up, and the watering-can fell from his hand, shooting a swirl of water down the gravel path.

"Who on earth are you?" he gasped, trembling violently.

"I am Major Brown," said that individual, who was always cool in the hour of action.

The old man gaped helplessly like some monstrous fish. At last he stammered wildly, "Come down — come down here!"

"At your service," said the major, and alighted at a bound on the grass beside him, without disarranging his silk hat.

The old man turned his broad back and set off at a sort of waddling run towards the house, followed with swift steps by the major. His guide led him through the back passages of a gloomy but gorgeously appointed house, until they reached the door of the front room. Then the old man turned with a face of apoplectic terror dimly showing in the twilight.

"For Heaven's sake," he said, "don't mention jackals."

Then he threw open the door, releasing a burst of red lamplight, and ran downstairs with a clatter.

The major stepped into a rich, glowing room, full of red-copper and peacock and purple hangings, hat in hand. He had the finest manners in the world, and, though mystified, was not in the least embarrassed to see that the only occupant was a lady, sitting by the window, looking out.

"Madam," he said, bowing simply, "I am Major Brown."

"Sit down," said the lady; but she did not turn her head.

She was a graceful, green-clad figure, with fiery red hair and a flavor of Bedford Park. "You have come, I suppose," she said, mournfully, "to tax me about the hateful title-deeds."

"I have come, madam," he said, "to know what is the matter — to know why my name is written across your garden. Not amicably, either."

He spoke grimly, for the thing had hit him. It is impossible to describe the effect produced on the mind by that quiet and sunny garden scene, the frame for a stunning and brutal personality. The evening air was still, and the grass was golden in the place where the little flowers he studied cried to Heaven for his blood.

"You know I must not turn round," said the lady; "every afternoon till the stroke of six I must keep my face turned to the street."

Some queer and unusual inspiration made the prosaic soldier resolute to accept these outrageous riddles without surprise.

"It is almost six," he said; and even as he spoke the barbaric copper clock upon the wall clanged the first stroke of the hour. At the sixth the lady sprang up and turned on the major one of the queerest and yet most attractive faces he had ever seen in his life — open and yet tantalizing, the face of an elf.

"That makes the third year I have waited," she cried. "This is an anniversary. The waiting almost makes one wish the frightful thing would happen once and for all."

And even as she spoke a sudden rending cry broke the stillness. From

low down on the pavement of the dim street (it was already twilight) a voice cried out with a raucous and merciless distinctness:

"Major Brown, Major Brown, where does the jackal dwell?"

Brown was decisive and silent in action. He strode to the front door and looked out. There was no sign of life in the blue gloaming of the street, where one or two street lamps were beginning to light their lemon sparks. On returning he found the lady in green trembling.

"It is the end," she cried, with shaking lips; "it may be death for both of us. Whenever —"

But even as she spoke her speech was cloven by another hoarse proclamation from the dark street, again horribly articulate.

"Major Brown, Major Brown, how did the jackal die?"

Brown dashed out of the door and down the steps, but again he was frustrated; there was no figure in sight, and the street was far too long and empty for the shouter to have run away. Even the rational major was a little shaken as he returned at a certain time to the drawing-room. Scarcely had he done so than the terrific voice came:

"Major Brown, Major Brown, where did —"

Brown was in the street almost at a bound, and he was in time — in time to see something which at first glance froze the blood. The cries appeared to come from a decapitated head resting on the pavement.

The next moment the pale major understood. It was the head of a man thrust through the coal-hole in the street. The next moment, again, it had vanished, and Major Brown turned to the lady. "Where's your coal-cellar?" he said, and stepped out into the passage.

She looked at him with wild, gray eyes. "You will not go down," she cried, "alone, into the dark hole with that beast?"

