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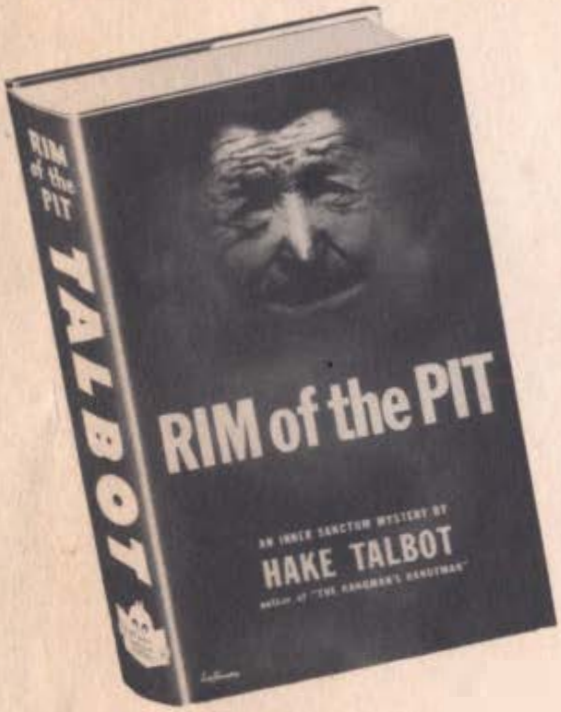

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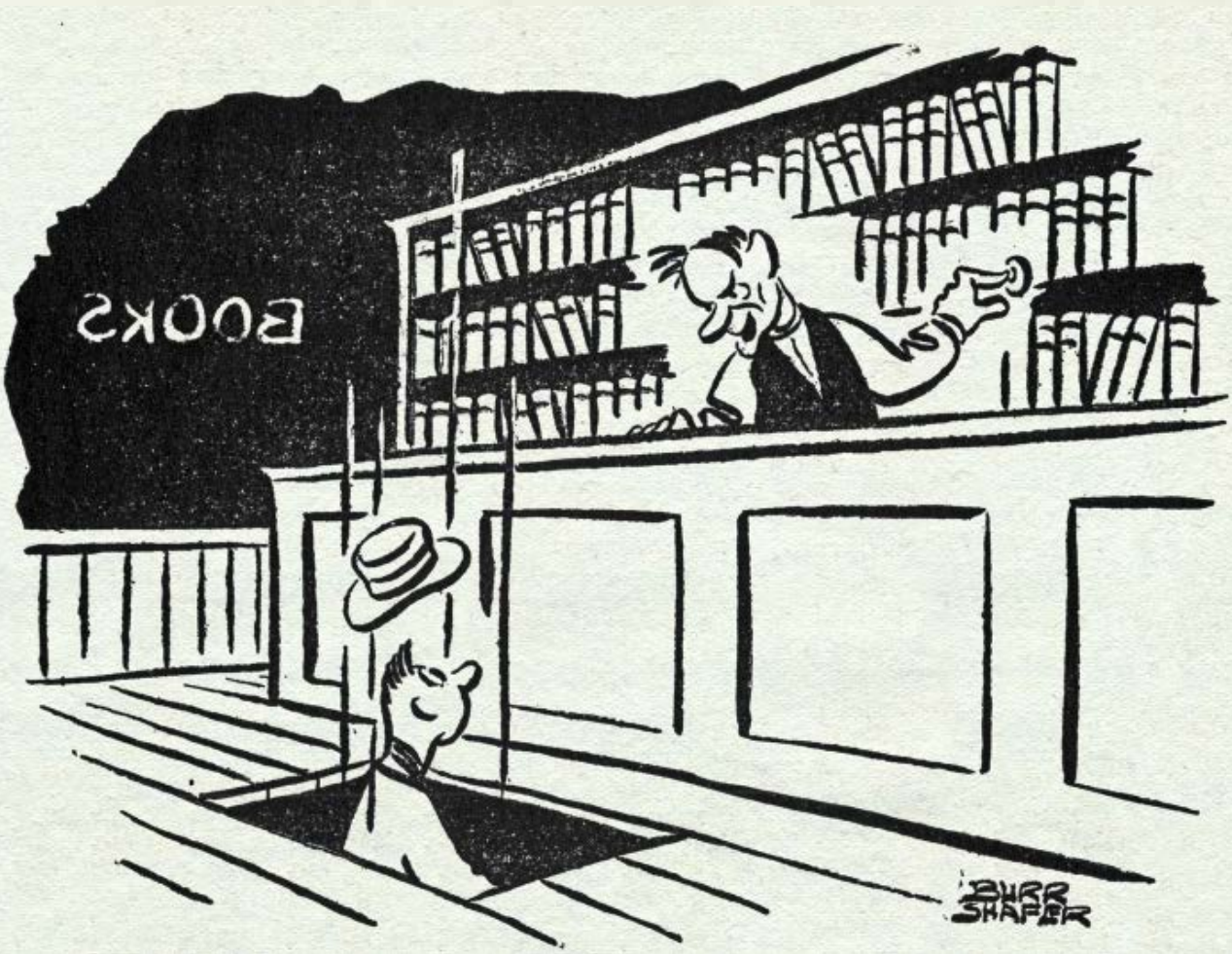

"The mystery stories are in the basement."

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• • • • •

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Most of these Labors have already appeared in American magazines. We were fortunate, however, to handcuff a few for EQMM, including "The Nemean Lion," which chronologically represents the first of the series. This first Labor, and the ones to follow in coming issues, were purchased directly from manuscript and have never before been published in the United States.

Whereas in olden days Hercules solved most of his gigantic problems with a heavy club (the ancient "blunt instrument"), our modern Herculerelies, as always, on his "little grey cells" — a revealing commentary on how our heroes have changed. In "The Nemean Lion" — or, as we call it, "The Case of the Kidnaped Pekinese" — Poirot unravels one of the most human mysteries in his long and brilliant career, a deceptively simple little affair that does something few detective stories accomplish — tugs at the heart strings. In its broader humanitarian aspects "The Case of the Kidnaped Pekinese" is a truly Poirotean labor.

The Labors of Hercules:

The Nemean Lion, or
THE CASE OF THE KIDNAPED PEKINESE

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"I'M A plain man, Mr. Poirot," said Sir Joseph Hoggin.

Hercule Poirot made a noncommittal gesture with his right hand. It expressed (if you chose to take it so) admiration for the solid worth of Sir Joseph's career and an appreciation of his modesty in so describing himself. It could also have conveyed a graceful deprecation of the statement. In any case it gave no clue to the thought then uppermost in

Hercule Poirot's mind which was that Sir Joseph certainly was (using the term in its more colloquial sense) a very plain man indeed. Hercule Poirot's eyes rested critically on the swelling jowl, the small pig eyes, the bulbous nose and the close-lipped mouth. The whole general effect reminded him of someone or something — but for the moment he could not recollect who or what it was. A memory stirred dimly. A long time ago . . . in Belgium . . . something to do with *soap*. . . .

Sir Joseph was continuing: "No frills about me. I don't beat about the bush. Most people, Mr. Poirot, would let this business go. Write it off as a bad debt and forget about it. But that's not Joseph Hoggin's way. I'm a rich man — and £200 is neither here nor there to me. But that's not to say that I'm in the habit of throwing my money about. What I want I pay for. But I pay the market price — no more."

Hercule Poirot said: "You realize that my fees are high?"

"Yes, yes. But this is a very small matter."

Hercule Poirot shrugged his shoulders. He said: "I do not bargain. I am an expert. For the services of an expert you have to pay."

Sir Joseph said frankly: "I know you're a tip top man at this sort of thing. I made inquiries and I was told that you were the best man available. I mean to get to the bottom of this business and I don't grudge the expense. That's why I got you to come here."

"You were fortunate," said Hercule Poirot

Sir Joseph said "Eh?" again.

"Exceedingly fortunate," said Hercule Poirot firmly. "I am, I may say so without undue modesty, at the apex of my career. Very shortly I intend to retire. That, however, is not the point. I wished merely to explain that before retiring I had imposed upon myself a certain task. I have decided to accept twelve cases — no more, no less. A self imposed "Labors of Hercules" if I may so describe it. Your case, Sir Joseph, is the first of the twelve. I was attracted to it, I may say, by its striking unimportance."

"Importance," said Sir Joseph.

"Unimportance was what I said. I have been called in for varying causes — to investigate murders, unexplained deaths, robberies, thefts of jewelry. This is the first time that I have been asked to turn my talents to elucidate the kidnapping of a Pekinese dog."

Sir Joseph grunted. He said: "You surprise me! I should have said you'd have had no end of women pestering you about their pet dogs."

"That, certainly. But it is the first time that I am summoned by

the husband in the case."

Sir Joseph's little eyes narrowed appreciatively. He said: "I begin to see why they recommended you to me. You're a shrewd fellow."

Poirot murmured: "If you will now tell me the facts of the case. The dog disappeared when?"

"Exactly a week ago."

"And your wife is by now quite frantic, I presume?"

Sir Joseph stared. He said: "You don't understand. The dog has been returned."

"Returned? Then, permit me to ask, where do I enter the matter?"

"Because I'm damned if I'll be swindled. Now then, Mr. Poirot, I'm going to tell you the whole thing. The dog was stolen a week ago — nipped in Kensington Gardens where he was out with my wife's companion. The next day my wife got a demand for £200. I ask you — *£200!* For a damned yapping little brute!"

Poirot murmured: "You did not approve of paying such a sum?"

"Of course I didn't — or wouldn't have if I'd known anything about it! Milly (my wife) knew that well enough. She didn't say anything to me. Just sent off the money — in one pound notes as stipulated — to the address given."

"And the dog was returned?"

"Yes. That evening the bell rang and there was the little brute on the doorstep. And not a soul to be seen."

"Perfect. Continue."

"Then, of course, Milly confessed what she'd done and I lost my temper a bit. However, I calmed down after a bit — after all the thing was done and you can't expect a woman to behave with any sense — and I daresay I should have let the whole thing go if it hadn't been for meeting old Samuelson at the Club."

"Yes?"

"Damn it all, this thing is a positive racket! Exactly the same thing had happened to him. *Three* hundred pounds they'd rooked *his* wife out of. Well, that was a bit *too* much! I decided the thing had got to be stopped. I sent for you."

"But surely, Sir Joseph, the proper thing (and a very much more inexpensive thing) would have been to send for the police?"

Sir Joseph rubbed his nose. He said: "You married, Mr. Poirot?"

"Alas," said Poirot, "I have not that felicity."

"H'm," said Sir Joseph. "Don't know about felicity, but if you were you'd know that women were funny creatures. My wife went into hysterics at the mere mention of the police — she'd got it into her head that something would happen to her precious Shan Tung if I did that. She wouldn't hear of the idea — and I may say she doesn't take very kindly to the idea of your being

called in. But I stood firm there."

Hercule Poirot murmured: "The position is, I perceive, a delicate one. It would be as well, perhaps, if I were to interview Madame your wife and gain further particulars from her whilst at the same time reassuring her as to the future safety of her dog."

Sir Joseph nodded and rose. He said: "I'll take you up right away."

In the large ornately furnished drawing-room two women were sitting in obvious expectation. As the men entered, a small Pekinese dog rushed forward barking furiously and circling dangerously round Poirot's ankles.

"Shan — Shan, come here. Come here to mother. Pick him up, Miss Carnaby."

The second woman bent down and Hercule Poirot murmured: "A veritable lion, indeed."

Rather breathlessly Shan Tung's captor agreed.

"Yes, indeed, he's such a *good* watch dog. He's not frightened of anything or anyone. There's a lovely boy, then."

Having performed the necessary introduction, Sir Joseph said: "Well, Mr. Poirot, I'll leave you to get on with it," and, with a short nod he left the room.

Lady Hoggin was a stout, petulant looking woman with dyed henna red hair. Her companion, the fluttering Miss Carnaby, was a plump amiable looking creature between forty and fifty. She treated Lady Hoggin with great deference and was clearly frightened to death of her.

Poirot said: "Now, tell me, Lady Hoggin, the full circumstances of this abominable crime."

Lady Hoggin flushed.

"I'm very glad to hear you say that, Mr. Poirot. For it *was* a crime. Pekinese are terribly sensitive — just as sensitive as children. Poor Shan Tung might have died of fright."

"Please tell me the facts."

"Well, it was like this. Shan Tung was out for his walk in the Park with Miss Carnaby —"

"Oh dear me, yes, it was all my fault," chimed in the companion. "How could I have been so stupid — so careless —"

Lady Hoggin said: "I don't want to reproach you, Miss Carnaby, but I do think you might have been more *alert*."

Poirot transferred his gaze to the companion.

"What happened?"

Miss Carnaby burst into voluble and slightly flustered speech.

"Well, it was the most extraordinary thing. We had just been along the flower walk — Shan Tung was on the leash, of course — he'd had his little run on the grass — and I was just about to turn and go home

when my attention was caught by a baby in a pram — such a lovely baby — it smiled at me — lovely rosy cheeks and such curls. I couldn't just resist speaking to the nurse in charge and asking how old it was — seventeen months, she said — and I'm sure I was only speaking to her for about a minute or two, and then suddenly I looked down and Shan wasn't there any more. The leash had been cut right through —"

Lady Hoggin said: "If you'd been paying proper attention to your duties, nobody could have sneaked up and cut that leash."

Miss Carnaby seemed inclined to burst into tears. Poirot said hastily: "And what happened next?"

"Well, of course I looked *everywhere*. And *called!* And I asked the Park attendant if he'd seen a man carrying a Pekinese dog but he hadn't noticed anything of the kind — and I didn't know what to do — and I went on searching, but at last, of course, I had to come home —"

Miss Carnaby stopped dead. Poirot could imagine the scene that followed well enough. He asked:

"And then you received a letter?"

Lady Hoggin took up the tale.

"By the first post the following morning. It said that if I wanted to see Shan Tung alive again I was to send £200 in one pound notes in an unregistered packet to Captain Curtis, 38 Bloomsbury Road Square. It said that if the money were marked or the police informed Shan Tung's ears and tail would be — cut off!"

Miss Carnaby began to sniff.

"So awful," she murmured. "How people can be such *fiends!*"

Lady Hoggin went on: "It said that if I sent the money at once, Shan Tung would be returned the same evening alive and well but that if — if afterwards I went to the police, it would be Shan Tung who would suffer for it —"

Hercule Poirot was quick to allay her anxiety.

"But I, I am not of the police. My inquiries, they will be conducted very discreetly, very quietly. You can be assured, Lady Hoggin, that Shan Tung will be perfectly safe. That, I will guarantee."

Both ladies seemed relieved by the magic word. Poirot went on:

"You have here the letter?"

Lady Hoggin shook her head.

"No, I was instructed to enclose it with the money."

"H'm, that is a pity."

Miss Carnaby said brightly: "But I have the dog leash. Shall I get it?"

She left the room. Hercule Poirot profited by her absence to ask a few pertinent questions.

"Amy Carnaby? Oh! she's quite all right. A good soul, though foolish, of course. I have had several companions and they have all been com-

plete fools. But Amy was devoted to Shan Tung and she was terribly upset over the whole thing — as well she might be — hanging over perambulators and neglecting my little sweetheart — these old maids are all the same, idiotic over babies. I'm sure she had nothing to do with it."

"It does not seem likely," Poirot agreed. "But as the dog disappeared when in her charge one must make quite certain of her honesty. She has been with you long?"

"Nearly a year. I had excellent references with her. She was with old Lady Hartingfield until she died — ten years, I believe. After that she looked after an invalid sister for a while. She is really an excellent creature — but a complete fool."

Amy Carnaby returned at this minute, slightly more out of breath, and produced the cut dog leash which she handed to Poirot with the utmost solemnity, looking at him with hopeful expectancy.

Poirot surveyed it carefully.

"*Mais oui*," he said. "This has undoubtedly been cut."

The two women still waited expectantly. He said: "I will keep this."

Solemnly, he put it in his pocket. The two women breathed a sigh of relief. He had clearly done what was expected of him.

It was the habit of Hercule Poirot to leave nothing untested.

Though on the face of it it seemed unlikely that Miss Carnaby was anything but the foolish and rather muddle-headed woman that she appeared to be, Poirot nevertheless managed to interview a somewhat forbidding lady who was the niece of the late Lady Hartingfield.

"Amy Carnaby?" said Miss Maltravers. "Of course, I remember her perfectly. She was a good soul and suited Aunt Julia down to the ground. Devoted to dogs and excellent at reading aloud. Tactful, too, never contradicted an invalid. What's happened to her? Not in distress of any kind, I hope. I gave her a reference about a year ago to some woman — name began with H —"

Poirot explained hastily that Miss Carnaby was still in her post. There had been, he said, a little trouble over a lost dog.

"Amy Carnaby is devoted to dogs. My aunt had a Pekinese. She left it to Miss Carnaby when she died and Miss Carnaby was devoted to it. I believe she was quite heartbroken when it died. Oh yes, she's a good soul. Not, of course, precisely *intellectual*."

Hercule Poirot agreed that Miss Carnaby could not, perhaps, be described as intellectual.

His next proceeding was to discover the Park Keeper to whom Miss Carnaby had spoken on the

fateful afternoon. This he did without much difficulty. The man remembered the incident in question.

"Middle-aged lady, rather stout — in a regular state she was — lost her Pekinese dog. I knew her well by sight — brings the dog along most afternoons. I saw her come in with it. She was in a rare taking about it. Wanted to know if I'd seen anyone with one. Well, I ask you — I can tell you the Gardens is full of dogs. Not likely as I'd notice one Peke more than another."

Hercule Poirot nodded his head thoughtfully.

He went to 38 Bloomsbury Road Square.

Nos. 38, 39 and 40 were incorporated together as the Balaclava Private Hotel. Poirot walked up the steps and pushed open the door. He was greeted inside by gloom and a smell of cooking cabbage with a reminiscence of breakfast kippers. On his left was a mahogany table with a sad looking chrysanthemum plant on it. Above the table was a big baize-covered rack into which letters were stuck. Poirot stared at the board thoughtfully for some minutes. He pushed open a door on his right. It led into a kind of lounge with small tables and some so-called easy chairs covered with a depressing pattern of cretonne.

He walked further along the passage and came to a staircase. On his right a passage branched at right angles to what was evidently the dining-room.

A little way along this passage was a door marked OFFICE.

On this Poirot tapped. Receiving no response, he opened the door and looked in. There was a large desk in the room covered with papers but there was no one to be seen. He withdrew closing the door again. He penetrated to the dining-room.

A sad-looking girl in a dirty apron was laying the tables.

Hercule Poirot said apologetically: "Excuse me, but could I see the Manageress?"

The girl looked at him with lack-lustre eyes. She said: "I don't know where she'd be, I'm sure."

"Perhaps," Hercule Poirot said, "you could find out?"

The girl sighed. Dreary as her day's round was, it had now been made additionally so by this new burden laid upon her. She said sadly:

"Well, I'll see what I can do."

Poirot thanked her and removed himself once more to the hall. He was staring up at the baize-covered letter rack when a rustle and a strong smell of Devonshire violets proclaimed the arrival of the Manageress.

Mrs. Harte was full of graciousness. She exclaimed:

"So sorry I was not in my office. You were requiring rooms?"

Hercule Poirot murmured: "Not

precisely. I was wondering if a friend of mine had been staying here lately. A Captain Curtis."

"Curtis," exclaimed Mrs. Harte. "Captain Curtis? Now where have I heard that name?"

Poirot did not help her. She shook her head vexedly.

He said: "You have not, then, had a Captain Curtis staying here?"

"Well, not lately, certainly. And yet, you know, the name is certainly familiar to me. Can you describe your friend at all?"

"That," said Hercule Poirot, "would be difficult." He went on: "I suppose it sometimes happens that letters arrive for people when in actual fact no one of that name is staying here?"

"That does happen, of course."

"What do you do with such letters?"

"Well, we keep them for a time. You see it probably means that the person in question will arrive shortly. People don't often book in advance these days. Of course if letters or parcels are a long time here unclaimed, they are returned to the post office."

Hercule Poirot nodded thoughtfully. He said: "I comprehend." He added: "It is like this, you see. I wrote a letter to my friend here."

Mrs. Harte's face cleared.

"That explains it. I must have noticed the name on an envelope. But really we have so many ex-Army gentlemen staying here or passing through. Let me see now."

She peered up at the board.

Hercule Poirot said: "It is not there now."

"It must have been returned to the postman, I suppose. I am so sorry. Nothing important, I hope?"

"No, no, it was of no importance."

As he moved towards the door, Mrs. Harte pursued him.

"If your friend should come —"

"It is most unlikely. I must have made a mistake . . ."

"Our terms," said Mrs. Harte, "are very moderate. I would like you to see one or two of our bed-stitting-rooms. . . ."

With difficulty Hercule Poirot escaped.

The drawing-room of Mrs. Samuelson was larger, more lavishly furnished, and enjoyed an even more stifling amount of central heating than that of Lady Hoggin. Hercule Poirot picked his way giddily amongst gilded console tables and large groups of statuary.

Mrs. Samuelson was taller than Lady Hoggin and her hair was dyed a different color. Her Pekinese was called Chang. His bulging eyes surveyed Hercule Poirot with arrogance. Miss Keble, Mrs. Samuelson's companion, was thin and scraggy where Miss Carnaby had been plump,

but she also was voluble and slightly breathless. She, too, had been blamed for Chang's disappearance.

"But really, Mr. Poirot, it was the most amazing thing. It all happened in a minute. Outside Harrod's it was. A nurse there asked me the time —"

Poirot interrupted her.

"A nurse? A hospital nurse?"

"No, no — a children's nurse. Such a sweet baby it was, too. A dear little mite. Such lovely rosy cheeks. They say children don't look healthy in London, but I'm sure —"

"Ellen," said Mrs. Samuelson.

Miss Keble blushed, stammered, and subsided into silence.

Mrs. Samuelson said acidly:

"And while Miss Keble was bending over a perambulator that had nothing to do with her, this audacious villain cut Chang's leash and made off with him."

Miss Keble murmured tearfully: "It all happened in a minute. I looked round and the darling boy was gone — there was just the dangling leash in my hand. Perhaps you'd like to see the leash, Mr. Poirot?"

"By no means," said Poirot hastily. He had no wish to make a collection of cut dog leashes. "I understand," he went on, "that shortly afterwards you received a letter?"

The story followed the same course exactly — the letter — the threats of violence to Chang. Only two things were different — the sum of money demanded — £300 — and the address to which it was to be sent, this time it was Commander Blackleigh, Harrington Hotel, 76 Clonmel Gardens, Kensington.

Mrs. Samuelson went on: "When Chang was safely back again, I went to the place myself, Mr. Poirot. After all three hundred pounds is three hundred pounds."

"Certainly it is."

"The very first thing I saw was my letter enclosing the money in a kind of rack in the hall. Whilst I was waiting for the proprietress I slipped it into my bag. Unfortunately —"

Poirot said: "Unfortunately, when you opened it, it contained only blank sheets of paper."

"How did you know?"

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

"Obviously, *chère Madame*, the thief would take care to recover the money before he returned the dog. He would then replace the notes with blank paper and return the letter to the rack in case its absence should be noticed."

"There was no such person as Commander Blackleigh staying there, I found."

"No, there would not be."

"And of course my husband was extremely annoyed about the whole thing. In fact he was livid — absolutely *livid!*"

Poirot murmured cautiously: "You

did not — er — consult him before despatching the money?"

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Samuelson with decision.

Poirot looked a question. The lady explained.

"I wouldn't have risked it for a moment. Men are so extraordinary when it's a question of money. Jacob would have wanted to go to the police. I couldn't risk that. My poor darling Chang. *Anything* might have happened to him. Of course, I *had* to tell my husband afterwards, because I had to explain why I was overdrawn at the Bank."

Poirot murmured: "Quite so —"

"And I have really never seen him so angry. Men," said Mrs. Samuelson rearranging her handsome diamond bracelet and turning her rings on her fingers, "think of nothing but money."

Hercule Poirot went up in the lift to the eighth floor of the building on the Embankment. There he sent in his card, standing in the outer office of Saltash, Hoggin & Levin.

Word was brought to him presently that Sir Joseph Hoggin would see him. Hercule Poirot was led through a suite of offices, each one increasing in importance until he arrived at the holy of holies. In the doorway he was swept aside by a haughty blonde who sailed out with her hands full of papers and who gave the quaint little man a disdainful glance in passing.

Sir Joseph was seated behind an immense mahogany desk.

"Well, Mr. Poirot? Sit down. Got any news for me?"

Hercule Poirot said:

"The whole affair is of a pleasing simplicity. In each case the money was sent to one of those boarding houses or private hotels where there is no porter or hall attendant and where a large number of guests are always coming and going, including a fairly large preponderance of ex-Service men. Nothing would be easier than for anyone to walk in, abstract a letter from the rack, either take it away, or else remove the money and replace it with blank paper. Therefore, in every case, the trail ends abruptly in a blank wall."

"You mean you've no idea who the fellow is?"

"I have certain ideas, yes. It will take a few days to follow them up."

Sir Joseph looked at him curiously.

"Good work. Then, when you've got anything to report —"

"I will report to you at your house."

Sir Joseph said: "If you get to the bottom of this business, it will be a pretty good piece of work."

"There is no question of failure. Hercule Poirot does not fail."

Sir Joseph Hoggin looked at the little man and grinned.

"Sure of yourself, aren't you?" he demanded.

"Entirely with reason."

"Oh well," Sir Joseph Hoggin leaned back in his chair. "Pride goes before a fall, you know."

Hercule Poirot, sitting in front of his electric radiator (and feeling a quiet satisfaction in its neat geometrical pattern) was giving instructions to his valet and general factotum.

"You understand, *Georges?*"

"Perfectly, sir."

"More probably a flat or maisonette. And it will definitely be within certain limits. South of the Park, east of Kensington Church, west of Knightsbridge Barracks and north of Fulham Road."

"I understand perfectly, sir."

Poirot murmured: "A curious little case. There is evidence here of a very definite talent for organization. And there is, of course, the surprising invisibility of the star performer — the Nemean Lion, if I may so style him. Yes, an interesting little case. I could wish that I felt more attracted to my client — but he bears an unfortunate resemblance to a soap manufacturer of Liège who poisoned his wife in order to marry a blonde secretary. One of my early successes."

George shook his head. He said gravely: "These blondes, sir, they're responsible for a lot of trouble."

It was three days later when the invaluable George said:

"This is the address, sir."

Hercule Poirot took the piece of paper handed to him.

"Excellent, my good *Georges.* And what day of the week?"

"Thursdays, sir."

"Thursdays. And today, most fortunately, is a Thursday. So there need be no delay."

Twenty minutes later Hercule Poirot was climbing the stairs of an obscure block of flats tucked away in a little street leading off a more fashionable one. No. 10 Rosholm Mansions was on the third and top floor and there was no lift. Poirot toiled upwards round and round the narrow corkscrew staircase.

He paused to regain his breath on the top landing and from behind the door of No. 10 a new sound broke the silence — the bark of a dog.

Hercule Poirot nodded his head with a slight smile. He pressed the bell of No. 10.

The barking redoubled — footsteps came to the door, it was opened . . .

Miss Amy Carnaby fell back, her hand went to her ample breast.

"You permit that I enter?" said Hercule Poirot, and entered without waiting for the reply.

There was a sitting-room door open on the right and he walked in. Behind him Miss Carnaby followed

as though in a dream.

The room was very small and much overcrowded. Amongst the furniture a human being could be discovered, an elderly woman lying on a sofa drawn up to the gas fire. As Poirot came in, a Pekinese dog jumped off the sofa and came forward uttering a few sharp suspicious barks.

"Aha," said Poirot. "The chief actor! I salute you, my little friend."

He bent forward extending his hand. The dog sniffed at it.

Miss Carnaby murmured faintly: "So you know?"

Hercule Poirot nodded.

"Yes, I know." He looked at the woman on the sofa. "Your sister, I think?"

Miss Carnaby said mechanically: "Yes, Emily, this — this is Mr. Poirot."

Emily Carnaby gave a gasp. She said: "Oh!"

Amy Carnaby said: "Augustus . . ."

The Pekinese looked towards her — his tail moved — then he resumed his scrutiny of Poirot's hand. Again his tail moved faintly.

Gently, Poirot picked the little dog up and sat down with Augustus on his knee. He said: "So I have captured you, my little friend. My task is completed."

Amy Carnaby said in a hard dry voice: "Do you really know everything?"

Poirot nodded.

"I think so. You organized this business — with Augustus to help you. You took your employer's dog out for his usual walk, left him here and went on to the Park with Augustus. The Park keeper saw you with a Pekinese as usual. The nurse girl, if we had ever found her, would also have agreed that you had a Pekinese with you when you spoke to her. Then, while you were talking, you cut the leash and Augustus, well-trained, slipped off at once and made a bee-line back home. A few minutes later you gave the alarm that the dog had been stolen."

There was a pause. Then Miss Carnaby drew herself up with a certain pathetic dignity. She said: "Yes. It is all quite true. I — I have nothing to say."