"Is this the way?" replied Brown, and descended the kitchen stairs three at a time. He flung open the door of a black cavity and stepped in, feeling in his pocket for matches. As his right hand was thus occupied, a pair of great, slimy hands came out of the darkness, hands clearly belonging to a man of gigantic stature, and seized him by the back of the head. They forced him down, down in the suffocating darkness, a brutal image of destiny. But the major's head, though upside-down, was perfectly clear and intellectual. He gave quietly under the pressure until he had slid down almost to his hands and knees. Then, finding the knees of the invisible monster within a foot of him, he simply put out one of his long, bony, and

skilful hands, and, gripping the leg by a muscle, pulled it off the ground, and laid the huge, living man with a crash along the floor. He strove to rise, but Brown was on top like a cat. They rolled over and over. Big as the man was, he had evidently now no desire but to escape; he made sprawls hither and thither to get past the major to the door, but that tenacious person had him hard by the coat-collar, and hung with the other hand to a beam. At length there came a strain in holding back this human bull, a strain under which Brown expected his hand to rend and part from the arm. But something else rent and parted — and the dim, fat figure of the giant vanished out of the cellar, leaving the torn coat in the major's hand, the only fruit of his adventure and the only clew to the mystery. For when he went up and out at the front door the lady, the rich hangings, and the whole equipment of the house had disappeared. It had only bare boards and whitewashed walls.

"The lady was in the conspiracy, of course," said Rupert, nodding.

Major Brown turned brick-red. "I beg your pardon," he said. "I think not."

Rupert raised his eyebrows and looked at him for a moment, but said nothing. When next he spoke he asked:

"Was there anything in the pockets of the coat?"

"There was sevenpence halfpenny in coppers and a threepenny-bit," said the major, carefully; "there was a cigarette-holder, a piece of string, and this letter," and he laid it on the table. It ran as follows:

"DEAR MR. PLOVER, — I am annoyed to hear that some delay has occurred in the arrangements *re* Major Brown. Please see that he is attacked as per arrangement to-morrow. The coal-cellar, of course.

Yours faithfully,

P. G. NORTHOVER."

Rupert Grant was leaning forward listening with hawklike eyes. He cut in:

"Is it dated from anywhere?"

"No — oh yes!" replied Brown, glancing upon the paper — "14 Tanner's Court, North —"

Rupert sprang up and struck his hands together.

"Then why are we hanging here? Let's get along. Basil, lend me your revolver."

Basil was staring into the embers like a man in a trance; and it was some

time before he answered:

"I don't think you'll need it."

"Perhaps not," said Rupert, getting into his fur coat. "One never knows. But going down a dark court to see criminals —"

"Do you think they are criminals?" asked his brother.

Rupert laughed stoutly. "Giving orders to a subordinate to strangle a harmless stranger in a coal-cellar may strike you as a very blameless experiment, but —"

"Do you think they wanted to strangle the major?" asked Basil, in the same distant and monotonous voice.

"My dear fellow, you've been asleep. Look at the letter."

"I am looking at the letter," said the mad judge, calmly; though, as a matter of fact, he was looking at the fire. "I don't think it's the sort of letter one criminal would write to another."

"My dear boy, you are glorious!" cried Rupert, turning round, with laughter in his bright blue eyes. "Your methods amaze me. Why, there *is* the letter. It *is* written, and it does give orders for a crime. You might as well say that the Nelson Column was not at all the sort of thing that was likely to be set up in Trafalgar Square."

Basil Grant shook all over with a sort of silent laughter, but did not otherwise move.

"That's rather good," he said; "but, of course, logic like that's not what is really wanted. It's a question of spiritual atmosphere. It's not a criminal letter."

"It is. It's a matter of fact," cried the other, in an agony of reasonableness.

"Facts," murmured Basil, like one mentioning some strange, far-off animals — "how facts obscure the truth. I may be silly — in fact, I'm off my head — but I never could believe in that man — what's his name, in those capital stories? — Sherlock Holmes. Every detail points to something, certainly; but generally to the wrong thing. Facts point in all directions, it seems to me, like the thousands of twigs on a tree. It's only the life of the tree that has unity and goes up — only the green blood that springs, like a fountain, at the stars."

"But what the deuce else can the letter be but criminal?"

"We have eternity to stretch our legs in," replied the mystic. "It can be an infinity of things. I haven't seen any of them — I've only seen the letter. I look at that, and say it's not criminal."

"Then what's the origin of it?"

"I haven't the vaguest idea."