The invalid woman on the sofa began to cry softly.

Poirot said: "Nothing at all, Mademoiselle?"

Miss Carnaby said: "Nothing. I have been a thief — and now I am found out."

Poirot murmured: "You have nothing to say — in your own defence?"

A spot of red showed suddenly in Amy Carnaby's white cheeks. She said:

"I — I don't regret what I did. I think that you are a kind man, Mr. Poirot, and that possibly you

might understand. You see I've been so terribly *afraid*."

"Afraid?"

"Yes, it's difficult for a gentleman to understand, I expect. But you see, I'm not a clever woman at all, and I've no training and I'm getting older — and I'm so terrified for the future. I've not been able to save anything — how could I with Emily to be cared for? — and as I get older and more incompetent there won't be anyone who wants me. They'll want somebody young and brisk. I've — I've known so many people like I am — nobody wants you and you live in one room and you can't have a fire or any warmth and not very much to eat, and at last you can't even pay the rent of your room. . . . There are institutions, of course, but it's not very easy to get into them unless you have influential friends, and I haven't. There are a good many others situated like I am — poor companions — untrained useless women with nothing to look forward to but a deadly fear. . . ."

Her voice shook. She said:

"And so — some of us — got together and — and I thought of this. It was really having Augustus that put it into my mind. You see, to most people, one Pekinese is very much like another. (Just as we think the Chinese are.) Really, of course, it's ridiculous. No one who knew could mistake Augustus for Chang or Shan Tung or any of the other Pekes. He's far more intelligent for one thing, and he's much handsomer, but, as I say, to most people a Peke is just a Peke. Augustus put it into my head — that, combined with the fact that so many rich women have Pekinese dogs."

Poirot said with a faint smile:

"It must have been a profitable — racket! How many are there in your little trades' union? Or perhaps I had better ask how often operations have been successfully carried out."

Miss Carnaby said simply: "Shan Tung was the sixteenth."

Hercule Poirot raised his eyebrows.

"I congratulate you. Your organization must have been excellent."

Emily Carnaby said:

"Amy was always good at organization. Our father — he was the Vicar of Kellington in Essex — always said that Amy had quite a genius for organization. She always made all the arrangements for the Socials and the Bazaars."

Poirot said with a little bow:

"I agree. As a criminal, Mademoiselle, you are quite in the first rank."

Amy Carnaby cried: "A criminal. Oh dear, I suppose I am. But — but it never felt like that."

"How did it feel?"

"Of course you are quite right. It was breaking the law. But you see —

how can I explain it? Nearly all these women who employ us are so very rude and unpleasant. Lady Hoggin, for instance, doesn't mind *what* she says to me. She said her tonic tasted unpleasant the other day and practically accused me of tampering with it. All that sort of thing." Miss Carnaby flushed. "It's really very unpleasant. And not being able to say anything or answer back makes it *rankle* more, if you know what I mean."

"I know what you mean," said Hercule Poirot.

"And then seeing money frittered away so wastefully — that is upsetting. And Sir Joseph, occasionally he used to describe a *coup* he had made in the City — sometimes something that seemed to me (of course I know I've only got a woman's brain and don't understand finance) downright *dishonest*. Well, you know, M. Poirot, it all — it all *unsettled* me, and I felt that to take a little money away from these people who really wouldn't miss it and hadn't been too scrupulous in acquiring it — well, it hardly seemed wrong at all."

Poirot murmured:

"A modern Robin Hood! Tell me, Miss Carnaby, did you ever have to carry out the threats you used in your letters?"

"Threats?"

"Were you ever compelled to mutilate the animals in the way you specified?"

Miss Carnaby regarded him in horror.

"Of course I would never have dreamed of doing such a thing! That was just — just an artistic touch."

"Very artistic. It worked."

"Well, of course I knew it would. I know how I should have felt about Augustus and of course I had to make sure they never told their husbands until afterwards. The plan worked beautifully every time. In nine cases out of ten the companion was given the letter with the money to post. We usually steamed it open, took out the notes, and replaced them with paper. Once or twice the woman posted it herself. Then, of course, the companion had to go to the place and take the letter out of the rack. But that was easy, too."

"And the nursemaid touch? Was it always a nursemaid?"

"Well, you see, M. Poirot, old maids are known to be foolishly sentimental about babies. So it seemed quite *natural* that they should be absorbed over a baby and not notice anything."

Hercule Poirot sighed. He said:

"Your psychology is excellent, your organization is first class, and you are also a very fine actress. Your performance the other day when I interviewed Lady Hoggin was irreproachable. Never think of yourself disparagingly, Miss Carna-

by. You may be what is termed an untrained woman but there is nothing wrong with your brains or with your courage."

Miss Carnaby said with a faint smile: "And yet I have been found out, M. Poirot."

"Only by me. That was inevitable. When I had interviewed Mrs. Samuelson I realized that the kidnapping of Shan Tung was one of a series. I had already learned that you had once been left a Pekinese dog and had an invalid sister. I had only to ask my invaluable servant to look for a small flat within a certain radius occupied by an invalid lady who had a Pekinese dog and a sister who visited her once a week on her day out. It was simple."

Amy Carnaby drew herself up. She said:

"You have been very kind. It emboldens me to ask you a favor. I cannot, I know, escape the penalty for what I have done. I shall be sent to prison, I suppose. But if you could, M. Poirot, avert some of the publicity. So distressing for Emily — and for those few who knew us in the old days. I could not, I suppose, go to prison under a false name? Or is that a *very* wrong thing to ask?"

Hercule Poirot said:

"I think I can do more than that. But first of all I must make one thing quite clear. This racket has got to stop. There must be no more disappearing dogs. All that is finished!"

"Yes! Oh, yes!"

"And the money you extracted from Lady Hoggin must be returned."

Amy Carnaby crossed the room, opened the drawer of a bureau and returned with a packet of notes which she handed to Poirot.

"I was going to pay it into the pool today."

Poirot took the notes and counted them. He got up.

"I think it possible, Miss Carnaby, that I may be able to persuade Sir Joseph not to prosecute."

"Oh, M. Poirot!"

Amy Carnaby clasped her hands. Emily gave a cry of joy. Augustus barked and wagged his tail.

"As for you, *mon ami*," said Poirot addressing him. "There is one thing that I wish you would give me. It is your mantle of invisibility that I need. In all these cases nobody for a moment suspected that there was a second dog involved. Augustus possessed the lion's skin of invisibility."

"Of course, M. Poirot, according to the legend, Pekinese were lions once. And they still have the hearts of lions."

"Augustus is, I suppose, the dog that was left to you by Lady Hartingfield and who is reported to have died? Were you never afraid of him coming home alone through the traffic?"

"Oh no, M. Poirot, Augustus is very clever about traffic. I have trained him most carefully. He has even grasped the principal of One Way Streets."

"In that case," said Hercule Poirot, "he is superior to most human beings!"

Sir Joseph received Hercule Poirot in his study. He said: "Well, Mr. Poirot? Made your boast good?"

"Let me first ask you a question," said Poirot as he seated himself. "I know who the criminal is and I think it possible that I can produce sufficient evidence to convict this person. But in that case I doubt if you will ever recover your money."

"Not get back my money?"

Sir Joseph turned purple.

Hercule Poirot went on: "But I am not a policeman. I could, I think, recover your money intact, if no proceedings were taken."

"Eh?" said Sir Joseph. "That needs a bit of thinking about."

"It is entirely for you to decide. Strictly speaking, I suppose you ought to prosecute in the public interest. Most people would say so."

"I daresay they would," said Sir Joseph drily. "It wouldn't be *their* money that had gone west. If there's one thing I hate it's to be swindled."

"Well, then, what do you decide?"

"I'll have the brass! Nobody's going to say they got away with two hundred pounds of my money."

Hercule Poirot rose, crossed to the writing-table, wrote out a check for two hundred pounds and handed it to the other man.

Sir Joseph said in a weak voice: "Well, I'll be — Who the devil *is* this fellow?"

Poirot shook his head.

"If you accept the money, there must be no questions asked."

Sir Joseph folded up the check and put it in his pocket.

"That's a pity. But the money's the thing. And what do I owe you, Mr. Poirot?"

"My fee will not be high. This was, as I said, a very unimportant matter. Nowadays nearly all my cases are murder cases."

"Must be interesting?"

"Sometimes. Curiously enough, you recall to me one of my early cases in Belgium, many years ago — the chief protagonist was very like you in appearance. He was a wealthy manufacturer. He poisoned his wife in order to be free to marry his secretary. The resemblance is very remarkable."

A faint sound came from Sir Joseph's lips — they had gone a queer blue color. All the ruddy hue had faded from his cheeks. His eyes, starting out of his head, stared at Poirot.

Then, with a shaking hand, he fumbled in his pocket. He drew out

the check and tore it into pieces.

"That's washed out — see? Consider it as your fee."

"Oh but, Sir Joseph, my fee would not have been that large."

"That's all right. You keep it."

"I shall send it to a deserving charity."

"Send it anywhere you like."

Poirot leaned forward. He said: "I think I need hardly point out, Sir Joseph, that in your position, you would do well to be careful."

Sir Joseph said, his voice almost inaudible: "You needn't worry. I shall be careful all right."

Hercule Poirot left the house. As he went down the steps he said to himself: "So — *I was right.*"

Lady Hoggin said to her husband:

"Funny, this tonic tastes quite different. It hasn't got that bitter taste any more. I wonder why?"

Sir Joseph growled: "Chemist. Careless fellows. Make things up differently different times."

Lady Hoggin said: "I suppose so."

"Of course. What else could it be?"

"Has the man found out anything about Shan Tung?"

"Yes. He got me my money back."

"Who was it?"

"He didn't say. Very close fellow, Poirot. But you needn't worry."

"He's a funny little man, isn't he?"

Sir Joseph gave a slight shiver and threw a sideways glance upwards as though he felt the invisible presence of Hercule Poirot behind his right shoulder. He had an idea that he would always feel it there.

He said: "He's a damned clever little devil!"

And he thought to himself: "Greta can go hang! *I'm* not going to risk my neck for *any* damned platinum blonde!"

"*Oh!*"

Amy Carnaby gazed down incredulously at the check for two hundred pounds. She cried:

"Emily! *Emily!* Listen to this:"

Dear Miss Carnaby,

Allow me to enclose a contribution to your very deserving Fund before it is finally wound up.

Yours very truly,

Hercule Poirot

"Amy," said Emily Carnaby. "You've been incredibly lucky. Think where you might be now."

"Wormwood Scrubbs — or is it Holloway?" murmured Amy Carnaby. "But that's all over now — isn't it, Augustus? No more walks to the Park with Mother and Mother's friends and a little pair of scissors."

A far away wistfulness came into her eyes. She sighed.

"Dear Augustus! It seems a pity. He's so clever. . . . One can teach him anything. . . ."

Your Editor's anthology, THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES, *the first and only "feminology" of great distaff detectives and petticoat pilferers, contains an anecdote about Mignon Eberhart and Vincent Starrett which is worth repeating. . . . Mr. Starrett once acted as chairman of a large public literary gathering. One of the speakers, lecturing on poetry, took occasion to belittle both the readers and writers of detective stories. At the end of her lecture, the speaker said solemnly: "Poetry is the door to another world."*

Vincent Starrett was equal to the occasion. He rose and said: "As perhaps the only available specimen of murdermonger, I think it is my duty to point out that murder too is a door to another world."

There was one other person present who was also equal to the occasion. Mignon Eberhart, out in the audience, got up and cheered at the top of her voice!

We welcome Mignon Eberhart's first appearance in "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" — in the person of her most charming detectivette, Susan Dare.

POSTICHE

by MIGNON G. EBERHART

Postiche: A pretentious imitation, particularly used of an inartistic addition to an otherwise perfect work of art. — Encyclopædia Britannica.

THE Wiggenhorn house could never have been a pleasant place: its slate roof was too heavy and dark; its turrets too many, its windows too high and too narrow. It was still less so on the cold, windy March afternoon when Susan Dare dismissed the taxi that had brought her from the train, and put her hand upon the gate.

Susan pressed the bell and thought of Jim's words to her over the telephone. "Go ahead, if you must, Susie," he'd said. "But if it looks like trouble, you get out. You take too many chances, my girl." He'd paused there, and then said in an offhand way: "Where'd you say the place is? Just outside Warrington? And what's the name of the people?" She'd told him, and had an impression that he'd written it.

The door opened. A plump little maid took Susan's bag and invited her to enter.

The interior of the house was exactly what one would expect. There was a great deal of heavy, darkly upholstered furniture; stiff curtains which looked dusty and a musty smell tinged with camphor.

She had only a glimpse of the hall, however, for she was ushered at once

into a hideous drawing-room and from a jungle of armchairs a woman arose. She was a large woman, very fat, with a jolly smile, several chins, eyes that were almost hidden in folds of flesh and lightish, untidy hair. There was an open box of chocolates on the table beside her.

"Miss Dare, I suppose," she said in an asthmatic voice. "I was expecting you. I am Miss Wiggenhorn. Miriam Wiggenhorn. Do sit down. Will you have tea?"

There was no tea in sight, so Susan said no, and thought Miss Wiggenhorn looked disappointed. "Now then, Miss Dare, I daresay you want to know exactly why I asked you to come here. I heard of you, you see, from John Van Dusen, our family lawyer. I believe he is acquainted with a woman for whom you did — er — something of the kind. A Mrs. Lasher." She picked up some embroidery hoops and then paused to glance quickly at Susan over them. Or at least, so Susan thought.

"Yes."

"Yes. Well, at any rate, when things — owing to the confusion — to my own wish rather" — she floundered, threading a needle with care, and said: "So John said call in Miss Dare. Let her look around."

"Perhaps you'd better tell me just what it is about. I have only your note asking me to come. I ought to tell you that I'm not a detective, but a writer of mystery stories. And that I'm not at all sure of being able to help you."

"I think that's quite sufficient. I mean — Mrs. Lasher — Mr. Van Dusen — you see, Miss Dare, this is the trouble." She made a careful and intricate stitch, took a breath and said: "My uncle, Keller Wiggenhorn, died a few days ago. He was buried yesterday. And I want to make sure he — died a natural death."

"You mean you think he was murdered?"

"Oh, dear, no."

"Then what do you mean?"

Miriam Wiggenhorn ate a chocolate cream thoughtfully. Then she said: "I think I'd better tell you the whole story. I'll tell it briefly."

And denuded of Miss Wiggenhorn's panting breaths and hesitation it was certainly a brief enough story. Keller Wiggenhorn had been ailing for some time, owing to a serious heart weakness. Had been so ill in fact that for some three months he'd been obliged to have the care of a trained nurse. He had died suddenly, when alone. The doctor was not surprised; it was to be expected, he said. The nurse was not surprised although she regretted that she had not been with her patient when he was taken with the last and fatal attack. No one had known it even, although it had happened during the daytime. But the nurse had been out in the

garden, taking her rightful air and exercise. Durrie had been in town ("Durrie?" said Susan. "My brother," said Miss Wiggenhorn. "Younger than I. We have lived with my uncle for many years.") — Durrie had been in town; the cook busy in the kitchen, and Miss Wiggenhorn herself had been in the kitchen. "Putting up pickled peaches," said Miss Wiggenhorn. "Uncle was very fond of them."

Only the maid might have known of his fatal attack, and she had not. For he had apparently merely felt faint at first and had called to the girl as she passed his door to hand him his bottle of smelling salts. The girl had done so, had asked if he wanted anything else, had been assured that he didn't. He was lying, she'd said, on a sort of couch, drawn up to the windows so he could read. He had made no complaint, seemed no worse than usual. The girl had gone on about her work downstairs.

There were no sounds. He hadn't rung the bell on the table beside him.

It was perhaps an hour after that that the maid returned and found he was dead.

Miss Wiggenhorn paused again and Susan waited. There was nothing, certainly, in the recital so far to suggest the thing that Miss Wiggenhorn had implied and then denied.

"But you see," said Miriam Wiggenhorn. "He died in great pain and struggle."

"Struggle!" said Susan sharply.

"The pillows were tossed about, his clothing disheveled, there were — marks on his throat."

It was very still. In the stillness someone walked heavily across the floor above and stopped.

"The doctor said it was all right. That with that particular trouble he was likely to gasp for breath at the last. He signed a certificate at once. Mind you, Miss Dare, I'm not saying there was murder done."

"Whom do you suspect?" said Susan bluntly.

Miriam Wiggenhorn did not reply directly. Instead she put down her embroidery with an air of decision and turned to face Susan.

"I only want you to stay here for a few days. To consider the thing. I want him to have died naturally, of course. But I cannot forget the — look of things. The marks on his throat. The doctor says he made them himself — clutching — you see? — for air. I don't suspect anyone. There is no one to suspect. Durrie and I. A cook who has been with us for years. A maid who is — too stupid in the first place; and has no motive."

"The nurse?"

"The nurse was devoted to her patient. And he to her. She is a sweet, charming young woman. As you will see."

"Did anyone profit directly by your uncle's death?"

"You mean money and property? Yes, of course. He left his property and money — all his possessions, equally divided between Durrie and me. We were like children to him. He was only a moderately wealthy man. His will permits us to live on in exactly the same manner. There's no motive at all."

"But still you feel he was murdered?"

"I feel that I want to be sure he was not. That is all."

There were footsteps overhead again and then someone was running down the stairway in the hall beyond. Miss Wiggenhorn said: "There's Durrie now."

"Do they — your family — know why I am here?" asked Susan.

"Oh, yes," said Miriam Wiggenhorn readily, and Durrie entered the room.

He was certainly much younger than his sister; young and slender with light-brown hair that had a crisp wave which any woman might have envied, light gray-blue eyes and a handsome profile which just escaped being pretty. He looked Susan over from under thick blond eyelashes and said, "How do you do," shortly.

"Rosina's out for a walk," said Miriam. "Were you looking for her?"

"No," he said quickly. "Not at all. That is — have you seen the book I was reading?"

"What book?" asked Miriam. In the midst of the little distraction of explaining and searching Durrie looked up. "You write, don't you, Miss Dare?"

"Yes," said Susan prepared to be modest. It wasn't necessary. He said "Humph" with definite disfavor, took up a book from another table and went away.

"Dinner's at seven," said Miss Wiggenhorn. "I'll take you to your room."

Left to herself in an unaired guest room, Susan sat down and surveyed the worn red roses of a Brussels carpet blankly.

Marks on a dead man's throat. A doctor's certificate. No motives. No murder. Yet she was there.

She rose and went to the window. Nottingham lace curtains did not obscure the depressing view of a bare, cold March garden. As she looked, however, a woman came into view, walking with her head bent against the wind. She wore a dark cape which, when the wind blew, showed glimpses of a scarlet lining, and paused at a fountain as if waiting for something — paused and looked up suddenly at the house. Despite the gathering gloom Susan could see the outline of her face; a darkly beautiful face with a rich, full mouth.

Rosina, that would be. The nurse. A sweet and charming young woman, Miriam had said.

Quite suddenly another figure was beside the nurse, coming swiftly from some shrub-masked path. It was Durrie, with no hat on and the collar of his coat turned up around his ears. He spoke to the woman briefly, they both turned to look directly upward at Susan's window and almost immediately moved away. They couldn't have seen her, of course; there was no light in her room. She pulled down the shade, and rang briskly for the maid.

Miss Wiggenhorn had said, leaving her, to question and explore as she liked.

And the little maid, Susan thought, had been prepared, for she answered her questions directly and fully and eyed her with a timorous look.

It was all exactly as Miss Wiggenhorn had already told her. The maid had heard Mr. Wiggenhorn call her, had entered the room and handed him his smelling salts.

"But didn't you think that perhaps he was having or about to have an attack?"

The maid hadn't. "He always liked to have things near him; his books, his spectacles; a glass of water; his smelling salts. I never thought anything about it."

"What did you do then?"

"I asked if there was anything else. The water glass was empty and he said to fill it and I did."

"Who found him? I mean after he was dead."

The girl's face paled a little but her eyes did not blink.

"I did. Dreadful, he looked. Everything was tossed about. Glass on the floor. Books — bottle with all the smelling salts spilled out of it. It looked as if he'd grabbed hold of the table cover and just jerked the whole thing off at once. He must have struggled — for a moment or two. I didn't hear anything at all. But then we'd shut the doors everywhere."

"Why? Was that customary?"

"I mean the doors to the back part of the house. Miss Miriam was making pickled peaches in the kitchen and the smell was all over the house. You know — vinegar and spices. So strong it was sort of sickening. The nurse said to shut the door of his bedroom."

"The nurse? What is her name?"

"Miss Hunt. Miss Rosina Hunt."

There was certainly something the girl wanted to tell — her plump face was bursting with it.

"I suppose Miss Hunt will be leaving soon?"

"She can't leave too soon," said the girl. "Not that she's not treated me well enough. But she's too bossy."

"Bossy?"

"Snappy — as if she owned the

place. And stubborn! Even with Miss Miriam. After all, it's Miss Miriam's house. Hers and Mr. Durrie's."

"Mr. Durrie is not married?"

"No, ma'am. Not him. Though he was engaged to be married once. But it didn't last long."

Susan said abruptly: "Will you show me the room in which Mr. Wiggenhorn died, please."

But at the end of a good half hour spent in that chilly, huge bedroom Susan was little wiser than when she had entered it.

In the hall she met Miriam Wiggenhorn.

"Oh, you've been in his room?"

"Yes."

"That was right — John Van Dusen will be here to dinner. If there's anything ——"

"There's nothing," said Susan, "yet."

Dinner. So she was to see the lawyer who had suggested sending for her. And the nurse would be there too. Rosina.

Miriam, now in cherry silk, was in the drawing-room when, half an hour later, Susan went down. With her was the lawyer, John Van Dusen, a spare, gray little man of fifty or so, who lifted his eyebrows, bowed to Susan and looked as if he were stuffed with sawdust.

And almost immediately Durrie came into the room, and then the nurse. And if the lawyer looked as if he were stuffed with sawdust, then the nurse looked as if she were charged with some high explosive. But she kept her beautiful dark eyes lowered and her red, rich mouth silent.

The dining room was dimly lighted. The food was very rich and very heavy and there was no conversation. The lawyer talked a little of politics and lifted his eyebrows a great deal; Durrie said nothing and looked at the nurse; the nurse looked at the table cloth and Miriam looked at nobody and ate steadily.

After dinner Susan had vaguely expected a talk with the lawyer. Instead they played parcheesi. Played it till ten o'clock.

There was somewhere in the house a clock which struck on a gasping, breathless note not unlike Miriam's panting voice. When it struck ten John Van Dusen rose, the parcheesi board disappeared, the nurse murmured and vanished.

"Good night, Miriam. Good night, Durrie. A pleasant evening. Good night, Miss Dare." The little lawyer paused and looked at Susan as if he had just become conscious of her presence. "Oh, yes," he said. "Miss Dare. So good of you to come. Not of course that there's any — er — reason for it. It really is absurd — the whole idea. Miriam is aware of my feeling, but she insisted ——"

"Now, John," panted Miriam good-naturedly, "don't blame me for this. And don't trip on the step — it's likely to be slippery. Go with him to his car, Durrie."

Durrie obeyed.

Miriam looked at Susan.

"Well, my dear," she said expectantly. "How is it going? What did you think of John? He's a dear old fellow. But timid. Very timid. Wouldn't admit a murder if he saw it with his own eyes."

"Why is the nurse still here?" asked Susan.

"Rosina? Oh, I asked her to stay on for a little. During Uncle's long illness and her extreme devotion to him we became very fond of her."

The hall door opened and closed again and they could hear Durrie locking it.

"Well — how about some cake or sandwiches before you go to sleep. No? Very well. Just ring the bell if you do want anything."

Susan was still shuddering when she reached her room; her hostess' interest in food was, to say the least, inordinate.

And it was ubiquitous. Susan tossed and turned and between times dreamed of enormous boxes of chocolate creams pursuing her. Once, quite late, a sound of some kind in the hall roused her so thoroughly that she rose and opened her door cautiously and peered into the shadows of the night-lighted hall. There was, however, nothing there.

But she was still wide awake and tense when she heard it again. Or at least she heard a faint sound which was very like the creaking of the steps of a stairway. This time she reached the door softly and managed to open it without, she thought, being detected. And her care had its reward for she saw, coming very quietly from the landing of the stairs, the nurse. Rosina. She was wearing something long and dark and her face was hidden so that Susan saw only her thick, smooth black hair. But as she passed under the light she turned suddenly and cast a sharp strange look at Miriam Wiggenhorn's door. A look so strange and pale and fiery, so full of malevolence, that Susan felt queer and shaken long after the nurse had glided away.

But there was no reason to suspect murder. She told Miriam Wiggenhorn that the next morning.

She did not add that there was something hidden, something secret and ugly, going on in the house. She said merely that she had thus far found no reason to suspect murder.

Miss Wiggenhorn took it with bland detachment and asked her, still blandly, to stay on a few days. She would welcome proof of Keller Wiggenhorn's death being natural; she wanted Susan to have plenty of

time. Susan said in that case she would like to see both the lawyer and the doctor and forestalled an offer on Miriam's part to have them summoned. She would go to their offices, said Susan firmly, and Miriam embroidered a flower and then said Durrie would take her in his car.

It was then that Susan risked a direct question about the nurse. "I saw her last night coming very quietly up the stairway. What would she be doing on the first floor so late? Do you know?"

"How late?"

"I don't know exactly. I suppose only around midnight."

Miriam Wiggenhorn pondered very briefly and offered a — to her — sound explanation.

"I suppose she had gone down to the kitchen for a glass of milk," she said. "Or for something to eat. I hope you aren't going to involve little Rosina in this, Miss Dare."

"But there's only you and your brother and Rosina who had the opportunity," said Susan brutally. "That is, if you except the cook and housemaid."

"I suppose so," said Miriam Wiggenhorn. "Well — I'll ask Durrie to take you to see John. And the doctor."

She did so. Durrie looked sullen but consented, and said, during the six-mile drive into Warrington, not one word.

And neither the doctor nor the lawyer yielded anything to Susan's inquiries. Except that the lawyer again rather nervously put the responsibility for calling Susan upon Miriam's plump shoulders.

In the end Susan, still with a silent and sullen Durrie, returned to the Wiggenhorn house no wiser than when she had left. They approached it this time along an old drive leading to a porte-cochère at a side door. Through the shrubs Susan caught glimpses of the garden, and, once, of a kind of summer-house, except that it was much more substantial than most summer-houses are. Durrie caught her look and said: "My studio."

"Studio? Oh, you paint, then?"

"Well, yes and no. I sort of dabble around at this and that." He hesitated and then said suddenly: "Look here, Miss Dare, I don't know what on earth's got into Miriam. Uncle wasn't murdered. Why, there's no one who would want to murder Uncle. It's a perfectly senseless notion. I wish — I wish you'd tell her so and leave."

"And there were no outsiders in the house, anyway," said Susan. "Except the nurse and ——"

"Rosina didn't do it! That's impossible. Why, she — she — I tell you she couldn't have done it. She thought the world of Uncle. And he of her."

"Will Rosina be leaving soon?"

"I suppose so. Just for a time. Until we can be married."

"Oh ——"

"Yes."

"Did your uncle approve of your engagement?" asked Susan after a moment.

The reply was not what she expected.

"Yes," said Durrie. "He thought it was fine. Here you are, Miss Dare."

He opened the door for her. She lingered to watch as he walked around the car which he left standing in the drive and disappeared in the direction of the summer-house.

Susan went thoughtfully into the hideous drawing-room. Rosina, immaculate in her white uniform, was there reading, and she lifted her fine eyes to give Susan one long, smoldering look. She was not disposed to be communicative.

Yes, she had liked Mr. Wiggenhorn very much. Yes, it was too bad he died alone; she felt very badly about that.

"But it takes them that way. It can't be helped. But it wasn't murder," she added with sudden, vehement scorn. "If he was murdered, it was an absolutely perfect crime. So perfect that it fooled me and the doctor, and I'm not easily fooled."

Susan was very thoughtful during a dreary, silent lunch. But it was not until late afternoon that, during a solitary, slow walk up and down the damp garden paths, one small phrase out of all the things that had been said to her began to emphasize itself. Was dispelled and returned. Began to assume rather curious proportions. Under its insistency she finally let her fancy go and built up, with that as a premise, a curious fabric of murder. Or rather it built itself up, queerly, almost instantly, with the most terrifying logic.

It couldn't be. There were reasons why it couldn't be.

Yet — well, who would know? No one. Who could tell her what she must know? Come now, Susie, she could hear Jim saying: let's get down to brass tacks. How *could* it have been done?

The house was still quiet when at length she returned to it. She summoned the little housemaid to her own room again. "I want you to tell me again, exactly how you found Mr. Wiggenhorn."

The girl shut her eyes and twisted her white apron.

"Well, he was there on the couch. That's the first thing I saw, because he was all twisted — looked so queer, you know. Somehow I knew right away he was dead. I screamed and everybody — that is, Miss Wiggenhorn and cook and then the nurse — came running."