"Then why don't you accept the ordinary explanation?"

Basil continued for a little to glare at the coals, and seemed collecting his thoughts in a humble and even painful way. Then he said:

"Suppose you went out into the moonlight. Suppose you passed through silent, silvery streets and squares until you came into an open and deserted space set with a few monuments, and you beheld one dressed as a ballet-girl dancing in the argent glimmer. And suppose you looked and saw it was a man disguised. And suppose you looked again and saw it was Lord Kitchener. What would you think?"

He paused a moment and went on:

"You could not adopt the ordinary explanation. The ordinary explanation of putting on singular clothes is that you look nice in them; you would not think that Lord Kitchener dressed up like a ballet-girl out of ordinary personal vanity. You would think it much more likely that he inherited a dancing madness from a great-grandmother, or had been hypnotized at a séance, or threatened by a secret society with death if he refused the ordeal. With Baden-Powell, say, it might be a bet — but not with Kitchener. I should know all that, because in my public days I knew him quite well. So I know that letter quite well, and criminals quite well. It's not a criminal's letter. It's all atmospheres." And he closed his eyes and passed his hand over his forehead.

Rupert and the major were regarding him with a mixture of respect and pity. The former said:

"Well, I'm going, anyhow, and shall continue to think — until your spiritual mystery turns up — that a man who sends a note recommending a crime — that is, actually a crime that is actually carried out, at least tentatively, is, in all probability, a little casual in his moral tastes. Can I have that revolver?"

"Certainly," said Basil, getting up. "But I am coming with you." And he flung an old cape or cloak round him and took a sword-stick from the corner.

"You!" said Rupert, with some surprise, "you scarcely ever leave your hole to look at anything on the face of the earth."

Basil fitted on a formidable old white hat.

"I scarcely ever," he said, with an unconscious and colossal arrogance,

"hear of anything on the face of the earth that I do not understand at once, without going to see it."

And he led the way out into the purple night.

We four swung along the flaring Lambeth streets, across Westminster Bridge, and along the Embankment in the direction of that part of Fleet Street which contained Tanner's Court. The erect, black figure of Major Brown, seen from behind, was a quaint contrast to the houndlike stoop and flapping mantle of young Rupert Grant, who adopted, with childlike delight, all the dramatic poses of the detective of fiction. The finest among his many fine qualities was his boyish appetite for the color and poetry of London. Basil, who walked behind, with his face turned blindly to the stars, had the look of a somnambulist.

Rupert paused at the corner of Tanner's Court, with a quiver of delight at danger, and gripped Basil's revolver in his great-coat pocket.

"Shall we go in now?" he asked.

"Not get police?" asked Major Brown, glancing sharply up and down the street.

"I am not sure," answered Rupert, knitting his brows. "Of course, it's quite clear, the thing's all crooked. But there are three of us, and —"

"I shouldn't get the police," said Basil, in a queer voice. Rupert glanced at him and stared hard.

"Basil," he cried, "you're trembling. What's the matter — are you afraid?"

"Cold, perhaps," said the major, eyeing him. There was no doubt that he was shaking.

At last, after a few moments' scrutiny, Rupert broke into a curse.

"You're laughing," he cried. "I know that confounded, silent, shaky laugh of yours. What the deuce is the amusement, Basil? Here we are, all three of us, within a yard of a den of ruffians —"

"But I shouldn't call the police," said Basil. "We four heroes are quite equal to a host," and he continued to quake with his mysterious mirth.

Rupert turned with impatience and strode swiftly down the court, the rest of us following. When he reached the door of No. 14, he turned abruptly, the revolver glittering in his hand.

"Stand close," he said, in the voice of a commander. "The scoundrel may be attempting an escape at this moment. We must fling open the door and rush in."

The four of us cowered instantly under the archway, rigid, except for the old judge and his convulsion of merriment.

"Now," hissed Rupert Grant, turning his pale face and burning eyes suddenly over his shoulder, "when I say 'Four,' follow me with a rush. If I say 'Hold him,' pin the fellows down, whoever they are. If I say 'Stop,' stop. I shall say that if there are more than three. If they attack us I shall empty my revolver on them. Basil, have your sword-stick ready. Now — one, two, three, four!"