"And he had pulled off the cover of the table ——"

"Oh, yes, and everything was spilled. Glass and water and ——"

"Did you straighten the room?"

"Yes, ma'am. Right away. While Miss Wiggenhorn was telephoning for the doctor."

"What did you pick up?"

The girl's eyes opened widely. "Why, the — empty water glass. The bottle of smelling salts ——"

"Was it open? I mean had Mr. Wiggenhorn used it?"

"Oh, yes, the stopper was out and it had fallen on its side."

"Then you gathered up the crystals of salts that had fallen out?"

"No, ma'am," said the girl. "The bottle must have been empty. There wasn't anything in it at all. Except a sort of mist ——"

"Mist!" said Susan violently.

"Well — steam. As if it had had hot water in it — you know. Only the bottle was empty."

"I see," said Susan after a moment. "What did you do with it?"

"Why, I — I put it on the table. And straightened up the table and wiped up the water that had spilled from the glass ——"

"Wait. There was nothing in the glass?"

"No, ma'am. It had fallen on its side too. I took it and washed it and put it back on the table."

She waited for further questions. Finally Susan said: "Was there any unusual odor in the room?"

The girl thought and then shook her head decisively. "No, ma'am. I didn't notice anything. Not even smelling salts — but then, the bottle was empty. But we were all excited — everybody running around — putting up windows."

"Opening windows? Who?"

But she didn't know exactly. "Besides," she said, "the smell of the vinegar and spices was all over the house. Suffocating, it was."

"It must have been. Did you replace the stopper in the smelling-salts bottle?"

She was dubious. Then remembered: "Yes. When I cleaned the room the next day. It had rolled under the couch."

"Do you clean Mr. Durrie's studio?" asked Susan abruptly.

"Oh, no," said the girl. "He's got bottles and glass things in there. And he won't let me clean it. Miss Miriam does it. Only Miss Miriam and the nurse are allowed to go into the studio. And if you want smells," she added with vehemence, "that's the place to get them. He says it's chemical experiments. Me and the cook think it's dreadful."

"Oh," said Susan. I've got to go, thought Susan, blindly. I've got to leave. I've got to get out of here now. At once. Will they try to stop me?

And I have no proof.

The girl was looking worried.

"What's the matter, miss? Have I done anything wrong?"

"No, no," said Susan sharply. "It's all right. Do your parents live near here?"

"Two miles away."

"You'd better go to them at once. Walk. Make some excuse. Don't tell anyone you have talked to me. But go."

"G-go" — stammered the girl looking frightened. "Now?"

Somehow, tersely, Susan convinced her and watched her scuttle anxiously downstairs. (Besides she would be a valuable witness.) And still there was no proof. And no time to be lost.

The house was silent all around her. The hall empty, but shadowy and narrow. Which was Rosina's room?

She found it after opening doors to several cold, darkened bedrooms. The nurse's red-lined cape was across a chair. Her books on a table: powder and creams and bottles quite evidently belonging to the nurse and not to Miriam, on the dressing table. In an adjoining bathroom were other things: a bathing cap, bath salts, sponge, toothpaste. She was exploring a large jar of bath powder with a cautious forefinger when there was a small rustle and Rosina herself stood in the doorway, eyes blazing.

"What are you doing in my things?"

"Searching," said Susan with false airiness.

"Searching! What for? I've nothing to conceal. I wish you'd get out of here."

"Nothing," said Susan, "would suit me better. Look here, when are you planning to be married?"

Rosina blinked.

"I don't know. Next summer. Why?"

"Why not immediately?"

"Why, I — we haven't ——"

"Is there anything to prevent an immediate marriage?"

"Why — no! Certainly not!"

"Could you be married next week?"

"Y-yes. Yes, of course."

"Tomorrow?"

"Yes."

Susan permitted herself to look incredulous. "Are you sure?" she said very softly.

For a long moment the nurse's fine black eyes blazed into Susan's. Then she said furiously:

"Certainly. It's no affair of yours, but you might like to know, since you are so officious, that that is exactly what I'm going to do. I shall be married, Miss Snoopy Dare, tomorrow."

They stepped out into the hall and Rosina banged her door and, furious, went downstairs. Susan waited and

then returned once more to the same room.

She looked around it again. There were remarkably few places of concealment. None, indeed, except the old-fashioned mahogany wardrobe. She looked at it with disfavor, but finally opened one of the heavy mirrored doors and stepped up into it. The few dresses offered little concealment. And there was only one way out. And Jim had said something about danger. But she didn't think of all that until she had settled herself to wait.

Not an easy wait. For the space was narrow and cramped, the air not too good in spite of the small opening she had left to enable her to see into the room, and a sense of danger, like a small red signal, became more and more marked. Danger in that muffled, orderly house. Danger — danger.

Minutes dragged on and Susan's muscles were numb and cramped. Suppose no one came. Suppose Rosina had decided on another course. But she wouldn't. And they knew, too, that Susan's own departure was imminent. Susan's eyes were blurred from staring too long and too fixedly at that crack of light. She closed them wearily.

And it was then that someone entered the room. Entered it so stealthily, so furtively that Susan felt only the faint jar of footsteps on the old floor.

Her heart pounded in her throat and her eyes were glued again to that crack.

And too late she realized that the wardrobe itself might be the objective.

Suppose the door should suddenly, silently open — suppose the very torrent of her thoughts betrayed, telepathically, her hiding place. Suppose — something passed across Susan's range of vision and obscured for an instant that crack of light.

Obscured it. And then was gone as silently, as swiftly, as it had come. But not too swiftly for recognition.

It was a long ten minutes before Susan dared move and open the door and, cautiously, emerge from her hiding place.

It was not difficult to find what she sought. The pungent odor of bath salts guided her. The jar was closed again, but it had been opened and disturbed.

She was cautious, too, in returning to her own room.

Now then, to get away. At once. Without fail.

Would they let her leave? She tossed her things in her bag and closed it; put on her coat. Knotted a yellow scarf with trembling hands and pulled her small brown hat at a jaunty angle over her light-brown hair. She looked pale and frightened.

And was. But they had told her to go; at least Durrie had.

On the stairway she could hear their voices coming from the drawing-room.

Susan braced herself and entered.

And she need not have braced herself for it was all very simple and easy. They agreed that if Miss Dare felt that she could do no more and wished to go, she must go. They were very grateful to her. Her advice had relieved them greatly (this only from Miriam).

It was all very easy and very simple. Except that she didn't leave.

For something was wrong with the car.

"*Wrong with the car?*" panted Miriam. "Why, you were driving it only this morning."

"I know," said Durrie sulkily. "The thing won't start. I don't know what's wrong. You'll have to wait till morning, I guess, Miss Dare. There's only one night train in to Chicago. It leaves at six."

"A taxi" — said Susan with stiff lips.

"Too late," said Durrie, looking at his watch. "It's five-thirty now and the roads are a fright. You can't possibly make it."

Miriam looked up from her embroidery hoops. "It looks as if you'll have to spend another night with us, Miss Dare. We are very happy, indeed, to have you."

Susan's bag dropped and her heart with it. She had a sudden, sharp pang of longing for Jim. "Very well," she said after a moment. "But — a theatre engagement — I'll telephone——"

There was an instant of complete silence. Then Miriam said, panting: "Show her the telephone, Durrie. It's there in the hall, Miss Dare."

They were listening, all of them, while she called Chicago and then a familiar number. But Jim was not there. "Will you give him a message, please," Susan said. "Tell him Miss Dare can't keep her engagement for the theatre tonight. That she's" — she hesitated and then made curious use of a conventional phrase. "Tell him," she said, "that she's unavoidably detained."

But if they thought the use curious they did not say so.

Jim would understand her message; they had had no theatre engagement. But there was no way of knowing when he would return and find it.

Was there anything really wrong with the car? And what would they say when they discovered that the little housemaid had gone home?

They said nothing of it. Nothing at all. The cook, enormous in a white apron, served the meal. What did they know? Somehow Susan managed to get food past a stricture in her throat.

Later they played parcheesi again.

"Tired, Miss Dare?" said Rosina once when Susan had glanced surreptitiously at her watch. And Miriam, holding dice in her fat, ringed hand, said:

"Are you perfectly sure you have nothing to tell us, Miss Dare? Your view of Uncle's death, I mean? Does it coincide in every way with what we know of it?"

Susan had to speak without hesitation. "I'm afraid I've discovered nothing that wasn't already known. But I'll think it over carefully; sometimes it takes a little while for things to become clear in one's mind."

Miriam tossed the dice and Durrie took his turn. He said calmly: "Is that why you sent the girl away?"

The question fell into absolute silence. Long afterwards Susan was to remember the way Rosina's strong, wide, white hand closed upon the dice and held them rigidly. And her own swift, queer recollection of the empty room upstairs. The room where a kind old man had been cruelly murdered.

She couldn't have spoken. And Durrie, all at once white and strange, cried: "You thought you'd fasten it on Rosina. But she didn't kill him. She ——"

"*Durrie*," said Miriam, "*Don't you know that only Rosina could have done it.*"

Durrie leaped to his feet. Rosina did not move and neither did Miriam.

And in the silence they all heard the sudden squealing of the brakes of an automobile at the side of the house.

"*Jim*," thought Susan. "Oh, let it be Jim ——"

It was. Durrie went to the door and let him in. He gave one look at Susan and said very pleasantly that he'd come to take her home.

There was a bad moment when Miriam Wiggenhorn raised an objection.

"But you have only begun the investigation, Miss Dare. This is most distressing—most inconclusive——"

Jim said crisply: "Miss Dare will put any evidence she has into your hands in due form ——"

It puzzled them a little. And in the instant of perplexity Jim thrust Susan out the door and closed it smartly behind them.

The engine of his car was running. Thirty seconds later they had turned into the public road and the Wiggenhorn house was a dark, brooding bulk behind them. "J-Jim," said Susan shakily.

"Scared?"

"Terrified ——"

His profile looked forbidding. He said grimly: "I got your message. Drove like hell. What have you been stirring up?"

"Oh," said Susan. "A man was

murdered, and I know who killed him. Can you remember chemistry?"

The car swerved, recovered, and Jim muttered. Susan went on:

"What was the name of that gas that's so dangerous? To breathe, I mean. It's heavier than air and if left open passes into the air. And when you transfer it from one container to another you have to be so careful not to breathe it — it burns the lungs or something."

"Wait a minute. Let me pull myself together." He lighted a cigarette and thought for a moment. "I know — you can see the fumes above the test tube. Otherwise you can't detect its presence except by smell. And if the tube is on its side all the gas escapes into the air. I'll remember it in a minute — hydrogen——"

"Hydrogen chloride," said Susan.

"Somebody die of it?"

"I think so," said Susan. "I'm sure — but somebody else can do the proving. I won't. They'll have to start with an autopsy."

Jim said: "Begin at the beginning."

Susan did. It took a long time and Jim said nothing till she had finished.

Then he said: "I begin to see the outline. Rich old man subject to heart attacks, likely to die of one, but doesn't. Somebody wants him to die at once. Hydrogen chloride is introduced into a smelling-salts bottle; bottle is green and thus no one is likely to perceive its apparent emptiness or its actual content. Maid hands man smelling salts, when he is alone. He gets a good big sniff of it before he can stop himself — that's bad, Susan. Think of the horrible pain — the shock — he dies really of the shock; his heart can't stand it. Ordinarily I think a person might live for some hours, or even days, and be conscious. But the murderer counted on that bad heart and won. It looks like a natural death. Anyway it is a successful murder. Durrie has a studio where he seems to do chemical experiments. The nurse would know something of chemistry. But the murder would have been perfect if Miriam hadn't suspected something. Which one did it?"

"It's funny," said Susan, "that you used the word a perfect murder. That very word is what started me thinking. Perfect. Too perfect!"

"Huh," said Jim with vehemence.

"Too perfect. No one suspected it was murder. And that was the motive, you see. Murder had to be suspected."

"Murder had to be -- sorry, Susie, but I don't see."

"All right. Look at this. Durrie is in love with the nurse; wants to marry her. *His uncle didn't object.* And there was no motive at all, remember, for murder — no money motive. No question of thwarted

love. No motive at all except — except that Rosina was a very wilful young woman — and Miriam, no less wilful, hated her."

"But Miriam approved the marriage"

"Oh, *did* she!" said Susan. "Then why were Rosina and Durrie obliged to steal meetings. In the garden at dusk. At midnight."

"How do you know Rosina had gone downstairs to see Durrie?"

"I didn't. But it's a good reason. Name a better one."

"Suppose she did," conceded Jim. "What then?"

"Miriam had ruled that house and Durrie in the smallest detail for years. She loved her rule — a previous engagement of Durrie's had been mysteriously broken off. The uncle was about to die anyway; here was a perfect plan to get rid of Rosina."

"Do you mean Miriam murdered the old man? But that doesn't make sense. She didn't gain by it."

"She did, Jim, if she could make Durrie think, in his heart, that it was murder. And that the newcomer, the nurse, was the only one who could have done it."

"You can't prove this, Susan, it's mere theory. How do you know it was Miriam?"

"You've said it yourself, Jim — there's a French term, postiche. It means a counterfeit, an inartistic addition to an otherwise perfect work of art. Well, the murder was perfect. *It was too perfect.* No one suspected it was murder. So Miriam had failed. Had failed unless she could get someone — someone without official standing — like me — to look into it; perhaps to discover some little thing, not too much (she was very sure of herself); but enough to make Durrie think *it might have been murder.* And that if it was murder, only Rosina could have done it. She didn't know exactly how much she could trust me to see or not to see. I think she meant to watch — to — to gauge — me. If necessary to introduce a little evidence against the nurse, as she did. It's queer; her very words of praise for Rosina made me suspect the nurse. At first. She's very clever — Miriam Wiggenhorn."

"Then the housemaid was in danger from her ——"

"The housemaid is a very valuable witness. And Miriam might have discovered that I had something of the true story from her. The real story. It wasn't just accident that Miriam was pickling peaches that afternoon, filling the house with a smell of vinegar that would mask any other smell. This isn't the season for putting up fruit. She had to pickle canned fruit. Besides there was the inartistic addition ——"

"You mean her calling you and talking of murder when *nobody had suspected it was murder* shows that she

thought of murder when, if she were innocent, she would have had no reason to suspect it. And that for some reason she was determined to suggest that it *was* murder."

"To suggest it anyway. The perfect murder, except for the inartistic addition. Postiche. And I," said Susan, "am it."

"But" — Jim paused and said in a helpless way: "All this is very nice. But angel, it's only theory. It isn't a bad idea, you know, to have proof."

"Oh, yes — proof. It's in my bag. Wrapped in a handkerchief and mixed with bath salts. But identifiable."

"What!"

"Smelling salts. When she emptied the bottle she kept the salts in case her investigation should need a little steering. Rosina, you see, has a fine temper. When I hinted there was something preventing their marriage as if I were suspicious about it, she flounced down to tell Durrie and Miriam that she wanted it to take place at once. Durrie agreed, of course. Rosina had much the stronger will. Miriam agreed, too — and came straight upstairs to plant the clue. Nobody in the house ever used smelling salts but Keller Wiggenhorn."

"Framing her."

"Exactly. I suppose she would have tried something more open, given time."

"How did you know it was Miriam?"

"Saw her."

"From where?" demanded Jim.

"N-never mind," said Susan in a small voice.

Jim stopped the car and looked at her intently. But when he spoke it was with an air of preoccupation. "There's guilt in your voice," he said absently. "But we'll skip it. Do you know, I have a queer sort of impulse. I'd like to ——"

"To what?"

"To kiss you," said Jim unexpectedly, and did so.

Cornell Woolrich needs no introduction to readers of EQMM. His "Dime a Dance" and "After-Dinner Story" are memorable examples of the modern detective short story.

Mr. Woolrich's favorite medium is the long short story. Only on rare occasions does he concentrate his rich talents within the limits of a few thousand words. Here, then, is a Woolrich rarity — a short-short story. But you will not be conscious of its brevity. This tale is no mere appetizer, no mouthful of hors-d'œuvre — it's a full-course dinner in a few pages.

The story has an interesting titular history. Originally Mr. Woolrich called it "Restaurant on Third Street." Then he changed the title to "Plat du Jour." When the story was first published it became "The Customer Is Always Right." But in this instance your Editor prefers more simplicity, more starkness, and that shivery sensation, so slightly suggested, by the two words

THE FINGERNAIL

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

INSPECTOR MORROW, retired, followed his friend to one of the little tables against the wall.

"This place is famous for its food," the other man, who was acting as host, remarked as they sat down, unfurled their napkins. "Ever been here before?"

Morrow looked around him uncertainly. "Restaurant Robert," he murmured. "Wait a minute, I remember this place! Before my retirement from Homicide we once traced a murderer as far as here — and then we lost him again. Remind me to tell you about it after we've ordered." He took up his bill-of-fare, studied it a moment or two. "You come here a lot — what's good?"

"Try one of Robert's famous rabbit-stews," the other man suggested. "They're made separately for each customer, in little individual earthenware casseroles. It's Robert's own secret recipe, he won't share it with anyone."

"Sounds good to me," acquiesced Morrow.

"Two," said his companion to the waiter. "And tell Robert I have a new customer with me tonight." He turned to Morrow. "That'll bring him out in person at the end of the meal, to hear you praise his efforts — it always does. He's as proud as a kid of these rabbit-stews of his." He leaned back comfortably in his chair. "It'll take a little while. Now

what was that story you promised to tell me?"

"Oh yeah, that." Morrow helped himself to a piece of bread. "It's a good five years ago now. We found a man murdered one night —"

* * *

Inspector Morrow, five years younger, five inches slimmer at the waist, climbed down the rickety iron steps into the basement antique-shop. A younger man came toward the entrance to greet him, said "Hello, Inspector."

"Hello, Fletcher. What's the good word so far?"

"Well, I've got all the preliminaries over with," his subordinate said. "Weylin Hamilton's his name. He lived here alone on the premises, in back of the shop. It happened in the early part of last evening. Robbery-motive. He evidently kept considerable money down here with him. We found the box he'd hidden it in busted open — and empty. No relatives or next of kin."

The place was even more grotesque within than it had looked from the outside. Technically it might have been an antique-shop, but to Morrow's practical eye it looked more like a junk-shop. It contained just about everything a person would *not* want, the way he felt about it. A suit of Japanese armor loomed terrifyingly in one corner. Scimitars, spears, and venerable flintlock pistols were affixed to the walls. There were squat Chinese buddhas, a South Sea war-drum, even a Turkish water-pipe coiled on a tabouret.

"Look out, that's him," Fletcher warned abruptly as his superior was about to thrust his way between a couple of the overcrowded display-stands. Morrow recoiled, just missing stepping on the inert bundle on the floor.

He gestured impatiently. "Move this trash out of the way and give me some room. That's better." He crouched down, peered attentively at the form lying there. "Now let's see what we've got here." The handle of an antique Florentine dagger, wrapped in felt, protruded from the dead man's chest.

"That came down off the wall over there," Fletcher pointed out.

"In other words, it wasn't premeditated. The guy didn't bring his own weapon with him. Hamilton came out of the back room, interrupted the guy trying to rob him, and the guy snatched down the first thing he could lay hands on and let him have it." He pointed. "What's this cotton-wool doing wrapped around one of his insteps?"

"He was suffering with arthritis, the medical examiner says. Couldn't put one shoe on. Couldn't move around much, the last few weeks."

"Then it's a cinch he couldn't

manage those breakneck iron steps outside, leading up to the sidewalk. Must have been sort of marooned down here." Morrow got up again. "Now let's see this box you think he kept money in."

"I know he did; there's a tiny corner of a dollar-bill — or maybe it was a five or ten — got caught under the back of the lid and torn off in the murderer's hurry to get it out. I guess the old guy had it wadded in pretty tightly. Here it is."

Morrow eyed the tiny fragment of paper first. "Yeah, that's Government-paper," he agreed. "You can see the blue and red threads even with the naked eye." Then he turned to the box itself. It was of Oriental origin, lacquered wood on the outside, but lined with a thin sheeting of copper on the inside. The lacquer was marred and gouged-at all along the seam of the lid.

"He had a tough time opening this, even though it has no lock and key," Morrow pointed out. "You see, it operates by pressure; there's an unnoticeable sort of bulge in the wood. You press against that and that releases the lid. He didn't get the hang of it, must have kept digging his nail into the seam and trying to pry it up that way." He took it over closer to a portable reflector that had been rigged up, peered at the lining." Then it shot up suddenly when he least expected it and his finger rammed home. He hurt himself on it, too. There's a thin dark hair-line across the edge of the metal lining, where it peers above the edge of the wood casing — blood. Just where did you find the box lying?"

Fletcher took him over and showed him. Morrow got down and began to scan the floor. "Here's a drop here. Here's another. They must have escaped before he could wrap something around it —" He motioned imperatively to his assistant. "Gimme a piece of paper, any kind will do —" He scooped at something with it, held the paper out to show him. "See what this is?"

Fletcher squinted at the little shell-like object. "It looks like — like somebody's whole fingernail."

"It is. He lost his whole nail. It must have been defective to start with to come off that easy, but the metal edge of that box-lining caught under it and sliced it off. If it didn't come right off at once, he pulled it off himself to keep it from dangling. That was his mistake. It takes too long to grow a new nail for him to be able to cover up the loss before we've caught him." He wrapped and pocketed the queasy little memento.

"It was somebody that paid two or more visits — he knew just which box the old man kept his cash in, out of all the junk in here, and made a bee-line for it without disturbing

anything else. Hamilton must have been incautious enough to haul it out once or twice in his presence."

"That looks like Hamilton paid *him* instead of him paying Hamilton for something that he bought," Fletcher observed.

"Let's take a look at what that inside room is like."

It was just a cubbyhole with a cot and cupboard in it and not much else. Morrow glanced around with eyes trained not to miss little details that somebody else might have overlooked. He opened the cupboard; revealed several bottles of liniment and nothing else. He turned to Fletcher. "The medical examiner says he was suffering from arthritis lately and couldn't navigate the entrance-steps. You say he had no relatives or intimate friends. Well, where'd he get his meals from, then? There's not so much as an empty cracker-box in sight."

Fletcher scratched his head. "Gee, I never thought of—"

"He had them sent in, that's what he did. From some place nearby where he'd been in the habit of going formerly, before he was incapacitated. That means a waiter or bus boy of some kind. And that's who killed him. It all checks. Repeated visits with a covered tray or hamper. And Hamilton took money out of the box to pay him, instead of his paying Hamilton. Now we're getting somewhere. We want a waiter with the nail gone from one of his fingers, who works at some place in the immediate vicinity, within a radius of about three or four blocks at the most." He blew between his hands, ground them together. "It's practically over!"

Andy, the junior waiter at Robert's, was nervous. He stood there in the kitchen with his back to the boss, while the latter cut up the skinned rabbits that went piecemeal into the famous stews, six casseroles of which were already slowly simmering on the charcoal-stove.

Robert, a great good-natured hulk of a Frenchman, bald as an onion under his chef's cap, was rambling on, as he had a habit of doing whenever there was anyone in the kitchen to listen, no matter who. "Fonny thing happen this afternoon. Some guy he come to my door upstairs here in house, before restaurant is open, say he want to speak to me. I think he's policeman; you know, one of those kind without blue suit?"

Andy had stopped his work of trimming radishes, stood listening intently, head bent, with the paring knife held motionless in one white-gloved hand. He didn't say anything.

"He look at me close, like owl. He say, which one of your waiters got sore finger, you happen to notice?"

Robert shrugged. "I say, how I'm going to tell you that? The one strict rule in my place is, all the men work for me they got to wear white cotton gloves, kip 'em on their hands all the time for to be clean and neat."

Andy just listened, neck rigid.

"He say, Never mind, I find out for myself. Kip it under your hat, eh?" He gestured toward the dining-room door. "He sitting out there now, I see him when I come through. What you suppose is matter, eh?"

"I don't know," Andy said in a muffled voice.

Robert wiped his hands on his apron. "All right, *ragout* they all ready now, just wait for to put seasoning in. I go down basement, bring up little spice. Kip eye on fire for me, eh, Andy? If she get too low, put on little more charcoal —" He opened the cellar-door that led down to the supply-room, waddled clumsily out of sight down the steps.

Andy swallowed hard, as though he had a lump in his throat. He turned and eyed the redly-glowing charcoal-range. He went over to the sack of fuel slumped in a corner, scooped out a trowelful, carried it to the stove, crouched down and spaded it in. Then he looked around across his shoulder. He was alone in the kitchen at the moment, and such moments were likely to be few and far-between as the dinner-hour got under way.

He unpinned something from the inside of his shirt. With furtive, trembling, white-gloved fingers he tore it across once, twice. He flung the pieces in on top of the flame-licked charcoal. One fragment escaped him in the draught, fell to the floor, lay there for a moment. The numeral "20" was engraved on it, in green and white, with red and blue threads veining the paper. He retrieved it, sent it in after the other pieces. Then he closed the stove-flap. His face had been gray even in the ruddy glow beating against it.

He jumped furtively back to the work-table, just as the swing-door flapped open and one of his fellow-workers came bustling in. The latter loaded a tray without glancing at Andy, hoisted it to his shoulder, swung out again into the dining-room.

Andy went after him, but only as far as the door. He steadied it with one hand, peered cautiously out through the glass inset near the top. There was a sprinkling of early-arrivals already in the outer room. Most of them were habitués, he knew their faces. All but one. There was a man sitting by himself at a table against the far wall. He'd never been in the place before. Andy was sure of it. He didn't act hungry, he was ignoring the bill-of-fare. A waiter came over to take his order and the man said something to him.

The waiter looked surprised, hesitated momentarily. The man repeated what he had said in a tight-lipped way that brooked no argument. Then Andy saw the waiter slowly strip off first one glove, then the other, poise his hands for inspection, palms down. The man nodded curtly and the waiter slowly began to draw his gloves on again.

Andy didn't wait to see any more. He left the door-pane, fled swiftly across the kitchen toward the opposite door that gave onto the outside alley, stripping off his apron and flinging it behind him as he went. He pushed the door open, then drew up short. There was the motionless figure of a man outlined at the alley-mouth against the street-light beyond. He was just standing there waiting, effectively blocking all egress. There was no other way out but past him — in the other direction the alley came to a dead end.

Andy turned, floundered strickenly back into the kitchen again. He looked around him with agonized helplessness. Robert's slow, heavy tread was starting up the basement-steps from below.

He had a minute left. It ended.

He was standing there, bent forward over the work-table, face ghastly white, when Robert came lumbering up into sight a minute later. Robert gave him a sudden, startled look. "What's matter, you sick? You got pain in stomach?"

"Boss, you'll have to let me go home for tonight," Andy whispered weakly. "I can't work any more." There was sweat on his forehead.

Another waiter came barging in. "One rabbit-stew for the rich dame at number four table!"

Robert was a considerate boss. "All right, Andy, you go," he consented. "You no look good, that's a fact. You take over his tables for him tonight, George —"

Andy's face was still deathly-pale, but calm and untroubled now, when he tottered out to the alley-mouth a moment later. The man standing there promptly reached out, pinned him fast. "Just a minute, brother, let's have a look at your hands."

Andy obeyed without demur. He held them out, shakily, palms downward. They were ungloved. The index-finger of the right hand was a sodden, topheavy funnel of telescoped gauze-bandaging.

"Take that off," growled the man.

Andy didn't have to. He just gave his hand a slight downward hitch and the saturated dressing flew off of its own weight. There was nothing to hold it, nothing under it, just a gory space between the thumb and the middle finger.

* * *

"It was him all right, eh?" Morrow's friend asked absorbedly.

"Sure it was him," Morrow

scowled. "But knowing a thing is one thing, proving it another. He'd worn his white service-gloves when he'd carted the tray over, so that did away with all hope of prints. The pair of gloves that had become bloody, he probably destroyed. He admitted he'd taken quite a few meals over to Hamilton, but so had all the others. Hamilton had been seen alive after he called for and removed the tray that last night. The question was, which of them had sneaked back *after* the tray had been taken away, to rob the old man? We *had* to have that finger!

"I raised holy hell with them when they brought him in to me. 'You numbskulls, get that finger!' I hollered at them. 'That's almost more important than he is!'

"We jumped right back to the place, all of us. Inside of ten minutes after it happened, we were on the job turning the premises inside out. We put out the fire then and there, raked through the half-burned charcoal. We stopped the garbage before it had had a chance to go out, went through it with a fine-comb. We emptied out all the flour-bins and containers and whatnot they had around, we made a wreck out of that place. But thefingerneverturned up.

"*He* claimed it was an accident, of course. The knife had slipped and taken it clean off. He claimed he'd fainted with the shock, and was in too much pain when he came to to notice what had become of it.

"We ragged him for days after that, but it didn't do any good. We never found the money on him, nor any evidence that he'd spent it. We couldn't shake his alibi for the particular time the crime had taken place. He'd outsmarted us. We knew he was the guy. But without that nailless finger we couldn't prove it.