With the sound of the word the door bust open, and we fell into the room like an invasion, only to stop dead.

The room, which was an ordinary and neatly appointed office, appeared, at the first glance, to be empty. But on a second and more careful glance we saw, seated behind a very large desk with pigeon-holes and drawers of bewildering multiplicity, a small man with a black, waxed mustache and the air of a very average clerk, writing hard. He looked up as we came to a stand-still.

"Did you knock?" he asked, pleasantly. "I am sorry if I did not hear. What can I do for you?"

There was a doubtful pause, and then, by general consent, the major himself, the victim of the outrage, stepped forward.

The letter was in his hand, and he looked unusually grim.

"Is your name P. G. Northover?" he asked.

"That is my name," replied the other, smiling.

"I think," said Major Brown, with an increase in the dark glow of his face, "that this letter was written by you." And with a loud clap he struck open the letter on the desk with his clinched fist. The man called Northover looked at it with unaffected interest and merely nodded.

"Well, sir," said the major, breathing hard, "what about that?"

"What about it, precisely," said the man with the mustache.

"I am Major Brown," said that gentleman, sternly.

Northover bowed. "Pleased to meet you, sir. What have you to say to me?"

"Say!" cried the major, loosing a sudden tempest; "why, I want this confounded thing settled. I want —"

"Certainly, sir," said Northover, jumping up, with a slight elevation of the eyebrows. "Will you take a chair for a moment." And he pressed an electric bell just above him, which trilled and tinkled in a room beyond.

The major put his hand on the back of the chair offered him, but stood chafing and beating the floor with his polished boot.

The next moment an inner glass door was opened and a fair, weedy, young man in a frock-coat entered from within.

"Mr. Hopson," said Northover, "this is Major Brown. Will you please finish that thing for him I gave you this morning and bring it in?"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Hopson, and vanished like lightning.

"You will excuse me, gentlemen," said the egregious Northover, with his radiant smile, "if I continue to work until Mr. Hopson is ready. I have some books that must be cleared up before I get away on my holiday tomorrow. And we all like a whiff of the country, don't we? Ha! ha!"

The criminal took up his pen with a childlike laugh and a silence ensued — a placid and busy silence on the part of Mr. P. G. Northover; a raging silence on the part of everybody else.

At length the scratching of Northover's pen in the stillness was mingled with a knock at the door, almost simultaneous with the turning of the handle, and Mr. Hopson came in again with the same silent rapidity, placed a paper before his principal, and disappeared again.

The man at the desk pulled and twisted his spiky mustache for a few moments as he ran his eye up and down the paper presented to him. He took up his pen with a slight, instantaneous frown and altered something, muttering — "Careless." Then he read it again with the same impenetrable reflectiveness, and finally handed it to the frantic Brown, whose hand was beating the devil's tattoo on the back of the chair.

"I think you will find that all right, major," he said, briefly.

The major looked at it; whether he found it all right or not will appear later, but he found it like this:

Major Brown to P. G. Northover

	£	*s.*	*d.*
January 1, to account rendered	5	6	0
May 9, to potting and embedding of 200 pansies	2	0	0
To cost of trolley with flowers	0	15	0
To hiring of man with trolley	0	5	0
To hire of house and garden for one day	1	0	0
To furnishing of room in peacock curtains, copper ornaments, etc.	3	0	0
To salary of Miss Jameson	1	0	0

To salary of Mr. Plover	1	0	0
Total	£14	6	0

A remittance will oblige.

"What," said Brown, after a dead pause, and with eyes that seemed slowly rising out of his head, "what in Heaven's name is this?"

"What is it?" repeated Northover, cocking his eyebrow with amusement. "It's your account, of course."

"My account!" The major's ideas appeared to be in a vague stampede. "My account! And what have I got to do with it?"

"Well," said Northover, laughing outright, "naturally I prefer you to pay it."

The major's hand was still resting on the back of the chair as the words came. He scarcely stirred otherwise, but he lifted the chair bodily into the air with one hand and hurled it at Northover's head.