"It still burns me up, even at this late day, to think of it. It spoiled what would have otherwise been a hundred-per-cent perfect record for me. I still can't figure out what became of it, what he did to make it disappear so fast — and thoroughly."

"Here comes Robert, as I warned you, to find out how you liked his specialty," his friend remarked.

"Say, that rabbit-stew was great," Morrow complimented the old chef. "I never tasted anything to beat it!"

"You like, eh?" Robert's chest puffed out like a pouter-pigeon's. "I never had a complaint yet, in over twenty years' —" He corrected himself conscientiously. "Just once, I remember now. One night fussy rich lady, who used to come regular, she send for me. This long time ago, we have a little trouble in kitchen that night. I get maybe a little excited.

"She say, 'Robert, are you sure that was *all* rabbit? I may be wrong, but the flavor at times seemed to vary a little—' "

In nearly every issue of EQMM your Editor brings you the work of a great literary figure whose name is not usually associated with detective stories. The galaxy so far is enormously imposing — including such past and present masters as Arnold Bennett, James Hilton, Lincoln Steffens, H. G. Wells, O. Henry, Jack London, Mark Twain, Ellen Glasgow, Christopher Morley, William Faulkner, and W. Somerset Maugham.

Our guest star this month is the famous Pulitzer Prize winner, author of the unforgettable "Green Pastures" — Marc Connelly.

Mr. Connelly's story is one of the strangest on record: it concerns strange characters — two midgets; it concerns a strange physiological miracle; and it concerns one of the strangest motives for murder ever conceived.

"Coroner's Inquest" won the O. Henry Short-short Story Award of 1930 — an honor it richly deserved.

CORONER'S INQUEST

by MARC CONNELLY

"WHAT is your name?"

"Frank Wineguard."

"Where do you live?"

"A hundred and eighty-five West Fifty-fifth Street."

"What is your business?"

"I'm stage manager for Hello, America."

"You were the employer of James Dawle?"

"In a way. We both worked for Mr. Bender, the producer, but I have charge backstage."

"Did you know Theodore Robel?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was he in your company, too?"

"No, sir. I met him when we started rehearsals. That was about three months ago, in June. We sent out a call for midgets and he and Jimmy showed up together, with a lot of others. Robel was too big for us. I didn't see him again until we broke into their room Tuesday."

"You discovered their bodies?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Pike, there, was with me."

"You found them both dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you happen to be over in Jersey City?"

"Well, I'd called up his house at curtain time Monday night when I found Jimmy hadn't shown up for the performance. Mrs. Pike told me they were both out, and I asked her to have either Jimmy or Robel call me when they came in. Then Mrs. Pike called me Tuesday morning and said she tried to get into the room

but she'd found the door was bolted. She said all her other roomers were out and she was alone and scared.

"I'd kind of suspected something might be wrong. So I said to wait and I'd come over. Then I took the tube over and got there about noon. Then we went up and I broke down the door."

"Did you see this knife there?"

"Yes, sir. It was on the floor, about a foot from Jimmy."

"You say you suspected something was wrong. What do you mean by that?"

"I mean I felt something might have happened to Jimmy. Nothing like this, of course. But I knew he'd been feeling very depressed lately, and I knew Robel wasn't helping to cheer him up any."

"You mean that they had had quarrels?"

"No, sir. They just both had the blues. Robel had had them for a long time. Robel was Jimmy's brother-in-law. He'd married Jimmy's sister — she was a midget, too — about five years ago, but she died a year or so later. Jimmy had been living with them and after the sister died he and Robel took a room in Mrs. Pike's house together."

"How did you learn this?"

"Jimmy and I were pretty friendly at the theater. He was a nice little fellow and seemed grateful that I'd given him his job. We'd only needed one midget for an Oriental scene in the second act and the agencies had sent about fifteen. Mr. Gehring, the director, told me to pick one of them as he was busy and I picked Jimmy because he was the littlest.

"After I got to know him he told me how glad he was I'd given him the job. He hadn't worked for nearly a year. He wasn't little enough to be a featured midget with circuses or in museums so he had to take whatever came along. Anyway, we got to be friendly and he used to tell me about his brother-in-law and all."

"He never suggested that there might be ill-feeling between him and his brother-in-law?"

"No, sir. I don't imagine he'd ever had any words at all with Robel. As a matter of fact from what I could gather I guess Jimmy had quite a lot of affection for him and he certainly did everything he could to help him. Robel was a lot worse off than Jimmy. Robel hadn't worked for a couple of years and Jimmy practically supported him. He used to tell me how Robel had been sunk ever since he got his late growth."

"His what?"

"His late growth. I heard it happens among midgets often, but Jimmy told me about it first. Usually a midget will stay as long as he lives at whatever height he reaches when he's fourteen or fifteen, but every now and then one of them

starts growing again just before he's thirty, and he can grow a foot or even more in a couple of years. Then he stops growing for good. But of course he don't look so much like a midget any more.

"That's what had happened to Robel about three years ago. Of course he had trouble getting jobs and it hit him pretty hard.

"From what Jimmy told me and from what Mrs. Pike says, I guess he used to talk about it all the time. Robel used to come over and see his agent in New York twice a week, but there was never anything for him. Then he'd go back to Jersey City. Most of the week he lived alone because after the show started Jimmy often stayed in New York with a cousin or somebody that lived uptown.

"Lately Robel hadn't been coming over to New York at all. But every Saturday night Jimmy would go over to Jersey City and stay till Monday with him, trying to cheer him up. Every Sunday they'd take a walk and go to a movie. I guess as they walked along the street Robel realized most the difference in their heights. And I guess that's really why they're both dead now."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, as I told you, Jimmy would try to sympathize with Robel and cheer him up. He and Robel both realized that Jimmy was working and supporting them and that Jimmy would probably keep right on working, according to the ordinary breaks of the game, while Robel would always be too big. It simply preyed on Robel's mind.

"And then three weeks ago Monday Jimmy thought he saw the ax fall.

"I was standing outside the stage door — it was about seven-thirty — and Jimmy came down the alley. He looked down in the mouth, which I thought was strange seeing that he usually used to come in swinging his little cane and looking pretty cheerful. I said, 'How are you feeling, Jimmy?' and he said, 'I don't feel so good, Mr. Wineguard.' So I said, 'Why, what's the matter, Jimmy?' I could see there really was something the matter with him by this time.

" 'I'm getting scared,' he said, and I says, 'Why?'

" 'I'm starting to grow again,' he says. He said it the way you'd say you just found out you had some disease that was going to kill you in a week. He looked like he was shivering.

" 'Why, you're crazy, Jimmy,' I says. 'You ain't growing.'

" 'Yes, I am,' he says. 'I'm thirty-one and it's that late growth like my brother-in-law has. My father had it, but his people had money, so it didn't make much difference to him.

It's different with me. I've got to keep working.'

"He went on like that for a while and then I tried to kid him out of it.

" 'You look all right to me,' I said. 'How tall have you been all along?'

" 'Thirty-seven inches,' he says. So I says, 'Come on into the prop-room and I'll measure you.'

"He backed away from me. 'No,' he says, 'I don't want to know how much it is.' Then he went up to the dressing-room before I could argue with him.

"All week he looked awful sunk. When he showed up the next Monday evening he looked almost white.

"I grabbed him as he was starting upstairs to make up.

" 'Come on out of it,' I says. I thought he'd make a break and try to get away from me, but he didn't. He just sort of smiled as if I didn't understand. Finally he says, 'It ain't any use, Mr. Wineguard.'

" 'Listen,' I says, 'you've been over with that brother-in-law of yours, haven't you?' He said yes, he had. 'Well,' I says, 'that's what's bothering you. From what you tell me about him he's talked about his own tough luck so much that he's given you the willies, too. Stay away from him the end of this week.'

"He stood there for a second without saying anything. Then he says, 'That wouldn't do any good. He's all alone over there and he needs company. Anyway, it's all up with me, I guess. I've grown nearly two inches already.'

"I looked at him. He was pretty pathetic, but outside of that there wasn't any change in him as far as I could see.

"I says, 'Have you been measured?' He said he hadn't. Then I said, 'Then how do you know? Your clothes fit you all right, except your pants, and as a matter of fact they seem a little longer.'

" 'I fixed my suspenders and let them down a lot farther,' he says. 'Besides they were always a little big for me.'

" 'Let's make sure,' I says. 'I'll get a yard-stick and we'll make absolutely sure.'

"But I guess he was too scared to face things. He wouldn't do it.

"He managed to dodge me all week. Then, last Saturday night, I ran into him as I was leaving the theater. I asked him if he felt any better.

" 'I feel all right,' he says. He really looked scared to death.

"That's the last time I saw him before I went over to Jersey City after Mrs. Pike phoned me Tuesday."

"Patrolman Gorlitz has testified that the bodies were in opposite ends of the room when he arrived. They were in that position when you forced open the door?"

"Yes, sir."

"The medical examiner has testified that they were both dead of knife wounds, apparently from the same knife. Would you assume the knife had fallen from Dawle's hand as he fell?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has it been your purpose to suggest that both men were driven to despondency by a fear of lack of employment for Dawle, and that they might have committed suicide?"

"No, sir. I don't think anything of the kind."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, when Mrs. Pike and I went in the room and I got a look at the knife, I said to Mrs. Pike that that was a funny kind of a knife for them to have in the room. You can see it's a kind of a butcher knife. Then Mrs. Pike told me it was one that she'd missed from her kitchen a few weeks before. She'd never thought either Robel or Jimmy had taken it. It struck me as funny Robel or Jimmy had stolen it, too. Then I put two and two together and found out what really happened. Have you got the little broken cane that was lying on the bed?"

"Is this it?"

"Yes, sir. Well, I'd never been convinced by Jimmy that he was really growing. So when Mrs. Pike told me about the knife I started figuring. I figured that about five minutes before that knife came into play Jimmy must have found it, probably by accident."

"Why by accident?"

"Because Robel had gone a little crazy, I guess. He'd stolen it and kept it hidden from Jimmy. And when Jimmy found it he wondered what Robel had been doing with it. Then Robel wouldn't tell him and Jimmy found out for himself. Or maybe Robel did tell him. Anyway, Jimmy looked at the cane. It was the one he always carried. He saw where, when Jimmy wasn't looking, Robel had been *cutting little pieces off the end of it!*"

One man's meat is another man's poison and a shoemaker should stick to his last—which is a mixed way of saying that your Editor would be a poor editor indeed if he expected Cyril Plunkett to write like Dashiell Hammett, or vice versa. Each according to his own bent — and let's be catholicenough in our tastes to enjoy every good writer for that essential ingredient that is his and his alone.

If you have read Cyril Plunkett's "The Killer" (in our issue of November 1943), you'll know what to expect: a story with heart and feeling. But this time Mr. Plunkett has given us more than an emotional picture of crime and punishment: he has involved his warm-hearted, sincere protagonists in an unusual story of straight detection. Meet a new husband-and-wife detective team: Joe and Jeri Jones—just a couple of swell people — in Joe Jones's last case before changing his title from Detective Joe Jones, Homicide Squad, to Private Joe Jones, U.S. Army. And this last case was a honey — one for the books — one to remember a man by . . .

THE GUEST

by CYRIL PLUNKETT

JERI phoned me at Headquarters. Big events had been planned for the evening. "Joe," she said, "it's six o'clock. You're supposed to be home now. Remember?"

"Well," I said, "I got talking to Harcourt —"

"*You* got talking?" She laughed. "After all these years? Oh darling, that's wonderful!" Then her voice softened. "Joe, pretty low?"

This was it, the sign-off for Detective Joe Jones. In thirty-six hours it was going to be *Private* Joe Jones, U. S. Army. I looked around the office. I could see a dozen things I didn't like, and still —

"Lump in the throat, Joe?"

"Big as a football," I said.

She said, "Golly!"

So I promised to come home. I replaced the phone, pushed my chair back. The phone rang again. Nash, the desk Sergeant, was calling.

"Joe," Nash said, "is Inspector Harcourt around?"

Harcourt had wished me luck and said goodbye and gone to dinner.

"That's bad," Nash said. "There's a guy out here wants to talk to Homicide."

People are always wanting to talk to Inspector Harcourt. Harcourt *is* Homicide. He's Stokowski conducting from a podium. He's Orson Welles, director of the show, the producer and its star. It has become an axiom that press interviews begin with "Harcourt says —" The spotlight finds him inevitably, and though

the cogs in the machine go round the public never hears of them.

I am — I mean I *was*— one of the cogs. Harcourt's stooge and his sounding board, always ready with a pad, a pencil, and a "Yes, sir." I said to Nash now, "Send the guy in." By the time I realized I'd checked my badge for the duration there was a timid knock on the door.

"Come in," I said.

He opened the door. His clothes were too big for him by a mile. He blinked, a small thin man of fifty-five perhaps, gray-eyed, gray-haired.

"I," he said, "am Charles Morgan." He had a wistful smile, an air of quiet resignation. "At least I think that is my name."

I glanced at my watch, frowningly. It was six-ten, and Jeri had planned dinner for seven.

"Last night, last evening about nine, I discovered this billfold in my pocket." He removed the billfold from his coat and handed it to me. "There were two five dollar bills inside — a portion of which I have since used for food — a meal ticket for a restaurant I know nothing about and can't find, and the name, Charles Morgan, printed on the identification card — but no address."

I examined the worn billfold and its contents. Casually. The uninspired name Bean Pot was stamped on the meal ticket, punched to a dollar and eighty-five cents.

"I'm to understand this billfold is your one link to the past, Mr. Morgan? You've lost your memory?"

"With one exception, yes."

I didn't ask the exception. I wasn't interested. I rose and extended the billfold to Charles Morgan, saying, "It's not Homicide you wish to see, Mr. Morgan —"

He interrupted me. "On the contrary," he said. "You see, the exception is murder. I — I've killed a man and now I can't find the body."

I forgot about Jeri and dinner. I forgot about the army, the war. Murderers never want to find the body; they want to get rid of it. I stared at Charles Morgan and weighed his smile, his air of wistfulness and resignation. The questions in my mind were strictly hardboiled, born of hard experience. A cute bit of business? The first stone in a foundation Morgan was laying toward a plea of not guilty? *But he'd admitted to murder and the memory of committing it.*

I said abruptly, "Sit down."

"Thank you, sir."

"Whom did you kill?"

He shook his head. "I — I don't know."

The guy, blast it, was sincere!

"Look," I said, "let's get at it this way: Where did this murder take place?"

"Where?" He raised his hands,

palms up, in an apologetic gesture. His hands were small, slender. The nails had been manicured. "May I start at the beginning?"

"By all means," I said.

"About nine o'clock last evening I — I woke up. I was on Fearing Road, as I discovered later."

"The area wasn't generally familiar to you then?"

"So far as I knew I had never seen it before.

"I'd been running. At any rate, my heart was pounding furiously. I was panting and my legs had that terrible tiredness that comes only from exhaustion."

He paused. His expression changed. The scene was apparently vivid and horrible to him.

"At first," he continued slowly, "I was puzzled, and — and lonely. I had the peculiar feeling I'd dropped from nothing into a strange world. And yet I knew this world. The road was macadam; the growing things I saw were trees and lawn and shrubbery. It came to me then it was *I* whom I didn't know, *I* who was strange to this world.

"Well, I looked around. I fumbled with my clothing. My shoes were untied, so I tied them. It was then I began to see something white —"

"In the darkness?" I broke in.

"In my mind. A white room, I think. A white table."

"Operating room?" His hands might have been a surgeon's.

"No." He frowned a little. "No, I've considered that possibility, and I don't believe so. At least I remember no instruments. No, I could see only the white wall and a table. A man lay on the table."

"Dead?"

"Yes," he said simply. "I'd killed him. That one fact was so clear suddenly there was no escaping it."

I asked the obvious questions, softly. "How did you commit this murder, Mr. Morgan? And why?"

He put his hands to his face. He put them down again, stared at them and shuddered. "I throttled him," he said. "But why, I — I don't know."

Harcourt usually dines at the Paladium. I got them on the phone. A call for Harcourt while at dinner is certain to be long on ceremony. *He* doesn't go to the phone; oh, no — a waiter approaches apologetically. There is a whispered conversation. An extension phone is plugged in. Harcourt smiles and looks around —

"Joe, my boy," he said. You know — a blue star, what with Joe Jones going into the armed services.

I told him about Morgan. "We have here," I concluded, "a new one, Inspector — a murderer who has requested the aid of the police in helping him find the body!"

Harcourt chuckled. He likes a well-turned phrase. Then quick to

reach the core, he said, "Do we have a body?"

"No, sir."

"And no Charles Morgan has been reported missing?"

"No, sir."

"Hypnagogic hallucination," Harcourt decided promptly.

This was too good to pass up, so I grinned and said, "But Charles Morgan didn't have the flash, sir, in the twilight state, before falling asleep. It came after he woke up."

Harcourt grunted, "Pseudo affair, Joe. The true condition is a reciprocal amnesia, obviously."

"He *does* have this one flash from the past though," I pointed out stubbornly. "And that's rather unusual in a true amnesia, isn't it, sir?"

"Dammit, Joe," Harcourt exploded, "are you suggesting a house to house canvass in search of a body? And on *this* kind of evidence? Tag Morgan for a psychiatric examination and go home."

"Yes, sir, and thank you, Inspector." *Nuts to you, Inspector.* I replaced the phone.

Morgan looked at me hopefully. *The poor guy*, I thought. *Goodbye seven o'clock dinner*, I thought. I smiled as I rose and said, "I know this place, the Bean Pot, Morgan. Shall we run out there?"

So we drove across town, and parked across the street from the restaurant, and Morgan looked around a long minute before he sighed and said, "It isn't familiar."

"Come along," I said.

The Bean Pot was just another restaurant. The girl behind the counter glanced at Morgan's strange attire, the looseness of his clothes, and smiled as we came in. But she didn't know him. "Of course," she said, "I only work here evenings." So she called the owner, and he looked at Charles Morgan.

The owner said, "I don't believe I've seen this man before."

I produced the meal ticket. "This one of yours?"

"Sure," he said.

"Know when it was issued and to whom?"

He shrugged. "No record. I sell 'em all day."

I put the ticket in my pocket. "Ever hear the name Charles Morgan?"

"Morgan?" He shook his head. He went around the counter, down the aisle, calling to his waitresses, "Know a man named Morgan? Charlie Morgan?" Their answer too was no, and presently we walked back to the car, Morgan gnawing at his lip, his trembling underlip, and stumblingon the curb and saying, "Sorry, sir," when he bumped against me.

I lit a cigaret. The street was wet, glary-red from neon signs. Rain trickled down the windshield.

"Nothing but the billfold, huh?"

I said. "Cigars? Cigarets? Book of matches? How about a handkerchief?"

"Oh, yes! In the right hip pocket."

"Are you right-handed?"

He caught his breath. The answer, when it came, was murmured slowly. "I — I don't know. I've *used* the handkerchief, and it's *still* in my right hip pocket. I — I looked for marks on it too, sir, but there weren't any."

"How about your clothes? Tailor's label maybe?"

"This suit?" He smiled faintly. He smoothed a wrinkle from the baggy coat; then looked at me again. "What are you going to do with me, sir?"

I reached for the ignition switch. "That," I said, "is fast becoming a sixty-four dollar question."

A floor lamp glowed in the living-room. I put the car in the garage and came in through the kitchen. Jeri had her shoes off, her slender feet beneath her; she was curled up on the davenport.

"Hello," she said. She put down the paper she'd been reading.

"Where's the King-pin?" I said. The King-pin is Joe, Junior.

"Bed."

"Uh-huh," I said. "I guess at that it's pretty late."

Her blue eyes were wide and grave, and they accused me.

"Uh-huh," I said, "but Jeri, look —"

She'd found her shoes and put them on. Now she stood before me, her blonde head even with my shoulders. "Joe, your last night but one at home. And the plans we had!" She counted on the pink tips of her fingers. "Two tickets for a show. A table reserved for supper and dancing. A ride through the Park —"

"It's raining," I said. "Besides, we've got company. I brought a guy home."

Her eyes began to widen, as though this was a gag of mine that flopped, that wasn't funny, that she didn't like and couldn't understand.

"Now this guy —" I cleared my throat. "This guy thinks he committed a murder —"

Still she stared. I looked across my shoulder and called, "Hey, Morgan, come into the living-room."

He shuffled from the kitchen. He stood just inside the doorway, anxious, flushing, embarrassed when I introduced him. "How do you do, ma'am," he said. He managed something almost like — well, dignity. Jeri's hand tightened on my arm.

"Mr. Morgan is spending the night with us, hon," I said. You know — Pleasant Rooms for Murderers. Killer's Roost. Two-bits for a flop, and no questions asked. I guess it sounded like that. I guess Jeri thought I'd lost my alleged mind. "The day bed, hon?" I said.

"Upstairs, in the sewing-room? Of course, I'll lock him in."

I'd maneuvered Morgan to the stairway. Now I took him by the arm and started up the stairs. "Joe," Jeri said at last, "the King-pin —!"

Meaning would the King-pin waken at the noise we made? *Meaning would the King-pin be quite safe upstairs with Morgan?* "Hon," I said, "don't worry." *What's a killer in the Jones house!*

She was in the kitchen when I came back down.

"How *does* one entertain a murderer?" she said.

"Look, hon," I said. "If you'll just listen —"

She said, "Give me that key."

So I gave it to her, the key to the sewing-room, and she put it in the pocket of her blouse. "Tonight of all nights, Joe," she said. "How *could* you?"

There was coffee in the pot, cold. I poured a cupful, drank it. "A guy going off to war does a lot of thinking, Jeri."

She'd turned her back to me. I heard her catch her breath.

"Take an artist," I said. "He wants to paint *one* picture for posterity. Or take music, a composer, dreaming of *one* symphony. Or blast it, Jeri, take a cop — what's so strange about a cop wishing he could leave *one* perfect symphony behind him?"

She lit the gas beneath the coffee.

"Look at me," I said. "Joes and Joneses are like leaves on the trees. Maybe if I had one green eye and one brown one, or if I could maybe whistle through my ears — I mean I'm just a big lug, Joe Jones, Mr. Average, and I got tired of it suddenly. I got tired saying yes sir to Harcourt. I got feeling sorry for myself — and then this guy came in, and I got feeling sorry for him.

"I believe in the little guy, Jeri. He's sincere. And here, practically handed to me, is a case in a million — we don't even have a body. Hon, it might be the last chance I'll ever get to paint *my* picture, to compose *my* symphony."

"You would wait until the bell was ringing," she said. "Oh, Joe, you would find a job like this with a deadline to meet in twenty-four hours."

"Yeah," I said, "that's me."

Tears were in her eyes. She stood close to me suddenly, rubbing her head on my chest. Then she looked at me. "What's a show, Joe?" she said. "What's supper and dancing? What's a ride in the Park?"

What's a show, Joe? And dancing? What's a ride in the Park?

I woke up. The morning sun was streaming in our bedroom windows. "Joe!" Jeri was crying. She was tugging on my arm. "Joe, I looked in Morgan's room —"

I sat up in bed. "He's gone?"

She closed her eyes and shuddered. "Dead," she said.

After a while I washed and dressed. Then I went back to the sewing-room. I guess I hoped for miracles, for his quiet smile, his quiet voice saying, "Oh, good morning." But he lay there on the day bed. He'd been dead for hours, from midnight, very likely — or before. His hands, both hands, were clasped around his neck, and there were two small faint bruises, one on either side his Adam's apple. He'd choked himself to death, it seemed.

Now, this is one more for the books, I thought. To my mind, his first subjective symptom should have been a loss of consciousness. So wouldn't his muscles have relaxed? And thus, the instant the pressure of his fingers was removed, wouldn't he have breathed again, involuntarily?

I closed the door and went downstairs. Jeri had phoned Harcourt.

"He's coming, Joe," she said.

"How'd he sound?"

She kissed me. Then she said, "He called you a fool — only he qualified it. He put two words before it."

"Uh-huh," I said. "King-pin still asleep?"

"Oh, Joe, I hope so!"

She went upstairs. The King-pin still slept, I gathered, because she came right down.

"Joe," she said, "maybe someone murdered Morgan? He knew too much, perhaps. I mean the killer didn't know he'd lost his memory?"

"Wonderful," I said. I shook my head. "Only, there's a storm window in the sewing-room, and it wasn't touched. The house doors were locked last night, and still were locked this morning. The sewing-room door was locked — you had the key. Besides, we left our bedroom door ajar — your idea, bless you — and we were awake, I was at least, till almost three. Did you hear anyone picking the lock to the sewing-room door, say about midnight?"

"Well, it was just an idea," she said.

We both turned abruptly. Sirens were wailing. We reached the front door as a squad car swung in the drive, the first of the fleet.

I've often wondered how impressive Harcourt's tactics really were — and now I knew. Jeri's hand found mine and gripped it. Our neighbors stood on porches and at windows. The pomp and circumstance! No maharajah journeyed forth to hunt the tiger with more fanfare.

Lean and hawk-faced. Grim. Immaculate. Harcourt looked at me. He said to Jeri, "Good morning, Mrs. Jones." He looked at me. Then he said to Jeri, "Would you take me to the body, please?"

So I tagged along upstairs. The

King-pin, having heard the sirens, was calling, "Mamma! Daddy!" I went down the hall and warned the King-pin. Jeri didn't need me. She was doing very well with two small words — "Yes, sir."

Lane, the Medical Examiner, was coming up the stairs as I returned. He grinned and said, "Hello, Joe. I think you'd better go down for Mrs. Morgan."

Mrs. Morgan? I thought, *Now Joe, don't get excited — things have happened you don't know about.* But Mrs. Morgan? A sleek car stood at the curb. Maroon and chrome. The chauffeur was a bruiser. Then a man got out. The man was sleek, tall, forty, prematurely gray and stern. He reached inside for the woman.

Plump and fiftyish? Oh, no. Tiny pumps with high heels and extremely well-filled nylon. A chic black suit, a cocky little chapeau and a furpiece. The woman wore a veil, coming to her lips, accent to their redness — the little that I saw of them. She raised a wispy piece of kerchief to her nose, her mouth.

As they came up the walk, the two of them, I heard Jeri at the upstairs window; and then Jeri running down the hall to the King-pin.

"I am Doctor Cannister," the man said. "Inspector Harcourt is expecting us."

I took them to the sewing-room. It was a touching scene. The girl — the hat, the suit, the veil all might have helped, but she looked about eighteen — cried out, "Charles!" She sobbed, turned around and ran downstairs, to her car apparently.

"Fortunately," Cannister was saying, "I was with Mrs. Morgan when you phoned, Inspector."

"I take it you were also Morgan's physician?" Harcourt said.

"I was."

"And that Morgan's amnesia was therefore no great shock to you?"

"Well —" Cannister smiled. "I didn't anticipate a loss of memory, naturally. But he has been acting strangely for some weeks."

"Do you identify the body?"

"Certainly!"

Harcourt turned to the M. E. "How about it?" he said.

Lane frowned. "The inferential diagnosis is death by reason of cardiac failure. Did Mr. Morgan suffer from heart trouble, Doctor Cannister?"

Cannister said promptly, "I've been treating his heart for years."

"How about his hands?" I interrupted brashly. "Clamped around his neck, I mean, as though he tried to choke himself?"

Cannister looked at me pityingly. "A cardiac may commonly clutch at his throat at the moment of seizure. Well, gentlemen, do you wish an autopsy?"

Harcourt said again to Lane, "How about it?"

The M. E. shrugged. "No reason I can see. This certainly isn't murder. The man had a heart condition; he died from it. I understand, however, there were some rather peculiar circumstances preceding the attack —"

"They," Harcourt snapped, with a dark glance at me, "have been explained. Has Mrs. Morgan made arrangements for the disposition of the body, Doctor Cannister?"

"Yes, tentatively." Cannister consulted his watch. "The funeral directors should be here now—"

They were. And our guest, Charles Morgan, left the Jones house quietly and forever. Harcourt had motioned me downstairs.

"Last night," he said, "Mrs. Morgan reported her husband missing. These are the facts: Morgan, the night before, had gone to Doctor Cannister's Clinic on Fearing Road for an examination and treatment. Following which he was released — but he didn't return home. It so happens, however, that Mrs. Morgan is very active in war work, and she didn't miss her husband until early last evening, the dinner hour. As I said, she immediately contacted the Missing Persons Bureau —"

I saw what was coming. I fumbled for a cigaret and dropped the pack.

"It is a regrettable fact," Harcourt continued flatly, "that while I personally knew of Charles Morgan and his problem no departmental record had been made. Had Morgan been properly hospitalized last evening, as I specifically ordered, he might not have died. God knows, Jones, where you dragged him and what strain he was put to before you brought him home. Had routine procedure followed, his wife would have found him promptly and thus been spared the night's anguish."

I got a cigaret between my lips and lit it. "How about the meal ticket?" I said. "Where'd he get a thing like that?"

"The man had lost his identity," Harcourt said curtly. "How he bought the ticket, why and from whom, becomes unimportant."

"Uh-huh," I said. "But how about the murder Morgan reported?"

Harcourt's black eyes snapped. "So far as I can see, no murder has been committed. We have no crime authoritatively reported; we have no body. The murder was part of Morgan's aberration, obviously."

"Uh-huh," I said.

"So inasmuch as you are going in the army, I am content to bid you good day, Jones," Harcourt said. "But when the war is over —"

"Uh-huh." I sighed. "I understand, Inspector."

The sirens wailed and faded. Jeri came downstairs with the King-pin. "We'll have breakfast now," she said practically.

"That poor little Mr. Morgan,"

Jeri said later, after the King-pin had strolled outside. "With a wife like that. Why, Joe, she wasn't even *crying*. She just sat in the car, stonily, and her handkerchief never once touched her eyes. She used it as a — a mask, Joe, over her mouth and nose."

I poured myself another cup of coffee.

"And the clothes she wore, Joe! Those gorgeous clothes — and that poor little Mr. Morgan in a suit that didn't even fit him —"

She stopped. We gasped. We looked at each other. Then I said, "*The weak link and we missed it! They weren't his clothes!*"

"Now let's take it easy, hon," I said. *I* was jumping up and down in my chair. "Now let's take it easy. He didn't *buy* that suit. I know blamed well he didn't. He was embarrassed wearing it. He *knew* it didn't fit him. Now, hon, let's take it easy. Apparently we've got all but a few minutes accounted for. According to Cannister, Morgan was okay when he left the Clinic. And Morgan's story indicates he was still in that neighborhood when he 'woke up', when he realized he'd lost his memory. Okay — but how the devil could a man swap clothes in those few minutes out on Fearing Road?"

"Robbery?"

"Nix. We'd have a report on it."

"Maybe he didn't have any clothes to start with?"

"Naked? Why in thunder should he be?"

"Well—" She squinted. "Don't forget the white wall, Joe, and the white table he mentioned. That could be Cannister's examining room. Morgan was stripped for the examination."

"Then his mind didn't blank out *after* he left the Clinic, but *in* the Clinic. He didn't know which suit was his own!"

"Which suit?" Jeri said queerly.

"Kid, take it *easy!*" I pleaded. "There were *two* men to be examined, you mean."

"Wouldn't there have to be, if there were two suits?"

"Then who was the other man?" I said — and we answered together, in a whisper: "*Charles Morgan.*"

For a moment neither of us spoke. We heard the King-pin, in the yard, telling a neighbor, "My daddy's a cop —" We heard the neighbor pumping the King-pin.

Jeri said abruptly, "Joe, who was our guest — the man who died in our sewing-room?"

I said, "Yeah, and if that *was* Mrs. Charles Morgan, what did she want with this little guy's body?"

The King-pin was telling the neighbor, "Last night my daddy brought a dead man home —"

"Out of the mouths of babes!" I

breathed. "Jeri, the King-pin's got it! I brought the name and the clothes of a dead man home. Charles Morgan was dead. Charles Morgan was murdered. I don't know why — can't even guess — but this is the murder our little guest confessed to."

I reached for the phone and Jeri wailed, "You aren't going to call Harcourt?"

"Harcourt hell," I said. "This is *our* symphony, hon, and believe me we're going to play it!"

Lane, the M. E., had just returned to his office. I motioned Jeri closer to the phone.

"Doctor, look," I said. "That guy this morning, the dead one. Could he have choked himself to death?"

The M. E. chuckled. "Still concerned with the position of his hands, Joe? Yes, suicide by throttling is fairly common. However, the post-mortem appearances in strangulation with a compressing force, or by hand, are not often misleading. For example, if the compression is applied high above the hyoid bone, the tongue is forced into the back part of the mouth. If the pressure is applied below the hyoid bone the tongue will protrude between the jaws — unless the compression has a decidedly downward direction, when its position may be normal — and the position of Charles Morgan's tongue was normal."

"Anything else?" I said.

"Yes, of course! If the hands furnish the pressure, the marks will show on the throat as dark bluish or brownish blotches, corresponding to the outline of pressure —"

"And there," I interrupted, "is my argument. There *were* two such marks, one on either side the Adam's apple, made by Morgan's thumbs apparently, and misleading apparently because the marks didn't extend *around* the throat. Now let's discount throttling. Let's stick to your finding of cardiac failure. Is there any way, by pressure applied to the neck, the heart could be affected?"

There was a long pause. Lane said abruptly, "You've got something, Joe, at that. Carotid sinus pressure —"

"In the neck? And would a man like — like Morgan know of it?"

"He might. He might have been instructed to use unilateral vagus pressure in event of tachycardia. You see, Joe, pressure over the sinus, either sinus, stimulates the vagus nerve, the check nerve of the heart, and unilateral vagus stimulation is therefore used commonly to slow a rapid heart. As, for example, on medical examination. Such unilateral stimulation is not fatal. On the other hand —" Again Lane paused before he said, "Have you any reason to believe Morgan wanted to commit suicide?"

"On the other hand," I countered, "this guy had lost his memory. He didn't *know* he had heart trouble. So he didn't know, if he ever knew, about this carotid sinus pressure. Meaning he couldn't commit suicide by a method he couldn't remember, could he?"

The wires sang. Then Lane said, "I don't believe I follow you, Joe."

"Look," I said. "Let's boil it down. Let's keep it simple. There were marks on both sides the man's neck. All I want to know is, what would you say about them now, in view of this vagus business?"

I heard Lane sigh. "In my considered opinion," he answered, "bilateral vagus stimulation can be instantly fatal."

I said, "Thanks —" to a dead phone. Jeri had cut the connection.

"Joe, you're giving too much away! It's your symphony, it's your picture. Joe, it's *your* case," she said.

I grinned. "Don't worry. He'll mull over the thing. He's a cautious one, hon. Then maybe in a couple of hours he'll have a talk with Harcourt. Result: Autopsy. And that's what I wanted. Think you could get me a little information, hon, quick, before the end of those two hours?"

"Oh!" she said. She ran to the door suddenly, called to the Kingpin. "We'll have to leave him with the neighbors, Joe. Should I wear something striking, darling? Should I pour it on for Doctor Cannister? I know, Joe — I'm a dizzy blonde! I'm Mrs. — Mrs. Brown and I suffer from palpitation —"

From halfway up the stairs she said, "Joe, don't you think I should carry a gun in my purse?"

There is an axiom, an old one, concerning fools and angels. The Joneses maybe? We sallied forth. We drove across town and twice Jeri reached for my arm; twice she squeezed it. Loyal despite a zero score. Yea and rah, rah, Jones. You know, the cheering section.

I dropped her a block from Cannister's, watched the proud sure way she walked, and waited for a wave, perhaps, before she turned in. But she didn't look back, and she didn't wave, and suddenly I felt worried and alone. I began to wonder if Harcourt was not right after all. No body. No motive. No murder?

And no time to waste, I thought, driving to the funeral parlors. I talked to the undertaker — his name was Baird. I sat in his polished, quiet office while he glared at me.

"I don't like this, Jones," he said. "I don't like your insinuations."

I endeavored to be patient. "Let's go at it this way," I suggested. "Known Doctor Cannister long?"

"Years," he answered promptly. "He's a responsible physician."

"But he does maintain a clinic, to which lying-in service is essentially

a part, and in the course of these years, Mr. Baird, some deaths have occurred no doubt —"

"Good heavens, sir!" Baird protested.

"I know. I know." Grinning, I said, "Even good doctors lose patients. Isn't it rather unusual though for *two* bodies —"

"Jones," Baird interrupted angrily, "I repeat — I tell you again and again I don't know what you're talking about."

"Only one body, huh?" I said. "Only Charles Morgan?"

"Emphatically!"

"And I can't see the body?"

"I don't know any reason why you should, not yet, not until it has been properly prepared."

I sighed. I drove back toward Fearing Road. One body. Where was the other one then? Where and when was the swap to be made? There had to be a swap, if there was to be a case — or was it possible no exchange was necessary? That made sense, after a fashion — if Morgan, the real Morgan, and our little guest were both vagrants without relatives and friends. But who ever heard of a male tramp with manicured fingernails? And why in thunder did Cannister want the little man — his body — if identity did not matter anyway?

Why, for that matter couldn't the mortician be lying? I considered this. *Friends?* I thought. *Thick as thieves?* I thought. Back on Fearing Road I shook my head and sighed.

"Give me an hour, darling," Jeri had said. Well, Uncle Sam was seeing to it there were precious few hours left to give. The real trouble, however, was that *more* than an hour had passed, and Jeri hadn't come back from Cannister Clinic.

I waited a while in the corner drugstore, the spot we'd chosen for a rendezvous. Jeri's job had seemed simple enough — and safe enough, since neither Cannister nor Mrs. Morgan had met her this morning. All Jeri had to do was learn Mrs. Morgan's real identity. Meaning did she work for Cannister, perhaps? The way we'd figured it you could sit in a doctor's waiting room and get the information from his patients.

Only I could see the ivy-grown building from the drugstore, and there were no cars parked in its drive; out here no cars meant probably no patients. I walked the block and tried the Clinic door. It was locked, so I punched a bell.

Mrs. Morgan answered it.

She was wearing white now, sharkskin, and she would never see eighteen again, or twenty-five again, but there was no mistaking the nylons, the chassis, or her red lips. "Come in," she said.

"I'm Mrs. Brown's husband," I said.

She laughed. It was a very good laugh and only slightly forced. "Don't we all have our moments?" she said. "The doctor expects you, Mr. Jones."

"And my wife?" I said.

"She's resting."

I had a queer feeling, walking down the corridor. Jeri hadn't returned . . . there was a certain threat in that word, resting. And a curious, listening silence here in the corridor. The girl opened a door, smiled and stepped aside. Not Cannister, but the chauffeur, the bruiser, sat at the desk, facing me.

He didn't rise. He waved one hand, the left. There was something in the way he looked at me. "Sit down," he said. "Doctor Cannister happens to be busy. My name is Waltz."

"Doctor Waltz?"

"Oh, no." The smile broadened to reveal strong white teeth. "No, I'm a businessman essentially, Jones. Sit down."

I sat down. Gingerly. The girl stood behind, a little to one side of me. She was still smiling. Amused? Their smiles were smug, I decided suddenly. I looked around. Jeri's purse lay on the desk.

"Doctor Cannister is with my wife?" And when Waltz nodded, I pointed. "That's her purse. Strange she left it here. I'll take it — if you don't mind?"

"Why should I mind?" Waltz said.

I cleared my throat. *Look, Cannister*, I'd planned to say, *"I'm just a guy. You know, fifty bucks a month from here on in. So I'm thinking first of Joe Jones. I could have mentioned all this to Harcourt this morning. I could have told Harcourt that the little guy talked before he died. You know — the white room, the white table? The body on the table?*

I'd planned to cut through to the core. It was Waltz who cut the corners, however.

"Your wife made the mistake of looking out of the window this morning," he said. "I sat in the car. I saw her. Blackmail is a stupid game, Jones."

"Oh?" I said.

He laughed unpleasantly. "Have I taken the wind from your sails?" The *right* hand appeared, the hand previously hidden from me. It flashed up from behind the desk, holding a gun. "Stand up — and raise your hands."

I stared.

"Stand up!" he repeated savagely. "No more mistakes for me, Jones. Liss, fan his pockets for a rod."

The girl found my automatic; moved away again.

"Now sit down, Jones," Waltz said. "Nathan Frawl talked, of course. I was afraid that would happen before we found him. So you know damned

well he wasn't Charles Morgan. You know about the will, the dough, and like as not that I killed Morgan. Frawl saw me do it, didn't he?"

"Yes," I said. What else could I answer?

Waltz nodded. "Well, it would have come out all right if we'd called the cops right away, if we had got him back quick enough." He said aside, "I told you, Liss. Liss and I, Jones, played for high stakes too — like you — and lost — like you, only we're getting out to try again, with whole skins. Clear?"

"Uh-huh," I said. "Meaning Joe Jones isn't getting out with his skin."

He grinned and said, "Meaning Joe Jones isn't and Cannister isn't, and neither is your wife."

My fingers began fumbling with the purse, snapping and unsnapping the catch. I wet my lips and swallowed. "Pretty risky business — a shot in mid-afternoon?"

"Don't worry." There was an open bottle of ink on the desk — red ink; he pushed it aside, the first sign of his tension. "You see, we're going to call the police anyway, Liss and I. As soon —" His teeth pulled at his lower lip a moment, irritatingly. "As soon as we finish off your wife and Cannister. That's the picture, Jones, right off the cuff. You and your wife tried to put the bite on Cannister. He blew his top and shot you, and then himself."

His eyes were blurring now. There was a click, the hammer being drawn back on the gun. Chuckling, he was saying to me, "Sorry, sap — and so long —!"

There was a shot. Not from his revolver; it came a shade before the roar of his gun. I had fired Jeri's little weapon, from Jeri's purse. There was a scream — from the girl; I'd bucked the desk enough to jar Waltz. But there wasn't time to see if the bullet he'd meant for me had really found her body. Waltz was very much alive. The various objects on the desk had spilled into his lap, and he was trying to jerk free as I vaulted the desk and hit him.

He didn't rise. His chair tipped and he sprawled with it. Then I turned. Liss was on the floor, dead.

So I called Harcourt, and it was very nice again to hear the sirens. However by the time their wailing broke into the silence of the Clinic I'd found Cannister — and Jeri. Together, as Waltz had said, gagged and tied.

Of course, Jeri clung to me and cried. She said, "Joe, I was so worried! I'd left my purse there on the desk — the gun, Joe, if you should need it —" I kissed her. For the purse, the gun; for her belief in me. For luck and life, I said, when we might all have died.

Doctor Cannister had gone at once to Waltz, and now he called to me. "Jones, he's dead!"

I came back to the office, staring, and it was then I heard the sirens. Jeri went on down the hall to unlock the door for Harcourt while I talked with Cannister.

Harcourt didn't seem surprised. He never seems surprised. But I was "Joe" again. He'd returned the blue star to his window. And the cogs, as always, functioned smoothly, so we had a long talk.

"The little guy," I said, "was Nathan Frawl. He lived downstate, and Doctor Cannister was his physician. Frawl, without close relatives, wealthy, grateful for services rendered, had arranged for his fortune to be left to Cannister Clinic."

"Oh, we do have a motive?" Harcourt interrupted.

I grinned and said, "Yes, sir. Now this girl, the doctor's secretary — Liss Moore was her name — knew about that will. Doctor Cannister says she played him, with marriage her goal, presumably — until Waltz appeared."

"New employee?" Harcourt interrupted, looking at Cannister.

This time Cannister said, "Yes. Physiotherapist."

"Well," I continued, "according to the Doctor here Frawl's heart and health improved, and when it seemed years would pass before he died, Waltz and Miss Moore got their heads together. They figured all they had to do was kill Nathan Frawl, and then take Doctor Cannister. Their unusual method of murder rose out of Doctor Cannister's experience as a heart specialist." I paused. "Did you talk to the Medical Examiner, Inspector?"

"Vagus stimulation?" Harcourt said. "Yes, Joe. I was on my way out here when you phoned."

I looked at Jeri. Jeri smiled. I shook my head and took a deep breath and faced Harcourt again.

"Okay," I said. "Frawl arrived the evening before last for a periodic checkup. He was readied for examination. Waltz was ready for murder. Only Waltz had never met Frawl. When he found a gray-haired man in the examining room he assumed it was Frawl and killed him. The man he killed was Morgan."

"Wait a minute," Harcourt said. "Where is Morgan's body?"

Cannister flushed as he said, "In the morgue downstairs, I presume."

"You what?" Harcourt snapped. "Presume?" He turned to me. "Dammit, Joe, here we're closing a murder case and still have no body. Send a man down to find that body."

"Yes, sir," I said. But Jeri rose and whispered, "I'll tell one of the detectives, Joe." She slipped from the room.

"All right. Go on, Joe," Har-

court said.

"Well, apparently Frawl was in one of the dressing cubicles. Apparently he witnessed the murder. Apparently he realized *he* was to have been murdered — you know, the will and the money. In Doctor Cannister's opinion the shock so twisted the thing in his mind he came to believe later he had committed the murder himself. Since the hazy murder scene was his one link to the past, it would now seem that, lying alone on our day bed last night, he tried to probe, to re-enact the murder scene, to bring alive this knotty part of his past. Like Waltz, he used both hands while pressing on his own neck, and the result was fatal."

I paused as the sound of someone running filtered from the hall, through the door not quite closed. Then Jeri stood in the open doorway, gasping, "Inspector, they've already searched the morgue. There isn't any body!"

I heard Harcourt's voice exploding — and a separate sigh. It was Cannister who sighed — at last.

"We've reached the end," he said. "I've been trying desperately to figure a way out, but from the time Jones mentioned Frawl's name it was hopeless. I think Jones knew it was hopeless. I think he's been baiting me. You see, the body is — buried."

He smiled a little, rose and said, "May I write a complete confession for you, Inspector?"

We stood by the window, Jeri and I, for awhile. The sky was dull, low; the day far gone now. We could hear the scratching of Cannister's pen. But he would pause at times, and murmur —

"Charles Morgan simply walked into the Clinic that evening, as new patients will upon a doctor. Except for height and weight, his resemblance to Frawl was really amazing."

A moment passed. Then the scratching resumed as he spoke: "As a matter of fact, killing Frawl was Waltz's idea. Once he suggested it, however, I couldn't leave him out. When, as we thought, the job was over I long-distanced Frawl's attorney immediately. Frawl was dead, I said. Yes, I would accompany the body for interment services. Then I called the undertaker.

"You understand I still hadn't seen Frawl's body. Obviously it was too late to change stories once we discovered Waltz had killed the wrong man. Frawl *had* to be dead then — or the entire plan of killing him and getting his money abandoned forever. We knew he'd taken Morgan's clothes; we knew why when we picked up his trail and learned he believed himself Charles Morgan. Yes, we found his trail, but we couldn't

find *him*. Finally, after some twenty-odd hours, we called the police, with Miss Moore posing as Mrs. Morgan."

Apparently Cannister looked up. "Blotter?" he said. "I'm afraid ink has been spilled on the desk, Inspector." Apparently Harcourt permitted him to find a blotter, for a drawer opened and closed.

"I neglected to say," Cannister continued, "we had taken a history on Morgan. He was without family, he had no local address. It seemed we faced no further difficulty. Then Mrs. Jones came to the Clinic.

"It was at this point that Waltz and Miss Moore became alarmed and turned on me. They saw a way out for themselves. As *I* thought I saw my way out when, of the two, only Waltz survived the gun fight with Jones. I still thought I could bury Frawl as 'Charles Morgan.' I still thought Frawl's name and my motive for wanting him dead were effectively hidden. Our crime, if any, seemed only in claiming 'Charles Morgan's' body. Well—" Once more I heard him sigh. "*Two* Frawls couldn't be explained, not when I was irrevocably linked with the name, the will, the death and the funeral. Jones," he said abruptly, "you were baiting me, weren't you?"

I turned around. "Do you confess also to killing *Waltz?*"

He seemed surprised. "Was that it? But how could you have known? He was wounded, unconscious—and I was quite alone with him. I left no revealing marks on his neck either, I assure you."

I walked to the desk. I pointed to the smear of red ink. "You had too little time, Doctor. You saw what you *thought* was the stain of blood. You heard the reports from two guns, and you *thought* Waltz was wounded seriously. It happens, however, that I *knocked* him unconscious. I didn't shoot him. I couldn't. I fired only to startle him, to gain that one small advantage. You see, there were blanks in my wife's gun."

The pen scratched again. I motioned to Jeri and we stole out of the office, out of the building. Her hand found mine.

"Pictures on the front page," I said. "Name in all the papers. 'Joe Jones says' for a change—and not Harcourt. Well, we could have had all that, hon. Are you calling me a sap for walking out?"

"No, Joe," she said. "There's beauty in a painting. And there's beauty in music—but murder can't be anything but ugly."

I looked at her. "Should we ride through the Park?"

"Next year," she said, "when you're home again. And in the years to come. Joe, let's spend this evening with the King-pin, shall we? After all, darling, isn't he our real symphony?"

We asked Mr. C. Daly King to write a brand-new Trevis Tarrant adventure-in-deduction especially for "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine." Mr. King has obligingly taken time off from his research work at Yale University to dream up "The Episode of the Little Girl Who Wasn't There," or as we choose to call it, "Lost Star."

Within the narrow confines of a single short story, Mr. King rings almost all the changes on that ever-fascinating, ever-stimulating problem of the "sealed room." He has added a distinct novelty too in forcing Tarrant to solve a locked-room puzzle not on the scene of the crime (which is usually difficult enough!) but from 3000 miles away — thus giving us the "curious" Mr. Tarrant in the role of pure armchair detective.

"Lost Star" is something of a tour de force — the kind of story that demands careful reading. So don't bolt it; chew on it slowly. In many ways it's an object lesson in point-counter-point ingenuity.

LOST STAR

by C. DALY KING

TARRANT and I were sitting quietly enough, that evening, in his apartment in the East Thirties. It was only a day or so after the dénouement of what he called the City of Evil episode — in fact, the bullet holes in his living room walls had not yet been treated by the decorators — and I, for one, had had all the excitement I wanted for the moment.

The scene now, however, was as peaceful as anyone could have wished. Brihido, having served his usual excellent dinner, had cleared away; the tightly closed living-room windows reduced the city's clamour to a low drone only occasionally interrupted by the squawk of a distant taxi; the few, well-placed, mellow lights were pleasant to the eye in this luxuriously masculine room. Across from us the dial of the walnut radio cabinet glowed a dull yellow above the modulated music issuing from beneath it.

Tarrant was slowly turning the stem of his brandy pony. "You know, Jerry, knowledge is sometimes more important than money in getting the good things of life. This brandy costs less than some of the widely advertised brands but it comes from people who know what brandy is and are not trying to unload the tag-ends of their product onto the gullible American market. Do you like it?"

I did, and said so. "If it's all the same, I'll have another pony. The brandy is fine but that music is too dopey for me. How about getting a

dance orchestra?" Tarrant had tuned the instrument to a popular concert being broadcast from the Mall.

He smiled. "You're a Philistine, Jerry. You are listening to one of the most famous conductors in the world. However, I'll agree that I don't care for his program, myself. That's the trouble with these popular concerts; the musical appreciation of the audiences is so low that the selections have to be fairly uninteresting. This one is almost finished, though. Let's see what he will give us next; if it's no better, I'll turn it off."

But he didn't turn it off; we were destined to listen to most of that concert.

Tarrant was tipping the decanter over my empty glass and the music was entering a rather horrible, syrupy passage when it was abruptly cut off and an unexpected voice spoke distinctly from the radio.

"Trans-Radio Flash. Gloria Glammeris has been kidnaped! Her absence was discovered at nine-forty-two by Operative Huggins of the All-American Agency. This is Lou Vincent speaking for the Trans-Radio News Service. We will stand by and bring you further details as we receive them. Station WJEX."

The instrument was silent for a moment, then brought us smoothly the last two notes of the selection on the Mall, followed by a burst of applause.

I sat up in my chair with the brandy glass in my hand. "Good Lord, Tarrant, that *is* going pretty far for a publicity stunt, isn't it?"

He shook his head. "We don't know that it is a publicity stunt. Our friend, Peake, down at Headquarters is convinced it's not. Of course he has contact with the All-American people and they tell him that they view it seriously. After all, they're the biggest private detective agency in the country; they certainly can't be bribed into staging a fake crime, and when they send ten of their best men out to Hollywood, it looks like business. Just the threatening letter — yes, that might be a phoney. But it seems that the thing has actually been pulled off, right under their noses."

The music had commenced again but we were paying no attention to it. I said, "Just the same, her new picture is about to open. And she's the biggest star the Kolossal outfit has. People with brass enough to call themselves Kolossal, and misspell it into the bargain, would do anything."

"All I know is what I've been told," was Tarrant's reply. "Peake says that All-American was hired by Ike Bronsky, Kolossal's president, that he flew east to confer personally with their head office and that they believe he would gladly give up half

a year's publicity to get to the bottom of the matter and protect his star. It's true there will be plenty of publicity now; she has a tremendous following and she is certainly a lovely girl."

"Ho-ho! I had no idea you went for film stars. How long has this been going on?"

"Blast it, Jerry," declared Tarrant, "I'm no monk. I admire beauty in any form. And a girl with a face, a figure and a voice like hers combines all the beauties of painting, sculpture, and music simultaneously. I've never met her but I would say she is no pretty Hollywood blank. Judging from her work, that girl has both talent and intelligence. I'll wager several millions of people are being bored with radio programs all over the country while they're waiting to —"

The music from the Mall was fading out and Tarrant interrupted himself to listen.

"Trans-Radio Flash," came the voice, "Further regarding the kidnaping of Gloria Glammeris. The crime was discovered at 6:42 Pacific Time, 9:42 Eastern Time, not by Operative Huggins, as previously announced, but by Miss Jane Smith, Miss Glammeris's secretary. At that time Miss Smith went to Miss Glammeris's apartments on the second floor of her Beverly Hills home. Huggins had been on duty outside the door ever since a previous visit of Miss Smith two hours earlier and was still on duty. Miss Smith knocked on the door, opened it and immediately cried out that Miss Glammeris was not there. Operative Huggins entered the room at once and a hurried search showed that the star had vanished.

"For the benefit of listeners who have not followed the case, I will say that two weeks ago Gloria Glammeris received a letter, which has not yet been traced, threatening her with kidnaping during the present week. As she is not now making a picture, she agreed under protest, but at the urgent request of her employers, Kolossal Films, to spend the week in her private apartments in her home. Today is the third day she has been in retirement, up to this evening in perfect safety. Two detectives of the All-American Agency have been constantly on duty within the house and eight others have been patrolling the grounds outside. In addition, two Special Officers of the Los Angeles Police Department have been stationed in the immediate vicinity. It is therefore out of the question that Miss Glammeris could have been removed from her home. A thorough search is now in progress and it is believed that her whereabouts will be discovered at any moment. A Trans-Radio man is now upon the

premises and will give you an immediate bulletin of further developments. This is Lou Vincent of Trans-Radio News Service. This flash was brought to you through the facilities of Station WJEX."

Tarrant smiled, as the music welled up again from the cabinet. "I'm afraid it's a false alarm, Jerry. At first I thought it might be something to sharpen our wits on. But my guess is that Miss Glammeris has retired to one of her beautiful bathrooms to take a bath. Or perhaps she has gone downstairs to consult with her cook. I have no doubt we may very shortly expect a final bulletin in which she indignantly denies any intention of upsetting the detectives. . . . How about a highball, Jerry?"

"Yes, thanks. In which case," I went on, "this certainly isn't a stunt, for an anticlimax like that would be mighty poor publicity. The threat against her will remain, of course. Naturally she must be in the house; but keep it turned on, anyhow, and let's see where they found her."

Tarrant mixed himself a drink but had not yet resumed his seat when Mr. Lou Vincent was with us again.

"Trans-Radio Flash. Our last bulletin on the Glammeris kidnaping was delayed and we now have further details for you. The house and grounds have been thoroughly searched and Miss Glammeris has not been found. The circumstances as reported by our Trans-Radio man on the scene are most extraordinary. Here are the details.

"At four-thirty this afternoon, Pacific Time, Miss Glammeris was finishing a short conference with her secretary in her study on the second floor of her house. This room is not lavishly furnished; it contains a large desk, a couch, some portable book cases and several chairs. It has no windows but is ventilated by the air-conditioning system of the house. There are three doors; one to the main corridor, where Operative Huggins sat; one to a small lavatory which is little more than a cubbyhole and has no windows or other means of exit; the third opens into Miss Glammeris's sleeping apartmentsand has recently been cut through, since by way of the main corridor it is some distance between her bedroom and the study.

"At four-thirty Miss Glammeris concluded her conference in the study and Miss Smith came out. Before Miss Smith left, Huggins had distinctly heard the two women talking, one voice deep, the other high, through the corridor door left partially open by Miss Smith when she had come to the study for the conference a few minutes before.

"From that moment until six-forty-two, Pacific Time, Operative Huggins never left the immediate

vicinity of the study-corridor door. No one passed through this door in either direction. At six-forty-two Huggins entered the study immediately behind Miss Smith and found the room empty. There is no place within the study or the adjoining small lavatory where Miss Glammeris could conceal herself, let alone be concealed by a kidnaper. The lavatory, as we said, is a mere blind alley from which no egress is possible. And the door from the study to the sleeping quarters was locked. This door can be locked from either side by means of two bolts embedded in the construction of the door itself, each bolt operated by turning a small handle above the doorknob on either side. It also appears that, although it is an interior door, it is weather-stripped on both sides. When Huggins and Miss Smith entered the study, this door was secured not only by one bolt but by both. In other words, it was not only locked from the side of the bedchamber, which could be done after Miss Glammeris had been taken through it, but was also locked from the inside, the study side. It is established that in the case of this particular door, the inner bolt cannot be operated after one has passed through and closed the door from the other side. Detective Huggins at once discovered that both bolts were shot by unlocking the door from the study side and by finding that it was still secured by the bolt on the bedroom side.