The legs crashed against the desk, so that Northover only got a blow on the elbow as he sprang up with clenched fists, only to be seized by the united rush of the rest of us. The chair had fallen clattering on the empty floor.

"Let me go, you scamps," he shouted. "Let me —"

"Stand still," cried Rupert, authoritatively. "Major Brown's action is excusable. The abominable crime you have attempted —"

"A customer has a perfect right," said Northover, hotly, "to question an alleged overcharge, but, confound it all, not to throw furniture."

"What, in God's name, do you mean by your customers and overcharges?" shrieked Major Brown, whose keen feminine nature, steady in pain or danger, became almost hysterical in the presence of a long and exasperating mystery. "Who are you? I've never seen you or your insolent tomfool bills. I know one of your cursed brutes tried to choke me —"

"Mad," said Northover, gazing blankly round — "all of them mad. I didn't know they travelled in quartets."

"Enough of this prevarication," said Rupert; "your crimes are discovered. A policeman is stationed at the corner of the court. Though only a private detective myself, I will take the responsibility of telling you that anything you say —"

"Mad," repeated Northover, with a weary air.

And at this moment, for the first time, there struck in among them the strange, sleepy voice of Basil Grant.

"Major Brown," he said, "may I ask you a question?"

The major turned his head with an increased bewilderment.

"You?" he cried; "certainly, Mr. Grant."

"Can you tell me," said the mystic, with sunken head and lowering brow, as he traced a pattern in the dust with his sword-stick — "can you tell me what was the name of the man who lived in your house before you?"

The unhappy major was only faintly more disturbed by this last and futile irrelevancy, and he answered, vaguely:

"Yes, I think so; a man named Gurney something — a name with a hyphen — Gurney-Brown; that was it."

"And when did the house change hands?" said Basil, looking up sharply. His strange eyes were burning brilliantly.

"I came in last month," said the major.

And at the mere word the criminal Northover suddenly fell into his great office chair and shouted with a volleying laughter.

"Oh! it's too perfect — it's too exquisite," he gasped, beating the arms with his fists. He was laughing deafeningly; Basil Grant was laughing voicelessly; and the rest of us only felt that our heads were like weathercocks in a whirlwind.

"Confound it, Basil," cried Rupert, stamping. "If you don't want me to go mad and blow your metaphysical brains out, tell me what all this means?"

Northover rose.

"Permit me, sir, to explain," he said. "And, first of all, permit me to apologize to you, Major Brown, for a most abominable and unpardonable blunder, which has caused you menace and inconvenience, in which, if you will allow me to say so, you have behaved with astonishing courage and dignity. Of course you need not trouble about the bill. We will stand the loss." And, tearing the paper across, he flung the halves into the waste-paper basket and bowed.

Poor Brown's face was still a picture of distraction. "But I don't even begin to understand," he cried. "What bill? what blunder? what loss?"

Mr. P. G. Northover advanced in the centre of the room thoughtfully and with a great deal of unconscious dignity. On closer consideration there were apparent about him other things besides a screwed mustache, especially a lean, sallow face, hawklike, and not without a careworn intelligence. Then he looked up abruptly.

"Do you know where you are, major?" he said.

"God knows I don't," said the warrior, with fervor.

"You are standing," replied Northover, "in the office of the Adventure and Romance Agency, Limited."

"And what's that?" blankly inquired Brown.

The man of business leaned over the back of the chair and fixed his dark eyes on the other's face.

"Major," said he, "did you ever, as you walked along the empty street upon some idle afternoon, feel the utter hunger for something to happen — something, in the splendid words of Walt Whitman: 'Something pernicious and dread; something far removed from a puny and pious life; something unproved; something in a trance; something loosed from its anchorage and driving free.' Did you ever feel that?"

"Certainly not," said the major, shortly.