"Although bewildered by the situation, Huggins did not lose his head. He ran into the corridor, accompanied by Miss Smith, and locked the study-corridor door from the corridor side, retaining the key. He then ran downstairs to acquaint the other detective in the house with the disappearance and to draw the outside cordon closely about the walls. Needless to say, none of the outside guards had reported anything unusual during the preceding two hours.

"With two of the other detectives Huggins hurried upstairs again, where they found Miss Smith frantically searching her employer's bedroom, a search which disclosed nothing of any significance. The three detectives, followed by the secretary who was now becoming hysterical, hastily searched the whole house, after which they collected the servants together and put them through a severe questioning. All professed complete ignorance of what had occurred and, as Huggins could testify that none had so much as appeared in the upstairs corridor during the crucial time period, they were segregated in the kitchen while a more thorough search of the whole house went forward.

"This time the All-American operatives went through the rooms

more slowly and carefully, from cellar to attic. All closets were opened, the refrigerators and furnaces searched, wardrobes if locked were burst apart, even the film star's forty trunks were each examined in turn. It is hard to believe that such a probing yielded no result — but that is the fact. Meantime, the cordon around the house had stood inactive but alert and the All-American man in charge felt he could no longer put off informing the Los Angeles Prosecutor's Office as to the situation. The Prosecutor's Office, called on the phone, insisted that both outside doors of Miss Glammeris's study be sealed at once and that no one should enter until the morning, when the Prosecutor should have flown back from Palm Springs and undertake the investigation personally.

"The secretary, Miss Jane Smith, has suffered a complete breakdown and has been removed to the Los Angeles Hospital. This is Lou Vincent, speaking for Trans-Radio News Service. This bulletin came to you through Station WJEX."

Whereupon the instrument resumed with its miserable music. Tarrant, who after the first few seconds had been rapidly jotting down notes on the back and face of an old envelope, looked up and gave his peculiar whistle. Brihido stood in the doorway.

" 'Hido, bring me some paper and that drafting board of yours. We have a little puzzle. Rather an old and hackneyed one, I fear; the sealed room trick again — it keeps turning up regularly every so often."

The valet brought in the materials and sidled up with a sly expression. "My help, mebbe," he grinned.

"Why, certainly, doctor," Tarrant answered. "Pull up a chair and I will sketch out the problem for you. See if you can solve it." The manoeuvre caused me no surprise, for I knew that the butler was a servant, not by class but by exigency; he did, in fact, hold a medical degree in the Philippines.

"Now," Tarrant was saying, "this room that I am diagramming won't be correct, for I've never seen it. It holds a desk, a couch, some chairs, some portable bookcases. No windows. We will put the three doors one on each of three different sides. Their exact location isn't as important as their condition . . . there they are. Now this door — call it A — leads to a corridor and is covered by a guard. This door, B, gives access to a small lavatory from which there is no other exit of any kind. Door C, bolted on both sides, opens into a bedroom."

"Door A, corridor," murmured Brihido. "Door B, lavatory; door C, bedroom. Yiss."

Tarrant then explained the other

details, referring to the scribbles on his envelope. "We won't bother now about how Miss Glammeris was taken from the house," he concluded. "The question is: how was she removed from this room? Now, doctor, you've got it all; go ahead."

To me it seemed a somewhat difficult assignment but the Filipino tackled it without hesitation. He said, "First, door A: this covered by guard. Guard could be bribed, hit lady on head and take her out of room in two hours easy. Further difficulty to leave house but this not present problem. How about?"

"No good," smiled Tarrant. "This is a problem with the factors given. You can't change them upsidedown; you cannot assume that the guard is the kidnaper. Actually, there isn't a chance in the world that he is involved; he's an All-American operative, a carefully picked man. A poor solution, I'd say."

The butler agreed. "Not think so much, myself. Then, if guard honest, door A is out. Door B to lavatory also out: might as well be solid wall. Must go through door C to bedroom. And why not? No guard here, only question of locking door again from outside after lady is taken through. Quite possible for expert crime fella to lock doors from outside, I think."

I told him, "No," for this was one point I had got clearly. "These are bolts, not ordinary locks with a key. One on each side of the door and operated by turning a little handle, like the ones usually installed on bathroom doors. The bolts are inside the door itself, not on the outside."

"That'sright," Tarrant confirmed. "Both bolts were shot and my conclusion is that neither could be operated from the wrong side of the door, especially since for some weird Hollywood reason the door is doubly weather-stripped, leaving no possible apertures around its circumference. Apart from my own conviction, the bolts were examined by the All-American men and they —"

The cabinet behind us said sharply, "Trans-Radio Flash. The Glammeris kidnaping. In some way not yet discovered Gloria Glammeris was taken from her guarded study and from her house at 6:42 this afternoon, Pacific Time. The house is still under guard, the study sealed for the Prosecutor's visit in the morning. Alarms have been sent to the police of five states. Air fields and docks are under observation at Los Angeles. The Mexican border patrol has been increased, the Canadian border is being closely watched. By morning the police of the whole country will be on the lookout for the kidnapers. Federal agents are cooperating. This bulletin by Trans-Radio News Service, through Station WJEX."

"Hah," observed Brihido. "Method of leaving house mebbe important, too. We go back to study. Door C could be taken off hinges mebbe and bolts not disturbed. Which side of this door, by the way, sit hinges? Study side or bedroom side? You know?"

"I don't know about the hinges, but it doesn't make any difference, doctor. I think it most unlikely that a door with even one bolt shot could be removed that way and fitted back into its place again, in anything but a most dilapidated old house, which Miss Glammeris's home certainly is not. . . . No, if you have selected door C as the means of her exit from the study, you are squarely up against the problem of relocking that door after she had been taken through. It cannot be done from the bedroom side after the door has been closed, and no one could have re-entered the study past the guard at door A, to relock it from the inside. . . . So you give it up, doctor?"

Well, that seemed about the end of it to me. With both those doors disposed of, the only two possible exits from the room, the thing was simply insoluble. I was astonished to hear Brihido reply, "Oh, no; certainly not give up. In fact, see quite clearly now how was done. Please repeat all details of movements by guard and secretary. Only one way possible, I think."

After Tarrant had complied with the request, the valet continued, "Must be what you call publicity gag, like I read in paper when kidnap letter first published. At four-twenty-five lady sit in study with secretary. Door C to bedroom then unlocked both sides. At four-thirty she step through into bedroom and speak a few words with secretary still standing in study, so guard at door A can hear. Secretary is accomplice; then secretary close and bolt door C *on study side* and come out through door A. Lady bolt door C *on bedroom side* because that where she sit until discovery of empty study.

"At six-forty-two secretary come back and make believe finding lady gone from study. She yell, guard run in and guard himself *unlock door C from study side*. Secretary grin at this, mebbe, for he doing some of her work. Then they run into corridor, guard locks door A, puts key into pocket and hastens downstairs. So secretary runs to bedroom and tells lady now all right to go back in study; lady unlocks door, goes in study; secretary bolts door C *on bedroom side* and makes much useless search of that room. Meantime lady lies down under couch in study, in case guard should open door A and take another quick glance from corridor doorway. But he not even do that. Now study all nicely sealed up *with lady inside* and she stay there

until Prosecutor come tomorrow morning. By then too late to stop headlines in papers all over country. Good trick, mebbe."

"Excellent, doctor!" said Tarrant. "Of course there's *another* theory — No, I think you have the proper answer. So that's that; we can forget it now and listen to the music again."

Brihido smiled impishly. "For scientific fella necessary some proof before hypothesis become fact. Not any way in which we can check up on my theory?"

"Not without breaking the seals on the study, I'm afraid. And I could never persuade them to do that." Tarrant remained a moment in thought. "Well, perhaps there is a chance of proof. If your theory is correct, the secretary is an accomplice; therefore, she was pretending hysteria. It will be a little expensive but perhaps I can get some proof for you. You deserve it, after solving the problem."

He walked over to the telephone and slid the dial through its single revolution to call the operator. "Long distance, please. . . . Long distance: A person-to-person call. I want to speak either with Miss Jane Smith, a patient in the Los Angeles Hospital, or to the doctor who is attending her. Yes, I'll hold on. Thank you."

Someone must have left a key up in the central office, for Tarrant apparently could hear the call being put through. "St. Louis," he said to us; "ah, there's Kansas City. The hospital doctor won't have been fooled by a fake hysteria. Phoenix is on. . . . Now we're through to Los Angeles; I can hear them ringing the hospital."

He waited for almost a minute, then cut in with, "Hello. Hello, Los Angeles operator. . . . All right, get me the doctor who took care of her. It's important, operator, I must speak with him. This is a New York police call." I have noticed that Tarrant, for a truthful man, has a singular lack of hesitation about lying when he thinks it's necessary. This lie got him the man he wanted.

We heard him say. "Yes. . . . Yes. . . . When? . . . Well, about when? . . . Thanks. Yes, thanks, doctor. Goodbye."

He placed the receiver back in its cradle and turned around to us. "She faked the hysteria without any doubt. No objective symptoms at all when she got to the hospital. But she wasn't discharged; she was booked for the night. Sometime during the past hour she left without notifying anybody. Sneaked out."

Brihido was beaming with pleasure. "My theory correct —"

"Yes," Tarrant interrupted him seriously, "but there is that other possibility. How much of a chance do

I dare take? Suppose the second theory *is* the real one! Suppose . . ."

Tarrant's tone, which had risen from sobriety to tenseness, convinced me that the affair had suddenly become vital. He was dialing the telephone now with quick, nervous tension in his fingers.

"Centre Street? Peake, Inspector Peake, I must speak with him immediately. Hurry!"

Tarrant tapped his foot rapidly against the floor beneath the telephone stand. Then, "Peake? This is Tarrant. Do you know the Glammeris kidnap details? . . . Good, good. Peake, the girl is in that sealed study and is probably dying, if not dead! You must get in touch with Los Angeles at once! Make them break in — tell them to take a doctor along with them! . . . What? Oh, blast it, man, of course I know how it was done! I'll tell you later. I can't get action out there but you can. You've *got* to persuade them. . . . Now, listen, Peake, listen to me! You remember that penthouse job? I warned you and you wouldn't believe me; you let a policeman be murdered, didn't you? *This girl is dying right in her own study while you fuss about proprieties!* By God, Peake, I'll have your name and address on the front page of every newspaper in New York City if you let her die while you delay! I mean it. Goodbye."

Tarrant strode over to the cellarette and splashed whiskey into a highball glass. "The hell with their stuffy, official courtesies," he muttered.

"But what the devil?" I demanded. "Why should she be dying? That's no kind of publicity to—"

"This doesn't look like publicity," was the reply. "Miss Glammeris went through door C both ways, just as Brihido said; he was right about her *movements*. But she didn't go by herself; she was dragged out and dragged back in again by the secretary. At four-thirty Miss Glammeris had already been assaulted and was on the bedroom side of door C. What the guard heard didn't amount to anything; a low voice and a higher one mumbling unintelligible words — it's nothing. Jane Smith did that; you don't have to be even a good mimic to get away with it, under the circumstances. If she shot Miss Glammeris or stabbed her, the girl is dead. But I doubt it. A shot would be heard, a knife would have to be disposed of. There are a good many drugs whose action would be as fatal if the victim gets no attention. And there was a bathroom in which to wash out the glass and dispose of any telltale drug remaining. Some of them work slowly, though; there may be a chance if they break in soon enough.

"Motive? How do I know what

the motive was? Maybe the secretary has been stealing her employer's money and has to cover up; maybe Glammeris took a lover away from Jane Smith. There are dozens of motives, but motive doesn't enter the problem, because we have no information on it at all. The problem was a purely mechanical one — the question of what happened in and about the study."

"Wait, pliss," cried Brihido. "What you say not possible, pliss. If secretary drag lady into bedroom at four-thirty and return to study for exit through door A, then lady either dead or unconscious, because she raise no alarm. In this case *who lock door C from bedroom side?* Secretary could bolt door C only from study side."

"True," Tarrant admitted. "But where is the contradiction? When Jane Smith came out of the study at four-thirty this afternoon, she had just bolted door C on the study side and of course it was then still unbolted on the bedroom side. I see nothing, however, that would have hindered her from visiting the bedroom at some time between four-thirty and six-forty-two and *at this later time* having bolted the door from the bedroom side, perhaps over the unconscious body of her employer. She would have had to do that, as indeed we know it *was* done —in order to prevent the guard, when he finally entered the study, from going through at once to the bedroom, as he tried to do when the alarm was first given. Miss Glammeris's body had to be quickly accessible for return to the study and may even have been in full view. But Jane Smith knew that the guard would have to inform the other detectives before anything else, and those few minutes were all she needed. The point is that in any event Miss Glammeris *must* now be in the study; given the present factors, *there is no other possibility in logic.* But there are two alternatives concerning her presence there; either it is a stunt with Jane Smith as accomplice or it is a crime with Jane Smith as criminal . . . and Jane Smith has run away."

Brihido had screwed up his face and was saying, "Yiss. Mebbe," when the telephone gave a series of quite angry buzzes. My friend lifted it from its cradle, said, "Tarrant speaking," and immediately a whole series of staccato barks issued from the instrument.

For a time Tarrant said nothing. He emitted an incredulous whistle and a moment later made clucking noises indicative of astonishment or chagrin, or both. Finally he spoke. "Well. . . . Well, I am sorry, old man. I offer my most sincere apologies. . . . Yes. If there is anything I can do beyond apologies, of

course I'm at your service." He put down the receiver.

"It seems," he told us quietly, "that Peake got through directly to the house. At his insistence the police have unsealed the doors and entered the study." Tarrant paused. "There is no body in the study. There is no one there at all. The study is *empty*."

"Eh?" I sounded blank, even to myself. After the way it had all been figured out so neatly, this pretty well stopped me.

'Hido sat back on his haunches and gave a very fair imitation of Tarrant's previous whistle. Then he started hissing. "But not possible. *Musst* be lady in study! No? Iss kidnap, then. But how thiss done?"

Tarrant motioned him to silence. He was murmuring, "We have overlooked something. Probably something so obvious that we can't see it." He took a pull at his highball and stared down at the rug between his feet. "And why not?" he asked finally. "Why not the very thing we started with?"

"How you mean?" 'Hido could hold himself in no longer.

"How about our original notion?" Tarrant reminded him. "The publicity stunt, the faked kidnaping?"

'Hido insisted, "No, not possible. Lady can get out of study, like I invent long ago. But not out of house. House been searched; lady not there, nor in study, either. Must be police mistake; you already say only one possibility in logic."

"With the factors given," Tarrant answered. "But with the factors changed, another possibility arises. Since this possibility has actually occurred, we must deduce a change in our assumed factors."

Tarrant paused, deep in thought.

Then, "There's one catch." My friend smiled wryly. He pulled a fat directory from his shelves and flipped the pages over to the G's. "Yes, here it is. 'Secretary: Jane Smith, 3030 St. Clair Street, Rockford, Ill., or c/o Kolossal Studios, Hollywood, Calif.' Hm. Well," he said suddenly, "we'll have one more try. It will be about the longest shot I've ever played — but here goes."

My first speech for some time: "Here goes what?"

"Some more nice person-to-person business for American Tel. and Tel. If Jane Smith *should* be in Rockford, Illinois — I'd better hurry."

And, indeed, five minutes later, when the operator called him back, he could hardly conceal the surprise in his voice.

"This is Miss Smith? . . . Trevis Tarrant speaking — a friend of Miss Glammeris's. You *are* Miss Smith and you have been in Rockford for a week? . . . Oh, you thought this was from Miss Glammeris because it was a long distance call to you personally? Well, young lady, you

are going to receive a lot more long distance calls any minute now but they won't be from friends. If you want my advice, don't answer any more calls at all; just leave word that you are *not* there until Miss Glammeris reaches you. . . ."

Brihido gasped and I cried, "What the hell!", as he turned away from the phone.

Tarrant regarded us quizzically. He said, "Surely you see it now? If Jane Smith is in Rockford tonight, she wasn't in Hollywood this afternoon. Why not a vacation during Gloria's 'retirement' and 'kidnaping'? In other words, there never *was* a secretary — in Hollywood this afternoon, I mean. Miss Glammeris played both roles — that of herself earlier in the day and of her secretary from the four-thirty conference on. No trick at all for an actress of her ability. Remember, we were told that the guard, Operative Huggins, never saw the two women together. The part of Gloria in the afternoon was no more than an offstage voice.

"It's simple enough, once you nail down the vital fact. Gloria's movements were those we have been attributing to Jane Smith, because at that time she *was playing* Jane Smith. That's how she got out of the study. Then she faked the secretarial hysteria — *to get out of the house.* She was taken to a hospital; and skipped at the first opportunity. Probably right now she's registered at the Los Angeles Biltmore as Mrs. F. N. Trelawney or something, all done up in a pair of dark glasses and prepared to wait patiently a few days for a phoney exchange of half a million dollars' ransom and the best publicity in film history."

"But in that case," I managed, "Peake —"

"— probably won't speak to me for a week, I hope. As to Gloria versus the public, I'm for Gloria. . . . I trust," he added pleasantly, "that she thanks me for it some day. She really *is* lovely, you know."

In the issue of July 1943 we brought you the first detective story written by a boy-author — "Department of Impossible Crimes" by 15-year-old James Yaffe. At that time your Editor pointed out that Master Yaffe's plot-idea bore a strong resemblance to a classic theme used many years before. Young Yaffe took an old chestnut, roasted it over a modern oven, and garnished it with a new sauce of his own recipe. The resulting dish had a fresh and stimulating flavor.

In the issue of March 1944 we brought you Master Yaffe's second detective story — "Mr. Kiroshibu's Ashes," another adventure of Paul Dawn and his Department of Impossible Crimes. This time young Jimmy, now 16 years old, broke fresher ground. His fundamental plot-idea was much more original. But being young and inexperienced, he committed a whopping blunder in construction. Your Editor printed the story and with young Jimmy's permission, "exposed" the flaw in the plot. But it should be recorded, in justice to Master Yaffe, that many fans rushed to his defense, insisting vehemently that the flaw was editorial, not auctorial.

Now we offer you Master Yaffe's third detective story — "The Seventh Drink," and still another exploit of Paul Dawn, the sleuth who takes the "im" out of "impossible." Jimmy has now reached the ripe old age of 17, with two years of Paul-Dawning (so to speak) behind him. But we can't rush our favorite boy-author. Experience comes only with time and practice — and two years and two stories are not enough. Again your Editor is forced to admit that Master Yaffe has re-worked an old idea; but again your Editor points out that young Jimmy has dressed up the old idea, this time fashioning a brand-new suit of clothes out of old cloth. Coat lapels to trouser cuffs, the style is pure Yaffe — and even more imaginatively conceived than before.

Your Editor is going to string along with Jimmy — encouraging and helping him all he can. Let the youthful Yaffe burn all the old ideas out of his system; and one of these days our boy-author will come through with a story — fourth, fourteenth, or fortieth shot in his locker — that will be all Yaffe and a mile wide. That story will be new, daring, and extraordinary; it will be completely fresh and wholly original. Your Editor backs that prediction right down to his last editorial chip.

Now read an amazing scene between a murderer and a detective — the prelude to a Yaffesque "impossible" crime.

THE SEVENTH DRINK

by JAMES YAFFE

He put down the crossword puzzle and faced his visitor.

"I need money, Mr. Dawn, a great deal of money, and I need it right away. Could you afford to risk — say, two thousand dollars?"

She was blonde and twenty-six and not bad-looking at all. Her position in the chair gave him a nice view of her legs.

"All depends. What am I risking it on, Miss —?"

"*Mrs.* Dillberry. Janet Dillberry. I'll come right to the point, Mr. Dawn. You are an expert on the so-called Impossible Crime — the crime which appears on the surface to have no solution. You claim, Mr. Dawn, that there is no impossible crime which is too impossible for you to solve. Am I right?"

He nodded, wondering what she was getting at.

"Mr. Dawn, I am willing to make a bet with you. I am willing to bet you two thousand dollars that I can commit the impossible murder."

Paul Dawn leaned back in his chair and puffed at his cigarette. "Now, look here, Mrs. — er — ?"

"Dillberry."

"Dillberry. You aren't serious, are you? You wouldn't really kill somebody just to win a few dollars."

"Two thousand dollars. And, as I say, I must have the money. A small matter of some gambling debts. Trivial, you understand, but urgent. Well, Mr. Dawn, is it a bet?"

Paul cleared his throat, stalling for time, taking stock of the situation. A two thousand dollar wager — on a human life. Was it a practical joke? Interesting affair, though. Especially interesting since the leading character was a woman like Janet Dillberry. Beautiful legs, beautiful figure, beautiful face, beautiful blonde hair, beautiful everything. It would be almost a pleasure to be murdered be a woman like that. The more he examined Mrs. Dillberry, the more interested he became in her case.

"I suppose you've made all the arrangements. Picked out the method, and the time, and the place?"

"I've attended to everything, naturally. I'll commit the murder any time that would be most convenient for you." She leaned forward eagerly. "I could kill him tonight if you wished."

"No, don't kill him tonight," Paul said hastily. Good God, was the lady serious, did she actually mean it? "Who *is* the lucky corpse?" he asked, trying to sound nonchalant. "Or haven't you chosen one yet?"

"Oh, yes. I had thought at first of picking a name out of the telephone book — at random. However, I discarded the idea as far too brutal. So I finally decided to kill Charles."

"Charles?"

"Mr. Dillberry. My husband. You must meet him, Mr. Dawn, he's most interested in your work."

Paul laughed, and a hollow sound came out. "Does Charles — er — Mr. Dillberry know that you're going to kill him?"

"Naturally not. I wouldn't think of upsetting him like that."

Paul took a deep, desperate drag on his cigarette. He had been investigating impossible crimes for years without ever coming across a situation quite like this or a woman quite like Janet Dillberry. It was all so polite and bloodthirsty. He shuddered. "You're sure, Mrs. Dillberry, you can't think of a less — er — coldblooded way of raising two thousand dollars?"

"Let's not be sentimental, Mr. Dawn. What serious objection can there be to this way? Murder is one of the oldest arts."

Paul gulped. "And if I don't accept your offer, you'll probably go to someone else."

"Probably."

Paul nodded and said nothing.

"Will you do it, Mr. Dawn? I'm sure that any criminal investigator would risk two thousand dollars for a front row seat to a murder."

Paul sighed. "Mrs. Dillberry, it's a bet."

They shook on it.

Janet Dillberry laughed and said, "It's a relief to get that off my mind. I suppose you'd like to know when it's going to happen."

Paul nodded.

"My husband is giving a lecture at Town Hall tomorrow night. About Shakespeare; Charles is an English professor at the University. If you'll be there at eight-thirty sharp, you can make yourself comfortable while I kill Charles. Is that satisfactory?"

"Oh — fine," said Paul weakly.

Mrs. Dillberry stood up with a warm smile. "Good-bye, Mr. Dawn. Thank you again. And please don't worry. I'll use cyanide potassium, so it will all be over quickly."

And she was gone.

Inspector Stanley Fledge, Homicide Squad, was red.

"Why didn't you stop her, blast it? Why didn't you arrest her?"

"What charge? The woman hasn't killed anybody yet. She may be a nut, but until tomorrow night she's not a murderer."

"Well, then, why didn't you talk her out of it? Don't forget, Paul, the D.I.C. is part of the Homicide Squad, and it's our duty to keep law and order, and it's your duty to tell women who are going to poison

their husbands that it's not right to go around poisoning husbands."

"Crime Does Not Pay! That sort of thing?" Paul shook his head wearily. "Wouldn't work in this case. You know perfectly well that if Mrs. Dillberry has made up her mind to feed cyanide to Mr. Dillberry nothing in the world is going to stop her. Let's face it; the man is as good as cadaver. The only thing to do is be on hand when it happens and place the lady behind bars."

"But suppose she gets away with it!" said Fledge. "Suppose it *is* an impossible murder, and suppose you can't solve it!"

Paul was getting annoyed. "Then I'm out two thousand dollars. Really, if I'd thought you were going to have apoplexy over the thing, I never would have told you about it. Now, get out, Fledge — see you tomorrow night at eight-thirty."

"Excuse me," mumbled Paul Dawn, as he climbed over the knees of two elderly ladies. He sank into his seat, struggled out of his coat, and looked around. Town Hall seemed to be occupied entirely by females. Elderly schoolteachers with moth-eaten rabbit coats bravely trying to be minks; teen-age students with big black glasses and notebooks and wads of chewing gum in their mouths; middle-aged housewives with loud giggles, all of whom looked like (and were) Presidents of Ladies' Literary Clubs.

Paul felt nervous and uncomfortable, but not so nervous and uncomfortable as Inspector Stanley Fledge who, his neck red and sweating, sat next to him.

In a low voice Paul said, "After years of shooting it out with gunmen in roadhouses and tracking down sinister Orientals to opium dens, how does it feel to look for a killer at a lecture on Shakespeare?"

"Just like the good old days at Vassar," said Fledge sourly. "Where the hell's the daisy chain?"

Paul laughed, and looked up at the lecture platform. On the platform stood three chairs and a table; on the table, alone and aloof, was a glass of water. Two of the chairs were occupied by a thin, old woman and a tremendously stout man with hard, shrewd eyes. In the third sat Janet Dillberry, smiling coolly at the crowd. Paul nudged Fledge.

"Look at that glass of water."

Fledge squinted at the glass. "Only a glass of water. So what?"

"Rates more than an 'only', don't you think? Look at it again."

"Plenty of lecturers have a glass of water in front of them when they speak. What about it?"

"What about it? Exactly." Paul closed his eyes and leaned back to meditate. "Charles Dillberry is a lecturer. Consequently a glass of

water is placed before him, as is customary at most lectures. Consequently, what am I worried about? I am worried, Fledge, about cyanide potassium. And it occurs to me that that glass of water is the damnedest glass of water I have ever seen."

"What's so damnedest about it?"

"I've been gazing at it for the last few minutes. And something strikes me. Fledge, that glass of water looks — now, don't splutter all over my new suit — that glass of water looks lonely."

"LONELY!"

"Lonely. Where is its usual traveling companion, the pitcher of water? Romeo without Juliet. Adam without Eve. Mutt without Jeff. Glass without pitcher. Curious."

Fledge clenched his fists, then unclenched them, then clenched them again. "What the hell are you —"

"Ssh!" said Paul. "Make way for boredom."

The thin, old woman on the platform had risen from her seat and stood behind the table beaming. The murmuring from the audience stopped. Her thin fingers drummed for a moment on the table. She took a gulp of water from the glass and began in a squeaky voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen. We are fortunate this evening — " little laugh, " — in having with us one of America's most distinguished — " gulp of water, " — Shakespearean scholars. I am sure you will all be interested in what this famous Shakespearean scholar has to say about — er — Shakespeare. May I present Professor — " little laugh, gulp of water, and the smile, " — Charles — er — Dillberry."

A smattering of applause, and Professor Dillberry made his entrance. He was in his thirties and sureof himself, a good example of the Happy-Days-Are-Here-Again kind of lecturer who starts off every talk with a funny story and ends it with a quotation from Abraham Lincoln. He came onto the platform rubbing his hands together briskly and laughing. His first words were a hearty, "Thank you, Mrs. Beegle, thank you, thank you." The cheery type, Paul thought.

The Professor pulled out a sheaf of lecture notes, planted himself in front of the table, and was all business immediately. He cleared his throat in the accepted manner and took a long drink of water.

"Ladies and gentlemen." Original beginning, thought Paul. "Mrs. Beegle introduced me as a Shakespearean scholar, and that reminds me of a funny story. On my way to the University this morning —"

Stanley Fledge muttered, "Comedian!", out of the side of his mouth and stifled a yawn. Paul Dawn sat forward, one eye on the suspicious glass of water, one eye on the Professor, and a corner of both

eyes on Mrs. Dillberry. But she looked nothing like a would-be murderess at that moment. Her face betrayed no other emotion than extreme interest in her husband's speech.

"Glimpse Mrs. D.," said Paul softly. "Looks almost as if she hasn't heard this speech a hundred times before. Amazing woman. Pretty, too."

Fledge said, "Was Lucrezia Borgia a blonde?"

"Lucrezia Borgia! Which reminds me. Keep your eye on that water."

At that moment the glass of water was being lifted to Professor Dillberry's lips. " — that the Immortal Bard, whose monumental works have been the inspiration for — " A long drink of water, and the glass was placed on the table again. Paul looked quickly at Mrs. Dillberry. Her expression had not changed. " — because Shakespeare has often been described — "

Ten minutes later Paul was still staring, and Fledge was still yawning, and Mrs. Dillberry was still sitting, and Professor Dillberry was still living.

" — and the early part of Shakespeare's career was marred by — " The glass of water, half empty now, looked as lonely and as menacing as ever. But nothing had happened. If Janet Dillberry was going to kill her husband, she had better hurry up about it. And the glass of water still troubled him —

Fledge said, "When does your performing glass start to do its stuff? The way the Professor is going, if she doesn't kill him, I'll do it myself."

" — the mood of his earlier work is predominantly gay and sentimental — " Professor Dillberry picked up the glass of water and took a big gulp. " — gay and sentimental — "

Suddenly it happened.

Professor Dillberry stopped short. His face twisted into an expression of sudden and violent pain; desperately he clutched at his throat; he forced his mouth open and started but never completed a scream of agony. Before he could utter a sound, his knees buckled, and he collapsed on the floor nearly upsetting the table.

There was one moment of awed silence. And then — uproar. Paul had a confused impression of someone fainting, of Inspector Stanley Fledge bounding up to the platform, of Mrs. Dillberry's face, the expression of which he remembered chiefly because it didn't exist. But he had little time to pay close attention to any of these things. Because, throughout the excitement and confusion that followed, Paul's eyes were fastened with morbid fascination upon the half-empty glass of water that stood on the table, so lonely, so in-

nocent, so full of cyanide potassium.

"That's impossible!"

"Maybe so. But it happened."

"But it couldn't have!"

"But it did. And there's a corpse in the morgue to prove it. Go argue it out with him."

The morning after the murder was cold and dismal. Paul Dawn sat behind his desk and watched Inspector Stanley Fledge shout at the Medical Examiner. And he knew that the Medical Examiner was right. If Dr. Oswald Mortimor said a thing was so, it was so. And if Mortimor said that cyanide potassium had killed Charles Dillberry, then Charles Dillberry had died of exactly that.

"But it can't be," Fledge insisted. "I'll go over the whole thing with you again."

"Don't bother." Mortimor closed his bag with a snap.

"Cyanide potassium is an instant poison. It kills you the second you take a sip of the stuff. Right?"

Mortimor shoved his arm into the overcoat and said nothing.

"You say that Dillberry died of a large dose of cyanide potassium. And you found a large dose of cyanide potassium in the glass of water. But Dillberry drank from that glass of water at least six times before he died, and the water had no effect on him. Also, Mrs. Beegle, the female who introduced Dillberry, drank from that glass of water three times without falling into any convulsions. So that means the poison was not in that glass of water while Dillberry was speaking. So that means the poison must've been slipped into the glass of water a few seconds before Dillberry took the drink that killed him. Right?"

Mortimor buttoned up his coat and adjusted his scarf.

"But I was watching that glass of water closely all the time Dillberry was speaking. And so was Paul. And so were a couple of hundred other people. And I can swear that nobody even came near that glass of water during Dillberry's speech. So at what time did Mrs. Dillberry put the cyanide potassium in the water? Answer: At no time. Mrs. Dillberry *couldn't* have put the poison in the water or two hundred people would've seen her do it. Nobody else could've put the poison in the water: same reason. So *how* did the poison get in the water? Answer: The Invisible Man put it there. But the Invisible Man is making pictures out in Hollywood. Conclusion: The whole thing is impossible. Right?"

Mortimor nodded. "Right. Impossible. Only it happened. Good morning, gentlemen. Pleasant nightmares."

"Hey, Doc—" Fledge began, but the door was shut. The Inspector turned to Paul, and there were tears

in his eyes. "Once upon a time there was a glass of water. There it was, right in front of our noses for fifteen minutes. A guy drinks from the glass of water six times — *six times* — and nothing happens to him. So there isn't any poison in the water. And then he drinks a seventh time — and dies. And Presto! — there *is* poison in the water. When did it get there? Who put it there? My own eyes tell me the answer. Nobody! I'm going nuts!"

Paul puffed at his cigarette thoughtfully. "Neat little problem. Two hundred people and two detectives say the glass wasn't tampered with. One dead man, with a stomach full of cyanide, says that it was. Where is the order in this chaos? Optical illusion? Ghosts? Ectoplasmic glass? Bewildering."

"Blast her!" Fledge blurted out.

"Mrs. Borgia?"

"Yeah. That Dillberry dame. She wins her bet all right. The *really* Impossible Murder!"

"The Case of the Educated Glass. Now you see it, now you don't." Paul sat up suddenly. "I think a chat with Janet Dillberry is in order."

"How do you do, Mr. Dawn," she said pleasantly. "You owe me two thousand dollars."

"Sit down," said Stanley Fledge. His voice was grim.

"Thank you." She arranged herself carefully in the chair, taking care not to hide those legs. "Two thousand dollars, Mr. Dawn," and she smiled.

Stanley Fledge stuck out his chin. "How did the poison get into the glass?"

"Someone put it there, of course."

"Who put it there?"

"I did."

"When did you put it there? You couldn't have put it there *before* your husband started to speak, or Mrs. Beegle would have dropped dead when she drank from the glass, and so would your husband after his first drink."

"But he didn't drop dead until his seventh drink, did he?"

"Don't heckle," Fledge bellowed. "And you couldn't have put the poison in the glass *after* your husband began to speak or we'd have seen you do it."

Ignoring the inspector, she turned to Paul. "Looks very much like the impossible murder, doesn't it?"

Paul nodded glumly.

She stood up and approached his desk. "Then if you've both finished playing detective and have finally admitted failure, I'll take my two thousand dollars and leave."

"Not failure, Mrs D.," said Paul. "Only temporary miscalculation. Give us a little time."

She smiled. "I'll wait." She sat down again, rearranging the legs. So

confident, Paul thought, so perfectly sure of herself. And the way things looked now — why not?

"You confess to murdering your husband, don't you?"

"Of course."

"You admit that you placed a large spoonful of potassium cyanide in his glass of water, don't you?"

"It was a pill, not a spoonful."

"Where did you get this poisoned pill?"

"My husband gave it to me. The head of the Department of Science at the University compounded the pill for him. I told Charles I needed some cyanide of potassium, so he got it for me."

Paul stared at her. "Didn't he ask you what you wanted it for?"

"He did."

"And what did you tell him?"

"I told him it was none of his business."

"And he still got the poison for you?"

"Why not? Charles was quite — devoted to me."

Paul said, "You still admit that you killed him!"

"Still."

"And you still won't tell us how!"

"Absolutely."

"Looks as if I'll have to find out for myself, doesn't it?"

"Be sure and tell me if you do." She arose and presented them with a great big smile. "And remember, Mr. Dawn, when you make out that check — the name is spelt with two l's."

Mrs. Sophie Beegle had only known poor Professor Dillberry a short time. She was president of the New Rochelle Women's Reading Group, the organization which sponsored poor Professor Dillberry's lecture. Such an awful tragedy, wasn't it? And such a wonderful man, wasn't he? In the prime of life, so to speak. Not since the death of her poor dear husband had Mrs. Beegle been so broken up.

With some difficulty Paul interrupted the beginning of a long dissertation on Mrs. Beegle's poor dear husband. "You were up there on the platform with Professor Dillberry last night. You didn't see anything suspicious, did you?"

Mrs. Beegle's eyes shone. "How exciting," she cried. "You mean, did I notice any clues? The smell of exotic perfume, or whether Professor Dillberry had a finger missing from his right hand, or — "

He might have known it! Mrs. Beegle was a detective story fan! Her eyes glittered with the fanatical gleam of the hardened devotee. Paul said, "I didn't mean anything quite so dramatic, Mrs. Beegle. Did you see anyone approach the glass of water in front of Professor Dillberry at any time during the speech?"

Mrs. Beegle shook her head.

"Did the Professor drop anything into the glass while he was speaking."

Mrs. Beegle shook her head violently. She was watching the poor dear Professor with rapt attention, and she was sure that neither the Professor nor anybody else had tampered with the water.

"When you drank from the glass yourself," Paul said, "did you notice anything peculiar about the taste or the smell?"

Mrs. Beegle was reluctant to admit it, but the water had seemed perfectly all right to her at the time. No sickly-sweet taste of incense, no trace of South American curare, not even that best friend of all the detective-story writers, The Smell of Bitter Almonds. "But," said Mrs. Beegle, "I *did* notice something suspicious last night during the lecture. It struck me at the time, and I still remember it."

Paul leaned forward and told her to go on.

"Well! While I was sitting on the platform, I looked out at the audience, and I saw something very suspicious. *Very* suspicious."

Fledge said, "For God's sake, what was it?"

"I saw two very suspicious-looking characters out in the audience. Two suspicious-looking men. They were sitting in the second row, and during the whole lecture they stared and stared at the Professor's glass of water in a very queer manner. They didn't pay any attention to the lecture. Just sat there, staring at the glass of water."

"Go on," said Paul anxiously. "Can you describe them?"

Mrs. Beegle hesitated. "Let me see. One of them was a man in his early thirties — about your age, Mr. Dawn — almost six foot tall, with light brown hair and blue eyes — just like you. And the other one was in his forties, short and heavy-set with dark hair and nervous eyes and a red neck — like you, Inspector. They were both terribly sinister."

Paul Dawn closed his eyes and sucked in his breath. Stanley Fledge glared at Mrs. Beegle and muttered something. It wasn't very polite.

"Town Hall likes one of its Board of Directors to sit on the platform at every lecture. That's me. Board of Director." Mr. Bernard Remington chuckled and eased his tremendously stout body into the chair recently occupied by Mrs. Beegle and the coldblooded Mrs. Dillberry. The hard, shrewd eyes that Paul had noticed from the audience the night before peered at him suspiciously.

"So you never met the murdered man before last night, Mr. Remington?"

"Didn't say that. Charlie and I were fraternity brothers. Z.B.T.'s

under the skin. I'm class of 1910, Charlie's class of '28. Used to see Charlie at the Z.B.T. dinners."

"Did you know he was going to lecture at Town Hall last night?"

"No idea of it. I was told to sit on the platform for this lecture, and what do you know? — who's lecturing but Charlie Dillberry. Small world." Aimlessly he flicked a strand of blond hair off the chair arm.

Paul said, "Did you notice anything suspicious while Professor Dillberry was lecturing?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, did you see anybody fooling with Dillberry's glass of water?"

"Nobody touched the water — except Charlie. I'm sure of it."

Paul studied the big man closely. "Who poured that glass of water for the Professor, Mr. Remington?"

"Who poured the water?" Remington scratched his head. "There's a banquet hall on the second floor, and a small kitchen adjoining, with a sink and running water. Probably someone poured the water there."

"Who?"

"Hell, I don't know. His wife maybe."

"What made you think of his wife, Mr. Remington?"

Remington cleared his throat. "No particular reason. Well, if you don't need me any more — Oh, by the way." Remington paused as he was about to open the door. "Something funny happened while Charlie was talking. Just thought of it."

"Go ahead."

"Charlie was saying something about Shakespeare's works living through the ages, or something like that, and he stopped and took a drink of water. And after he drank the water, Charlie did something that caught my attention."

"What did he do?"

Remington looked puzzled. "He made a face. He screwed up his nose and turned down the corners of his mouth. Like this. Like he was smelling a bad egg. Or like something tasted queer. I wondered at the time what could have tasted queer. Does it help you any?"

Paul shook his head slowly. "I don't know," he said.

He was alone in the office. He worked on a crossword puzzle for a while, but having been stumped for five minutes on 14 Horizontal, he gave it up. Then he closed his eyes, leaned back in his chair, folded his hands over his stomach, and tried to imagine he was on a world cruise. But even that did no good. His mind was on the Dillberry case — the Impossible Crime In Front Of Two Hundred People.

He had never known a mystery with so little mystery to it. From the very beginning, everything had been so completely without secrecy,

so open for inspection. First of all, the murderer had come to him ahead of time and told him that she was going to commit the murder. Not only that, she had told him whom she was going to kill, and where and why and at what time and with what weapon, and she had gone on to invite him to be there when it happened. Then, in carrying out the murder, she had taken no advantage of the security and secrecy of a locked door or a dark alley. She had killed her victim on a lecture platform in front of two hundred witnesses, two of whom had come there for the sole purpose of watching her commit the murder. In short, Mrs. Dillberry might just as well have advertised the killing in the newspapers ahead of time. It was humiliating.

The sharp ring of the office telephone broke his train of thought.

"Department of Impossible Crimes, Good morning. I'm sorry, Mr. Dawn has had a sudden attack of vertigo and won't be back till 1985. Good bye."

"This is Fledge, you nitwit," squeaked a voice. "New developments on the Dillberry case. Doc Mortimor found something else in that glass of water beside a dose of potassium cyanide."

"Let me guess. A three-volume set of the Complete Works of William Shakespeare."

"Guess again. A very tiny wad of soap."

"A WHAT!" Paul Dawn nearly yanked the telephone out of the wall. "Repeat that, will you?"

"They found a small wad of ordinary soap, like you use to wash yourself, in the glass of water that killed Dillberry."

"Soap! Good God! Soap!"

"Yeah. Do you make anything out of it?"

"Soap! Beautiful, wonderful soap. From now on, I shall take a bath three times a day."

"Paul, are you screwy?"

"Only slightly," he cried ecstatically. "Now, listen closely. Here's what I want you to do —"

Five uniformed policemen paced up and down in front of Town Hall at eight-thirty that night. They rubbed their mittens together and puffed out their cheeks and looked cold.

Inside, five slightly excited, slightly irritated people were spending a crazy evening re-enacting the events of a crazy murder. The lecture platform was arranged just as it had been the night before, with three chairs and a table, and on the table stood a glass of water. Mrs. Sophie Beegle, panting with excitement, Bernard Remington, tense and watchful, and Janet Dillberry, cool and smiling as always, sat in the same

seats they had occupied twenty-four hours before. Inspector Stanley Fledge, looking very doubtful about the whole thing, was in the audience.

"And I," said Paul Dawn cheerfully, "shall attempt to be the murdered man. However foolish this may seem to you at the moment, please believe me — there is method to my madness."

"Madness is right," Remington said.

"I want," said Paul, "to reproduce as accurately as possible the events leading up to Charles Dillberry's murder last night. Go ahead, Mrs. Beegle, introduce me to the audience."

Mrs. Beegle looked at him uncertainly.

"Don't be shy. Introduce me."

She stepped forward timidly. "Ladies — ahem — ladies and gentlemen. Introducing Professor Paul — Professor Charles Dillberry." She shot a questioning glance in Paul's direction.

"Fine. Now, drink the water."

"What?"

"Drink the water," he said. "As you did last night. Drink from the glass."

Mrs. Beegle gulped helplessly from the glass and tottered into her chair.

"Mr. Dawn, I don't think —" Remington was saying.

"Sshl" said Paul. "Professor Dillberry is about to speak. Not worried, are you, Mrs. D?"

Janet Dillberry smiled. "Two l's, Mr. Dawn."

"Proceed, Professor." Paul cleared his throat. "Thank you, Mrs. Beegle, thank you, thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, Mrs. Beegle called me a Shakespearean scholar and that reminds me of a funny story. — And so on and so on and so on. I won't repeat the entire speech for you; I'm sure you all had enough of Shakespeare last night. From now on, however, I am conducting a rigid experiment in timing. For the next fifteen minutes, I must ask for absolute silence, broken only by occasional comments from the corpse and a slight slushing noise as I take sips from my glass of water."

The minutes passed. At the end of three minutes, Paul took a drink of water, calling out, "Drink Number Two". Silence again. At the end of six minutes, Paul took another drink, "Drink Number Three" and silence. Eight minutes had passed and "Drink Number Four — accompanied," Paul added, "by a sour face." He made a sour face. "Correct, Mr. Remington?" Remington nodded.

At the end of eleven minutes, Paul called out "Drink Number Five." Two more minutes passed. Mrs. Beegle was breathing excitedly. Remington was on his guard, alert. In the front row, Stanley Fledge

glared at the platform. Janet Dillberry's face was expressionless.

Thirteen minutes. "Drink Number Six. And you will all note that the glass is exactly half empty. In two more minutes I will take Drink Number Seven — the final drink. But first, I would like each one of you to take a small sip of this water."

He held the glass out for each of them, and they sipped. Paul said, "Taste anything?"

"Water," said Stanley Fledge wryly.

"Tastes all right to me," said Remington.

"And to me," said Mrs. Beegle.

"What's the idea?" said Stanley Fledge.

"Ssh! You know what happened to the cat. Be quiet and wait." And they waited, as Paul's watch ticked away the seconds.

"Fifteen minutes," he cried at last. He held the glass of water firmly and raised it high, facing Mrs. Dillberry. "A toast, ladies and gentlemen. Here's to the impossible murder — " He drank quickly from the glass, and as he did so a big smile appeared on his face. " — which turns out to be not so impossible after all. I would like you all to take another sip from this glass of water."

Again the glass of water was passed around, and again each one of them sipped.

"It tastes different," said Remington, after a moment.

"It tastes funny," said Mrs. Beegle.

"Blast it, Paul," said Fledge, "it tastes just like an aspirin tablet."

"And that's exactly what it is," said Paul Dawn. "An aspirin tablet."

Fledge squinted at him. "Two minutes ago I took a sip out of that glass and I didn't taste anything —"

"And one second ago you took a sip out of that glass and tasted —"

"An aspirin tablet. So how did the aspirin tablet get into that glass between the time, two minutes ago, when you took Drink Number Six, and just this minute when you took Drink Number Seven?"

Paul looked straight at Janet Dillberry. "In the same way that a small pill containing cyanide potassium got into this glass last night between the time Charles Dillberry took Drink Number Six and the time he took Drink Number Seven."

Fledge stared, his mouth open.

"Don't look so startled Fledge," said Paul. "It was no optical illusion. It was something so simple it excaped our notice completely. It was — ice."

The stunned inspector was barely able to repeat the word. "Ice?"

"That's right. That hard substance that melts in water. Mrs. Dillberry simply took her nice, new pill full of cyanide potassium and brought it with her to the kitchen a few minutes before the lecture. From

the refrigerator in the kitchen she removed an ice-tray and selected a big ice cube. She let a steady stream of hot water run on the center of the cube for several seconds. If you've ever tried this, you'll know that it succeeds in boring a small hole about halfway through the cube. In this little hole she placed the pill. That was the first step.

"Next, she had to have something to stop up the hole with. There was very little time, so she snipped off a tiny wad of soap — there's a bar in every kitchen — and stuffed it into the hole. The little pill was now packed tightly in, surrounded by ice, wadded in by soap. Mrs. Dillberry calmly dropped this ice cube, containing enough cyanide to kill three men, into a glass, filled the glass with water, and placed it on the table in front of her husband.

"It was so safe, wasn't it, Mrs. D? When the ice melted, the cyanide potassium, now completely dissolved, would be released, and Professor Dillberry would drink it down with the water. It would take the ice at least fifteen minutes to melt in this cold weather. For fifteen minutes that glass of water was harmless. At the end of fifteen minutes it was deadly. The police could never prove that you placed the poison in your husband's glass *before* he started to speak. If you had, why didn't the first sip kill him? Why didn't the first sip kill Mrs. Beegle? On the other hand, the police could never prove that the poison was placed in the glass *after* your husband started to talk — because two hundred people and two policemen saw with their own eyes that it wasn't.

"Extremely subtle, Mrs. D. Smooth, efficient, and no trace. That is, no trace except for a small wad of soap left in the bottom of the glass, just as a small wad of soap has been left in the bottom of the glass I'm holding in my hand. It was the soap that gave you away. It was the soap that caused Professor Dillberry to make the sour face which Mr. Remington noticed. A small particle of the stuff must have drifted loose and found its way down his throat. And it was the soap that told me the whole story of what was happening in that glass last night. Soap, water, and cyanide: a simple recipe for a new kind of weapon — *delayed action* poison."

"Q"

Katherine Fullerton Gerould once made the statement that the great American short story writers, as of 1924, included Wilbur Daniel Steele, H. G. Dwight, John Russell, Ben Ames Williams, and Charles Caldwell Dobie. She went on to say that Charles Caldwell Dobie did not belong to that hardboiled school which uses obscenity for characterization and revolver-shots for action. The human mind, she concluded, was Mr. Dobie's chief preoccupation.

Here is the second of the "Three Tales of Flavio Minetti" — one of Mr. Dobie's subtlest probings of the human mind. In this story Flavio Minetti, that "strangely fascinating" hunchback of San Francisco, plans to murder a man by using the slowest and most powerful poison in the world — the poison of the mind. Flavio Minetti had tried nearly every slow way except mental murder — killing without any weapon save the mind — and he fancied that too would be exquisite. . . .

A brilliant dissection of a brilliant modus operandi. . . . You will not soon forget the overtones of malignant and calculated evil conjured up within the misshapen form of one Flavio Minetti, Murderer.

THE OPEN WINDOW

by CHARLES CALDWELL DOBIE

"IT HAPPENED just as I have said," Fernet reiterated, tossing the wine-dregs from his glass.

The company at the table looked instinctively toward the kitchen. Berthe was bringing a fresh pot of coffee. They all followed Fernet's example, lifting their empty glasses for her to serve them in their turn.

The regular boarders of the Hôtel de France, after the fashion of folks who find their meal a duty to be promptly despatched, had departed, but the transients still lingered over their *café noir* and cognac in the hope that something exciting might materialize.

As the sound of Fernet's voice died away, a man who had been sitting in an extreme corner of the room scraped back his chair and rose. Fernet looked up. The man was a hunchback, and, instead of paying for his meal and leaving, he crossed over and said to Fernet:

"I see, my young fellow, that you are discussing something of interest with your friends here. Would it be impertinent for me to inquire into the subject?"

Fernet drew out a chair for the newcomer, who seated himself.

"By no means. We were discussing a murder and suicide. The murdered man was an Italian fisherman who lodged at the Hôtel des Alpes Maritimes, the suicide was a musician named Suvaroff."

"Ah," said the hunchback, cracking his fingers. "Why a murder and suicide? Why not two murders?"

"Because," returned Fernet, pompously, "it was abundantly proved to the contrary. This man Suvaroff suffered from neuralgia; the Italian fisherman was given to playing the accordion at all hours of the night. Suvaroff was, in addition, a musician — a high-strung person. The Italian's playing was abominable — even his landlady says as much. In short, Suvaroff deliberately killed this simple-minded peasant because of his music. Then, in a fit of remorse, he killed himself. I was on the coroner's jury. I should know what I am talking about."

"Oh, without doubt," agreed the hunchback, smiling amiably. "But, as I remember, the knives in both cases were plunged hilt-deep into the backs of the victims. One does not usually commit suicide in this fashion."

Fernet coldly eyed the curiously handsome face of his antagonist. "It seems you know more about this thing than a coroner's jury."

"It seems I do — granting that such an important item was left out of the evidence."

"Then, my good sir, will you be good enough to tell me who *did* kill Suvaroff, since you do not admit that he died by his own hand?"

The hunchback cracked his fingers again. "That is simple enough. Suvaroff was killed by the same person who stabbed the Italian."

"And who might that be, pray?"

The hunchback rose with a malignant smile. "Ah, if I told you that you would know as much as I do."

And with that he walked calmly over to the proprietor, put down thirty-five cents for his meal upon the counter, and without another word left the room.

A silence fell upon the group. Everybody stared straight ahead, avoiding the eye of his neighbour. It was as if something too terrifying to be remarked had passed them.

Finally, a thick-set man at Fernet's right, said, uneasily, "Come, I must be going."

The others rose; only Fernet remained seated.

"What," said another, "haven't you finished?"

"Yes," returned Fernet, gloomily, "but I am in no hurry."

He sat there for an hour, alone, holding his head between his hands. Berthe cleared off the soiled plates, wiped the oilcloth-covered tables, began noisily to lay the pewter knives and forks for the morning meal. At this Fernet stirred himself and, looking up at her, said:

"Tell me, who was the hunchback who came and sat with us? Does he live here — in San Francisco?"

"His name is Flavio Minetti," she

replied. "They tell me that he is quite mad."

"Ah, that accounts for many things," said Fernet, smiling with recovered assurance. "I must say he is strangely fascinating."

Berthe looked at him sharply and shrugged. "For my part, he makes me shiver every time I see him come in the door. When I serve him my hand shakes. And he continually cracks his fingers and says to me: 'Come, Berthe, what can I do to make you smile? Would you laugh if I were to dance for you? I would give half my life only to see you laughing. Why are you so sad?' . . . No, I wish he would never come again."

"Nevertheless, I should like to see him once more."

"He comes always on Thursdays for chicken."

"Thanks," said Fernet, as he put on his hat.

Fernet walked directly to his lodgings that night. He had a room in an old-fashioned house on the east side of Telegraph Hill. The room was shabby enough, but it caught glimpses of the bay and there was a gnarled pepper-tree that came almost to its windows and gave Fernet a sense of eternal, though grotesque, spring. Even his landlord was unusual — a professional beggar who sat upon the curb, with a ridiculous French poodle for company, and sold red and green pencils.

This landlord was sitting out by the front gate as Fernet entered.

"Ah, Pollitto," said Fernet, halting before the old man and snapping his fingers at the poodle, who lay crouched before his master, "I see you are enjoying this fine warm night."

"You are wrong," replied the beggar. "I am merely sitting here hoping that some one will come along and rent my front room."

"Then it is vacant?"

"Naturally," replied the old man, with disagreeable brevity, and Fernet walked quickly up to his room.

"Why do I live in such a place?" he asked himself, surveying the four bare walls. "Everything about it is abominable, and that beggar, Pollitto, is a scoundrel. I shall move."

He crossed over to the window and flung it open. The pepper-tree lay before him, crouching in the moonlight. He thought at once of Flavio Minetti.

"He is like this pepper-tree," he said, aloud, "beautiful even in his deformity. No, I would not trade this pepper-tree for a dozen of the straightest trees in the world." He stepped back from the window, and, lighting a lamp, set it upon a tottering walnut table. "Ah, André Fernet," he mused, chidingly, "you are always snared by what is unusual.

You should pray to God that such folly does not lead you to disaster."

André Fernet shivered and sighed. "Yes," he repeated, again and again, "they are alike. They both are at once beautiful and hideous, and they have strange secrets. . . . Well, I shall go on Thursday again, and maybe I shall see him. Who knows, if I am discreet he may tell me who killed this ridiculous musician Suvaroff."

On the next Thursday night, when Fernet entered the dining-room of the Hôtel de France his glance rested immediately upon Flavio Minetti. To his surprise, the hunchback rose, drawing a chair out as he did so, and beckoning Fernet to be seated next him. For a moment Fernet hesitated. Berthe was just bringing on the soup.

"What! Are you afraid?" she said, mockingly, as she passed.

This decided Fernet. He went and sat beside Minetti without further ado.

"Ah, I was expecting you!" cried the hunchback, genially.

"Expecting *me?*" returned Fernet. His voice trembled, though he tried to speak boldly.

"Yes. Women are not the only inquisitive animals in the world. What will you have — some wine?"

Fernet allowed Minetti to fill his glass.

Other boarders began to drift in. Minetti turned his back upon Fernet, speaking to a newcomer at his left. He did not say another word to his companion all evening.

Fernet ate and drank in silence. "What did I come for and why am I staying?" he kept asking himself. "This man is mocking me. First of all, he greets me as if I were his boon companion, and next he insults me openly and before everybody in the room. As a matter of fact, he knows no more than I do about Suvaroff's death."

But he continued to sit beside the hunchback all through the meal, and as fruit was put on the table he touched Minetti on the arm and said, "Will you join me in a *café royal?*"

"Not here . . . a little later. I can show you a place where they really know how to make them. And, besides, there are tables for just two. It is much more private."

Fernet's heart bounded and sank almost in one leap. "Let us go now, then," he said, eagerly.

"As you wish," replied Minetti.

Fernet paid for two dinners, and they reached for their hats.

"Where are you going?" asked Berthe, as she opened the door.

Fernet shrugged. "I am in his hands," he answered, sweeping his arm toward Minetti.

"You mean you will be," mut-

tered the hunchback.

Fernet heard him distinctly.

"Perhaps I had better leave him while there is yet time!" flashed through his mind. But the next instant he thought, contemptuously: "What harm can he do me? Why, his wrist is no bigger than a pullet's wing. Bah! You are a fool, André Fernet!"

The hunchback led the way, trotting along in a fashion almost Oriental. At the end of the second block he turned abruptly into a wine-shop; Fernet followed. They found seats in a far corner, away from the billiard-tables. A waiter came forward. They gave their orders.

"Be sure," said Minetti to the waiter, "that we have plenty of anisette and cognac in the coffee."

The man flicked a towel contemptuously and made no answer.

"Now," Minetti continued, turning a mocking face toward Fernet, "what can I do for you, my friend?"

Fernet was filled with confusion. "I . . . you . . ." he stammered. "Really, there is nothing."

"Nonsense," interrupted Minetti. "You wish to know who killed Suvaroff. But I warn you, my friend, it is a dreadful thing to share such a secret."

He looked at Fernet intently. The younger man shuddered. "Nevertheless, I should like to know," Fernet said, distinctly.

"Well, then, since you are so determined — it was I who killed him."

Fernet stared, looked again at the hunchback's puny wrists, and began to laugh. "*You!* Do you take me for a fool?" And as he said this he threw back his head and laughed until even the billiard-players stopped their game and looked around.