"Then I must explain with more elaboration," said Mr. Northover, with a sigh. "The Adventure and Romance Agency has been started to meet a great modern desire. On every side, in conversation and in literature, we hear of the desire for a larger theatre of events — for something to waylay us and lead us splendidly astray. Now the man who feels this desire for a varied fee pays a yearly or a quarterly sum to the Adventure and Romance Agency; in return, the Adventure and Romance Agency undertakes to surround him with startling and weird events. As a man is leaving his front door, an excited sweep approaches him and assures him of a plot against his life; he gets into a cab, and is driven to an opium den; he receives a mysterious telegram or a dramatic visit, and is immediately in a vortex of incidents. A very picturesque and moving story is first written by one of the staff of distinguished novelists who are at present hard at work in the adjoining room. Yours, Major Brown (designed by our Mr. Grigsby), I consider peculiarly forcible and pointed; it is almost a pity you did not see the end of it. I need scarcely explain further the monstrous mistake. Your predecessor in your present house, Mr. Gurney-Brown, was a subscriber to our agency, and our foolish clerks, ignoring alike the dignity of the hyphen and the glory of military rank, positively imagined that Major Brown and Mr. Gurney-Brown were the same person. Thus you were suddenly hurled into the middle of another man's story."

"How on earth does the thing work?" asked Rupert Grant, with bright and fascinated eyes.

"We believe that we are doing a noble work," said Northover, warmly.

"It has continually struck us that there is no element in modern life that is more lamentable than the fact that the modern man has to seek all artistic existence in a sedentary state. If he wishes to float into fairyland, he reads a book; if he wishes to dash into the thick of battle, he reads a book; if he wishes to soar into heaven, he reads a book; if he wishes to slide down the banisters, he reads a book. We give him these visions, but we give him exercise at the same time, the necessity of leaping from wall to wall, of fighting strange gentlemen, of running down long streets from pursuers — all healthy and pleasant exercises. We give him a glimpse of that great morning world of Robin Hood or the knights-errant, when one great game was played under the splendid sky. We give him back his childhood, that godlike time when we can act stories, be our own heroes, and at the same instant dance and dream."

Basil gazed at him curiously. The most singular psychological discovery had been reserved to the end, for as the little business man ceased speaking he had the blazing eyes of a fanatic.

Major Brown received the explanation with complete simplicity and good-humor.

"Of course; awfully dense, sir," he said. "No doubt at all, the scheme excellent. But I don't think —" He paused a moment and looked dreamily out of the window. "I don't think you will find me in it. Somehow, when one's seen — seen the thing itself, you know — blood and men screaming, one feels about having a little house and a little hobby; in the Bible, you know, 'There remaineth a rest.'"

Northover bowed. Then, after a pause, he said:

"Gentlemen, may I offer you my card. If any of the rest of you desire, at any time, to communicate with me, despite Major Brown's view of the matter —"

"I should be obliged for your card, sir," said the major, in his abrupt but courteous voice. "Pay for chair."

The agent of Romance and Adventure handed his card, laughing.

It ran, "P. G. Northover, B.A., C.Q.T., Adventure and Romance Agency, 14 Tanner's Court, Fleet Street."

"What on earth is 'C.Q.T.?'" asked Rupert Grant, looking over the major's shoulder.

"Don't you know?" returned Northover. "Haven't you ever heard of the Club of Queer Trades?"

"There seems to be a confounded lot of funny things we haven't heard of," said the little major, reflectively. "What's this one?"

"The Club of Queer Trades is a society consisting exclusively of people who have invented some new and curious way of making money. I was one of the earliest members."

"You deserve to be," said Basil, taking up his great white hat with a smile, and speaking for the last time that evening.

When they had passed out the Adventure and Romance agent wore a queer smile as he trod down the fire and locked his desk up. "A fine chap, that major; when one hasn't a touch of the poet one stands some chance of being a poem. But to think of such a clockwork little creature of all people getting into the nets of one of Grigsby's tales!" and he laughed out loud in the silence.

Just as the laugh echoed away, there came a sharp knock at the door. An owlish head, with dark mustaches, was thrust in, with deprecating and somewhat absurd inquiry.

"What! back again, major?" cried Northover, in surprise. "What can I do for you?"

The major shuffled feverishly into the room.

"It's horribly absurd," he said. "Something must have got started in me that I never knew before. But upon my soul I feel the most desperate desire to know the end of it all."

"The end of it all?"

"Yes," said the major, "'Jackals,' and the title-deeds, and 'death to Major Brown.'"

The agent's face grew grave, but his eyes were amused.

"I am terribly sorry, major," said he, "but what you ask is impossible. I don't know any one I would sooner oblige than you; but the rules of the agency are strict. The adventures are confidential; you are an outsider; I am not allowed to let you know an inch more than I can help. I do hope you understand —"

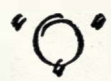
"There is no one," said Brown, "who understands discipline better than I do. Thank you very much. Good-night."

And the little man withdrew for the last time.

He married Miss Jameson, the lady with the red hair and the green garments. She was an actress, employed (with many others) by the Romance

Agency; and her marriage with the prim old veteran caused some stir in her languid and intellectualized set. She always replied very quietly that she had met scores of men who acted splendidly in the charades provided for them by Northover, but that she had only met one man who went down into a coal-cellar when he really thought it contained a murderer.

The major and she are living as happily as birds, in an absurd villa, and the former has taken to smoking. Otherwise he is unchanged — except, perhaps, there are moments when, alert and full of feminine unselfishness as the major is by nature, he falls into a trance of abstraction. Then his wife recognizes with a concealed smile, by the blind look in his blue eyes, that he is wondering what were the title-deeds, and why he was not allowed to mention jackals. But, like so many old soldiers, Brown is religious, and believes that he will realize the rest of those purple adventures in a better world.



MINUTE MYSTERIES

by Roy Post and Austin Ripley

The Case of the Young Detective

"In this class you will learn *all* of the latest scientific methods and techniques of modern crime detection," Professor Fordney said to his class. "But unless you learn the art of *observation*, scientific and technical knowledge will avail you little.

"The best means of training and increasing your observational powers is to observe the *commonplace*. Most of us do not observe those things with which we are most familiar. And memory is but the warehouse of observation." Fordney paused.

"Now I'm going to read you the brief but carefully drawn report of a young, ambitious detective on his first homicide case.

"'The unique tooled leather book-marker of Oriental design lying between pages sixty-three and sixty-four of "Gone with the Wind," resting on Harland Brock's lap, bore four star-shaped blood-stains. A decanter of poisoned Moselle wine and two glasses were on a nearby table. Brock died of poisoning. Am confident, therefore, he was murdered as, being devoted to his family, he would not chance, if a suicide, their drinking from the poisoned decanter, but a murderer would poison the entire supply rather than merely one glass. Have detained Margaret Dean, who recently tried badger game on Brock. Further report later.' Quickly now!" said Fordney. "What single error of observation is in that report?"

What's your answer?

Solution

It is impossible to place a book marker between pages 63 and 64 of *any* ordinary book . . . ! Reach for the nearest book at hand and check.

The Case of the Direct Angle

"I ask could it be *murder?* You say, 'Quite'. I ask *could* it be *suicide* and again you prattle, 'Quite'! You say he *could* have shot himself with that heavy .45 caliber revolver, in the right temple, on a *direct right* angle without leaving powder burns, but that the shot was fired from no less than 10 inches! Of all the . . ." Inspector James Ignatius Kelley popped a jujube into his mouth.

Fordney chuckled, said: "Quite." He continued his scrutiny of Andrew Crane's dead body. Slumped over his desk, his right hand held a .45 caliber revolver, his finger about the trigger; his left hand was in his coat pocket. There was a hole (without powder marks) in his right temple.

"Quite *what?*" shouted Kelley. "You say he *could* have shot himself in the temple on a *direct* angle without leaving powder burns, though it would have been *awkward*. So what? Well, what are you fooling around with his left hand for?"

The Inspector snorted. "What *is* this thing anyhow — murder or suicide?"

"The answer, Jim," Fordney replied, "is squarely before those childlike eyes of yours."

Was it suicide or murder? What single clue gave Fordney his solution? . . .

Solution

While awkward of accomplishment it is *possible* to shoot oneself in the temple on a direct right angle at ten — or even more inches, but only by *pushing* the trigger with the *thumb!* As Crane's *finger* was on the trigger, Fordney knew he had been murdered, his finger *placed* there in setting a "suicide" scene.

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