"What are you laughing at?" asked the hunchback, narrowing his eyes.

Fernet stopped. He felt a sudden chill as if someone had opened a door. "I am laughing at you," he answered.

"I am sorry for that," said Minetti, dryly.

"Why?"

The hunchback leaned forward confidentially. "Because I kill everyone who laughs at me. It — it is a little weakness I have."

The waiter came with two glasses of steaming coffee. He put them down on the table, together with a bottle of cognac and a bottle of anisette.

"Ah, that is good!" cried the hunchback, rubbing his hands together. "The proprietor is my friend. He is going to let us prepare our own poison!"

Fernet felt himself shivering. "Come," he thought, "this will

never do! The man is either mad or jesting." He reached for the anisette.

"Let me pour it for you," suggested Flavio Minetti. "Your hand is shaking so that you will spill half of it on the floor."

The hunchback's voice had a note of pity in it. Fernet relinquished his hold upon the bottle.

"Don't look so frightened," continued Minetti. "I shall not kill you here. The proprietor is a friend of mine, and, besides I give everybody a sporting chance. It adds to the game."

That night André Fernet was restless. He lay on his bed looking out at the blinking lights of the harbour. "I must stop drinking coffee," he muttered to himself.

Finally he fell asleep, and when he did he had a strange dream. It seemed that the pepper-tree outside his window suddenly began to move in the night breeze and its long green boughs became alive, twisting like the relentless tentacles of a devil-fish. Its long green boughs became alive, crawling along the ground, flinging themselves into the air, creeping in at André Fernet's open window. He lay upon the bed as he had done earlier in the evening, watching the harbour lights. Slowly the green boughs writhed over the faded carpet, scaled the bedpost, and fell upon the bed. André Fernet waited, motionless. He felt the green tentacles close about his legs, clasp his hands, slide shudderingly across his throat. Yet he made no move to free himself. It was only when he felt a breath upon his cheek that he turned slightly, and instead of the tentacle-like boughs of the pepper-tree he fancied himself staring down at the hands of Flavio Minetti. . . . He awoke with a start. The sun was pouring in at the open window. He got up quickly. A noisy clatter issued from the passageway. Fernet opened his door. Two men were carrying a trunk up the stairs. Pollitto, the beggar, walked behind.

"Ah, I see you have rented your front room," said Fernet, stepping out.

"Yes," returned the other. "It was taken as early as six o'clock this morning — by a hunchback."

Fernet stopped breathing. "A hunchback? Was his name Flavio Minetti?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

Fernet tried to smile. "He is a friend of mine," he answered, as he walked back into his room. "Perhaps it would be better if I moved away," he thought. "I do not like this room. Heaven knows why I have stayed this long. Is this fellow Minetti really mad, or merely making sport of me? I should not like to have him think that I am afraid of him. As for his story about Suvaroff, that is, of

course, ridiculous. If I thought otherwise, I should go at once to the . . . No, it is all a joke! I shall stay where I am. I shall not have it said that a little, mad, puny, twisted fellow frightened André Fernet out of his lodgings. Besides, it will be curious to watch his little game. What a beautiful morning it is, after all! And the pepper-tree — how it glistens in the sun! I should miss that pepper-tree if I moved away. But I must stop drinking *cafés royals*. They upset one. I do not know whether it is the coffee, or the cognac, or the anisette, or all three. Of course, that dream I had toward morning means nothing — but such dreams are unpleasant. I hate this place. But I shall not move now. No, I shall wait and see what happens."

Fernet did not see Minetti for some days. Indeed, he had dismissed the whole thing from his mind, when one night, returning home early, who should stop him on the stairway but the hunchback.

"Ah, so here you are!" called out Fernet, gaily, in spite of his rapidly beating heart. "I have been waiting for you to call on me ever since I heard that you were lodging under the same roof."

"I have been busy," replied the hunchback, laconically.

Fernet threw open his bedroom door and waved Minetti in.

"Busy?" he echoed, as he struck a light. "And what do you find that is so absorbing, pray?"

"You know my specialty," replied Minetti, flinging off his cap.

Fernet looked up sharply. A malignant look had crept into the hunchback's face.

"Oh, there is no doubt of it, he is quite mad!" said Fernet to himself. Then aloud: "Yes, I have been wanting to talk to you more about this. Take a seat and I shall make some coffee. For instance, do you always employ the knife in despatching your——"

"Scarcely," interrupted Minetti, quickly. "Slow poison has its fascinations. There is a very delicate joy in watching a gradual decline. It is like watching a green leaf fading before the breath of autumn. First a sickly pallor, then a yellowing, finally the sap dries completely, a sharp wind, a fluttering in the air, and it is all over. I have tried nearly every slow way — except mental murder. I fancy that, too, would be exquisite."

"Mental murder. . . . I do not understand."

Minetti stretched himself out and yawned. "Accomplishing the thing without any weapon save the mind."

Fernet picked up the coffee-pot and laughed. "Why, my dear fellow, it is too absurd! The thing cannot be done. You see, I am laughing at you again, but no matter."

"No, as you say, it is no matter. You can die only once."

Fernet's laughter stopped instantly. He went on with his preparation for coffee. Minetti changed the subject.

It turned out that there was no sugar in the cracked bowl. Fernet was putting on his hat to go out for some, when the hunchback stopped him.

"Sugar will not be necessary," he said. And as he spoke he drew a vial from his vest pocket and laid it upon the table beside the cups. "You know what these are, of course."

"Saccharine pellets?" inquired Fernet as he threw aside his hat.

Minetti replied with a grunt. Fernet poured out the coffee, set a spoon in each saucer, laid three French rolls upon a blue plate. Then he sat down.

"Permit me!" said Minetti, reaching for the vial and rolling a tiny pellet into his palm.

Fernet held up his cup; the hunchback dropped the pellet into it. Then he corked the vial tightly and laid it aside.

"You forgot to serve yourself," said Fernet.

"So I did!" answered Minetti, nonchalantly. "Well, no matter. I very often drink my coffee so — without sweetening."

Fernet drew back suddenly. Could it be possible that . . . The hunchback was staring at him with an ironical smile. Fernet shuddered.

"Drink your coffee!" Minetti commanded, sneeringly. "You are on the verge of a chill."

Fernet obeyed meekly. He felt for all the world like an animal caught in a trap. He tried to collect his thoughts. What had the hunchback been talking about?

"Slow poison!" muttered Fernet, "You were speaking of slow poison. How do you go about it?"

"Oh, that is easy! For instance, once in London I lodged next door to my victim. We became capital friends. And he was always calling me in for a bite of something to eat. Nothing elaborate — a bun and a cup of tea, or coffee and cake. Very much as we are doing now. He died in six months. It is no trick, you know, to poison a man who eats and drinks with you — especially drinks!"

As he said this the hunchback reached for the coffee-pot and poured Fernet another cupful. Then he uncorked the vial again and dropped a pellet into the steaming liquid.

"I do not think that I wish any more," protested Fernet.

"Nonsense! You are still shivering like an old woman with the palsy. Hot coffee will do you good."

"No," said Fernet, desperately, "I never drink more than one cup at a sitting. It keeps me awake, and

next morning my hand shakes and I am fit for nothing. I need a steady hand in my business."

"And what may that be, pray?"

"At present I am a draftsman. Some day, if I live long enough, I hope to be an architect."

"If you live long enough? You forget that you have laughed at *me*, my friend."

Fernet tried to appear indifferent. "What a droll fellow you are!" he cried, with sudden gaiety, rubbing his hands together. And without thinking, he reached for his coffee-cup and downed the contents in almost one gulp. He laid the cup aside quickly. He could feel the sweat starting out upon his forehead.

"There, you see," said Minetti, "the coffee has done you good already. You are perspiring, and that is a good sign. A hot drink at the right moment works wonders."

The next morning Pollitto stopped Fernet as he swung out the front gate to his work.

"What is the matter with you?" exclaimed the beggar.

"Why . . . what?" demanded Fernet, in a trembling voice. "Do I look so . . . ? Pray, tell me, is there anything unusual about me?"

"Why, your face . . . Have you looked at yourself in the glass? Your skin is the colour of stale pastry."

Fernet tried to laugh. "It is nothing. I have been drinking too much coffee lately. I must stop it."

It was a fine morning. The sun was shining and the air was brisk and full of little rippling breezes. The bay lay like a blue-green peacock ruffling its gilded feathers. The city had a genial, smiling countenance. But Fernet was out of humour with all this full-blown content. He had spent a wretched night — not sleepless, but full of disturbing dreams. Dreams about Minetti and his London neighbour and the empty sugar-bowl. All night he had dreamed about this empty sugar-bowl. It seemed that as soon as he had it filled Minetti would slyly empty it again. He tried stowing sugar away in his pockets, but when he put his hand in to draw out a lump a score or more of pellets spilled over the floor. Then he remembered saying:

"I shall call on Minetti's London neighbour. Maybe he will have some sugar."

He walked miles and miles, and finally beat upon a strange door. A man wrapped in a black coat up to his eyebrows opened to his knock.

"Are you Flavio Minetti's London neighbour?" he demanded, boldly.

The figure bowed. Fernet drew the cracked sugar-bowl from under his arm.

"Will you oblige me with a little sugar?" he asked, more politely.

The black-cloaked figure bowed and disappeared. Presently he came back. Fernet took the sugar-bowl from him. It struck him that the bowl felt very light. He looked down at his hands. The bowl had disappeared; only a glass vial lay in his palm. He removed the cork — a dozen or more tiny round pellets fell out. He glanced up quickly at Minetti's London neighbour; a dreadful smile glowed through the black cloak. Fernet gave a cry and hurled the vial in the face of his tormentor. Minetti's London neighbour let the black cloak fall, and André Fernet discovered that he was staring at himself. . . . He awakened soon after that and found that it was morning.

When he brushed his hair his hand had shaken so that the brush fell clattering to the floor. And he had spilled the cream for his morning coffee over the faded strip of carpet before the bureau. It had ended by his eating no breakfast at all. But he had drunk glass after glass of cold water.

After Pollitto's words he trembled more and more like a man with the ague, and before every saloon-door mirror he halted and took a brief survey of his face. Pollitto was right — his skin was dead and full of unhealthy pallor. It was plain that he could not work in his present condition. His trembling fingers could scarcely hold a pencil, much less guide it through the precise demands of a drafting-board. He decided to go to the library and read. But the books on architecture which always enthralled him could not hold his shifting attention. Finally, in despair, he went up to the librarian and said:

"Have you any books on poison?"

The woman eyed him with a cold, incurious glance. She consulted a catalogue and made a list for him.

He sat all day devouring books which the librarian had recommended. He did not even go out for lunch. He read historical and romantic instances with a keen, morbid relish; but when it came to the medical books his heart quickened and he followed causes and effects breathlessly. By nightfall he had a relentless knowledge of every poison in the calendar. He knew what to expect from arsenic or strychnine or vitriol. He learned which poisons destroyed tissues, which acted as narcotics, which were irritants. He identified the hemlock, the horse-chestnut, the deadly toadstools. In short, he absorbed and retained everything on the subject. It seemed that the world teemed with poisons; one could be sure of nothing. Even beautiful flowers were not to be trusted.

He was so upset by all he had read that he could scarcely eat din-

ner. He went to an obscure *pension* in a wretched basement, where he was sure he would be unknown, and, after two or three mouthfuls of soup and a spoonful of rice boiled with tomato, he rose, paid for his meal, and went out to tramp up and down past the tawdry shops of middle Kearny Street. He was trotting aimlessly in the direction of Market Street when he felt a tug at his coat-sleeve. He turned. Minetti was smiling up at him.

"Come," said the hunchback, "what is your hurry? Have you had coffee yet? I was thinking that——"

Fernet's heart sank at once. And yet he managed to say boldly: "I have given up drinking coffee. You can see for yourself what a wretched complexion I have. And today I have scarcely eaten."

"Pooh!" cried Minetti. "A cup of coffee will do you good."

Fernet began to draw away in futile terror. "No!" he protested, with frightened vehemence. "No, I tell you! I won't drink the stuff! It is useless for you to ——"

Minetti began to laugh with scornful good-humour. "What has come over you?" he drawled, half-closing his eyes. "Are you afraid?"

And as he said this Fernet glanced instinctively at the puny wrist, no bigger than a pullet's wing, and replied, boldly:

"Afraid? Of what? I told you last night I need a steady hand in my business, and today I have not been able to do any work."

Minetti's mirth softened into genial acquiescence. "Well, maybe you are right. But I must say you are not very companionable. Perhaps the coffee you have been drinking has not been made properly. You should take *something*. You do look badly. A glass of brandy? . . . No? . . . Ah, I have it — coffee made in the Turkish fashion. Have you ever drunk that?"

"No," replied Fernet, helplessly.

"Well, then," announced the hunchback, confidently, "we shall cross over to Third Street and have some Turkish coffee. I know a Greek café where they brew a cup that would tempt the Sultan himself. Have you ever seen it made? They use coffee pounded to a fine powder — a teaspoonful to a cup, and sugar in the same proportion. It is all put in together and brought to a boil. The result is indescribable! Really, you are in for a treat."

"If it is sweetened in the making," flashed through Fernet's mind, "at least we shall have no more of that pellet business."

"Yes — the result is quite indescribable," Minetti was repeating, "and positively no bad effects."

And as he said this he slipped his arm into Fernet's and guided him with gentle firmness toward the

Greek café in question. Fernet felt suddenly helpless and incapable of offering the slightest objection.

A girl took their orders.

"Two coffees . . . medium," Minetti repeated, decisively. "And will you have a sweet with it? They sell taffy made of sesame seeds and honey. Or you can have Turkish delight. Really, they are all quite delicious."

Fernet merely shrugged. Minetti ordered Turkish delight. The girl wiped some moisture from the marble table-top and walked toward the coffee-shelf.

"So you were not able to work today?" Minetti began, affably. "How did you put in the time?"

"At the library, reading."

"Something droll? A French novel or ——"

"Books on *poison!*" Fernet shot out with venomous triumph. "I know more than I did yesterday."

"How distressing!" purred Minetti. "Ignorance is more invulnerable than one fancies. Of course we are taught otherwise, but knowledge, you remember, was the beginning of all trouble. But you choose a fascinating subject. Some day when we get better acquainted I shall tell you all I know about it. Poison is such a subtle thing. It is everywhere — in the air we breathe, in the water we drink, in the food we eat. And it is at once swift and sluggish, painful and stupefying, obvious and incapable of analysis. It is like a beautiful woman, or a great joy, or love itself."

Fernet glanced up sharply. The hunchback had slid forward in his seat and his eyes glowed like two shaded pools catching greedily at the yellow sunlight of midday. Fernet shuddered.

The girl came back carrying cups of thick steaming coffee and soft lemon-coloured sweetmeats speared with two tiny silver forks. She set the tray down. Minetti reached for his coffee greedily, but Fernet sat back in his seat and allowed the waitress to place the second cup before him. As she did so the table shook suddenly and half of the hot liquid spilled over on the marble table-top. Fernet jumped up to escape the scalding trickle; the girl gave an apologetic scream; Minetti laughed strangely.

"It is all my fault!" cried the hunchback. "What stupidity! Pray be seated. My young woman, will you give the gentleman this coffee of mine? And get me another."

"Pardon me," Fernet protested, "but I cannot think of such a thing!" And with that he attempted to pass the coffee in question back to Minetti. But the hunchback would have none of it. Fernet broke into a terrified sweat.

"He has dropped poison into it!" he thought, in sudden panic. "Otherwise why should he be so anxious to

have me drink it? He kicked the table deliberately, too. And this cup of his — why was it not spilled also? No, he was prepared — it is all a trick!"

"Come, come, my friend," broke in Minetti, briskly, "drink your coffee while it is still hot! Do not wait for me. I shall be served presently. And try the sweetmeats; they are delicious."

"I am not hungry," replied Fernet, sullenly.

"No? Well, what of that? Sweetmeats and coffee are not matters of hunger. Really, you are more droll than you imagine!" Minetti burst into a terrifying laugh.

"He thinks I am afraid!" muttered Fernet.

And out of sheer bravado he lifted the cup to his lips. Minetti stopped laughing, but a wide smile replaced his diabolical mirth. The girl brought fresh coffee to the hunchback. He sipped it with frank enjoyment, but he did not once take his gaze from Fernet's pale face.

"Well," thought Fernet, "one cup of poison more or less will not kill me. . . . It is not as if he has made up his mind to finish me at once. He is counting on the exquisite joys of a prolonged agony." And he remembered Minetti's words: "It is like watching a green leaf fading before the breath of autumn. First a sickly pallor, then a yellowing, a sharp wind, a fluttering in the air. . . ." He tossed off the coffee in one defiant gulp. "He thinks that he has me in his power. But André Fernet is not quite a fool. I shall go away tomorrow!"

They went home as soon as Minetti finished his coffee. Fernet felt a sudden nausea; by the time he reached his lodgings his steps were unsteady and his head reeled. Minetti was kindness itself.

"Let me help you into bed," he insisted. "You must have a congestion. Presently I shall heat some water and give you a hot gin."

Fernet was too sick to protest. Minetti started the gas-stove and filled the kettle and went into his room for gin. Fernet dragged himself out of his clothes and crawled in between the sheets. Minetti came back. Fernet lay with his eyes half-closed, shivering. Finally the water boiled, and the hunchback brought Fernet a huge tumbler of gin and water with bits of lemon-peel and cloves floating in it. It tasted so good that Fernet forgot his terror for the moment. But when the tumbler was empty he felt helpless; he could scarcely lift his arms; so he lay flat upon his back, staring up at the ceiling. He tried to recall scraps of what he had been reading all afternoon. What was the name of the poison that left one paralyzed? He

could not remember. He found his movements becoming more and more difficult; he could scarcely turn in bed. Minetti brewed another toddy. Fernet could not hold the glass. He tried to push the tumbler away from his lips, but his efforts were useless. Minetti hovered above him with a bland, gentle smile, and Fernet felt the warm liquid trickling into his mouth and down his throat. In the midst of all this he lost consciousness. . . . Once or twice during the night Fernet had a wakeful interlude. Whenever he opened his eyes he saw Minetti sitting before the open window, gazing down at the twisted pepper-tree.

"Yes, they are both alike!" passed dimly through his mind. "They both are at once beautiful and hideous, and they have strange secrets! It is no use, I must go away — tomorrow."

In the morning Minetti was standing by the bed. "I have sent for the doctor," he said. But his voice sounded like that of one speaking from very far away.

The doctor came shortly after ten o'clock. He was a little wizened, old man with a profound air.

"He is a fraud!" thought Fernet. "He knows nothing!"

"Ah," said the doctor, putting a sly finger against his sharp nose, "our friend here has a nervous collapse. He should have a nurse!"

"A nurse!" exclaimed Minetti. "And, pray, what do you call me? Do you not think that ——"

"Well, we shall see! we shall see!" replied the doctor, rubbing his hands together. "But he will need all sorts of delicacies and ——"

Minetti moistened his lips with sleek satisfaction. "You cannot name a dish that I am not able to prepare."

"How about a custard? Today he should eat something light."

"A custard is simplicity itself," answered the hunchback, and he cracked his fingers.

Minetti went out with the doctor, and came back shortly, carrying eggs and a bottle of vanilla extract and sugar. Fernet lay helpless, watching him bustling about. Finally the delicacy was made and set away in a pan of water to cool. At noon Minetti brought a blue bowl filled with custard to the bedside. It looked inviting, but Fernet shook his head.

"I am not hungry," he lied.

The hunchback set the bowl down on a chair so that Fernet gazed upon it all day. The hunchback did not leave the room. He sat before the open window, reading from a thick book. Toward nightfall Fernet said to him:

"What do you find so interesting?"

Minetti darted a sardonic glance at his patient. "A book on *poison*. I did not realize that I had grown so rusty on the subject. Why, I remem-

ber scarcely enough to poison a field-mouse!"

He rose and crossed over to the bedside. "Do you not feel ready for the custard?"

Fernet cast a longing eye upon the yellow contents of the blue bowl.

"No. To tell the truth, I never eat it. But I should like a glass of water."

The hunchback drew water from the faucet. Fernet watched him like a ferret.

"At least," thought Fernet, "he cannot drop poison in the water secretly. It is well that I can see every move he makes at such a time. I should not like to die of thirst."

A little later Minetti removed the bowl and threw out its contents. Fernet looked on with half-closed eyes.

"What better proof could I have?" he mused. "If the custard were harmless he would eat it himself. I must get away tomorrow."

But the next day he felt weaker than ever, and when the doctor came Minetti said, in answer to questions:

"I made a delicious custard yesterday and he ate every bit. . . . An oyster stew? . . .with milk? I shall see that he has it at noon."

"God help me!" muttered Fernet. "Why does he lie like this? I must get the doctor's ear and tell him how things stand. I shall eat nothing — nothing! Thank heaven, I can drink water without fear."

At noon the oyster stew was ready. But Fernet would have none of it. "Oysters make me ill!" he said.

Minetti merely shrugged as he had done the previous day, and set the savoury dish upon a chair before the bed. It exuded tantalizing odours, until Fernet thought he would go mad with longing. Toward evening Minetti threw out the stew. And as before, when the doctor called the hunchback said:

"He ate a quart of stew, and there were plenty of oysters in it, I can tell you. Do you think that a chicken fried in olive-oil would be too hearty?"

Fernet groaned. "This is horrible — horrible!" he wept to himself. "I shall die like a starving rat with toasted cheese dangling just beyond reach. God help me to rouse myself! Surely the effects of the poison he has given me must soon wear off. . . . There he is, reading from that big book again. Perhaps he is contriving a way to put poison in my water even though I am able to watch him when he draws me a drink. . . . Poison — poison everywhere. It can even be administered with the prick of a needle. Why did I read about it? Chicken fried in olive-oil . . . what

torture!"

The chicken fried in olive-oil was a triumph — Fernet knew all this by the wisps of appetizing fragrance which drifted from the sizzling pan. Minetti made a great stir over the preparations. The tender flesh had to be rubbed thoroughly with garlic and well dusted with salt and pepper. And a quarter of a bottle of yellow-green olive-oil was first placed in the pan. When everything was ready and the chicken cooked to a turn, Minetti carried it to Fernet with a great flourish. Fernet gritted his teeth and turned his face away. He did not have the courage to invent an excuse. Minetti laid it on the chair as usual. For two hours Fernet was tortured with the sight of this tempting morsel, but at the sound of the doctor's step upon the stair the hunchback whisked away the chicken.

"His appetite?" Minetti said, echoing the doctor's query. "Why, one could not wish for better! Only this morning he despatched a chicken. As a matter of fact, he is always hungry."

"Well, well," beamed the doctor, "that is the best of signs, and it happens that way very often in nervous cases. You are a capital nurse, my good man."

At that moment Minetti was called downstairs by his landlord. Fernet struggled to lift himself; the doctor bent toward him.

"This hunchback," Fernet gasped, "he is trying to poison me. Already I have drunk four or five of his concoctions, and that is why I am in this condition . . . helpless. And he is lying when he says that I have eaten. I have touched nothing for three days."

The doctor laid the patient back upon the pillow.

"Poison you, my friend? And for what reason?"

"Because I laughed at him. In God's name, Doctor, see that you keep a straight face in his presence or else——"

The doctor patted Fernet's hand and straightened the sliding bedclothes. By this time Minetti had come back. The doctor and the hunchback whispered together in a far corner. Minetti laughed and tapped his head. At the door Fernet heard the doctor say:

"Just keep up the good work and the idea will pass. It happens that way in nervous cases. I shall not look in until next week unless. . . ."

Fernet groaned aloud.

"I must get away tomorrow. . . . I must get away tomorrow!" he kept on repeating.

By the end of the week the smell of food held no temptations for Fernet. Minetti stopped cooking.

And when a glass of water was drawn from the faucet, Fernet had difficulty in forcing his vision to answer the strain of a searching gaze.

"When my sight fails me," Fernet thought, dimly, "I shall either die of thirst or take the consequences."

When the doctor finally came again Fernet pretended to be asleep.

"He seems thinner," remarked the doctor, as if he had made an important discovery.

"Well, to tell the truth," replied the hunchback, "he has lost his appetite. I have fed him milk and eggs, but ——"

"There is nothing to do but be patient," said the doctor. "Medicine will do him no good. Just rest and food. Even a little starvation will not hurt him. People eat too much."

At this Fernet opened his eyes and broke into a laugh that startled even Minetti. The doctor looked offended.

"Well, he is in your hands," the old fraud said, pompously, to the hunchback. "Just keep up the good work ——"

Fernet laughed again.

"He is hysterical," proclaimed the doctor, with an air of supreme wisdom. "It happens that way very often in nervous cases."

And he walked out with great solemnity.

"Ah, I have offended him!" thought Fernet. "Well, now they will finish me — *together!*"

There followed days of delicious weakness. Fernet lay for the most part wrapped in the bliss of silver-blue visions. It seemed as if years were passing. He built shining cities, received the homage of kings, surrendered himself to the joys of ripe-lipped beauties. There were lucid intervals shot through with the malignant presence of Minetti and the puttering visits of the doctor. But these were like waking moments between darkness and dawn, filled with the half-conscious joy of a sleeper secure in the knowledge of a prolonged respite. In such moments Fernet would stir feebly and think:

"I must get away tomorrow!"

And there would succeed almost instantly a languid ecstasy at the thought that tomorrow was something remote and intangible that would never come.

At times the hunchback seemed like nothing so much as a heartless gaoler who, if he would, might open the door to some shining adventure. Gradually this idea became fixed and elaborated. Fernet's sight grew dimmer and dimmer, until he followed the presence of Minetti by the sounds he made.

"He is jingling something," Fernet would repeat, weakly. "Ah, it must be his keys! He is searching for the one that will set me free! . . . Now he is oiling the lock. . . . He has shut the door again. I am to be

held a while longer. . . . I am a caged bird and just beyond is the pepper-tree. It must be glistening now in the sunlight. Well, let him lock the door, for all the good it will do him. Is not the window always open? When the time comes I shall fly out the window and leave him here — alone. Then we shall see who has the best of this bargain."

And all the silver-blue visions would steal over him again, to be pierced briefly by the arrival of the wizened doctor.

"It is he who keeps me here!" Fernet would say to himself. "If it were not for him I could fly away — forever. Well, presently even he will lose his power."

One day a strange man stood at his bedside. Minetti was there also, and the old fraud of a doctor. The strange man drew back the covers and put his ear to Fernet's fluttering heart and went through other tiresome matters. . . . Finally he smoothed back the covers again, and as he did so he shook his head. He spoke softly, but Fernet heard him distinctly.

"It is too late. You should have called me sooner. He wishes to die . . . . There is nothing to be done.

"Yes, yes — it happens this way very often in nervous cases."

"I have done my best. I have given him food and drink. I have even starved him. But nothing seemed to do any good."

"No," said the stranger; "it is his mind. He has made up his mind that. . . . You can do nothing with a man who . . ."

Fernet closed his eyes.

"A man! They think I am a man. What stupidity! Can they not see that I am a bird? . . . They have gone out. He is locking the door again. . . . I can hear the keys jingle. . . . Well, let him lock the door if it gives him any pleasure. The window is open, and tonight . . ."

The footsteps of the departing visitors died away. A chuckling sound came to André Fernet and the thump of ecstatic fists brought down upon a bare table-top. The voice of Flavio Minetti was quivering triumphantly like the hot whisper of a desert wind through the room:

"Without any weapon save the mind! Ha! ha! ha! ha!"

Fernet turned his face toward the wall. "He is laughing at *me* now. Well, let him laugh while he may . . . . Is not the window open? Tomorrow I shall be free . . . and he? . . . No, *he* cannot fly — he has a broken wing. . . . The window is open, André Fernet!"

We are proud to bring you the first Dr. Gideon Fell radio story ever to appear in print.

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THE HANGMAN WON'T WAIT

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

The Characters

DR. GIDEON FELL . . . . . *the detective*
HELEN BARTON . . . . . *the accused*
COLONEL ANDREWS . . . . *Governor of Maidhurst Prison*
HERBERT GALE . . . . . *brother of the victim*
HARRIS, *the* WARDER; WOMEN PRISONERS; *etc.*

NARRATOR: He comes striding towards us now, beaming like Old King Cole. You can probably hear him chuckle. If he wheezes a little, that's due to his weighing more than three hundred pounds.

(*Dr. Fell is faintly but sternly heard in the background. He has a powerful voice; its uproaring mannerisms suggest a combination of Dr. Johnson and G. K. Chesterton.*)

DR. FELL: Slander, sir. Gross slander.

NARRATOR: You notice the three chins, and the bandit's moustache, and the eyeglasses on the black ribbon. He removes his hat with old-school courtesy. Don't try to bow, Doctor! He is Gideon Fell, doctor of philosophy and expert in crime. If he tells us something about the Barton case . . .

DR. FELL: (*Majestically*) Sir, I have only one remark to make about the Barton case. Everybody was wrong.

NARRATOR: I don't quite follow that.

DR. FELL: The judge was wrong. The jury were wrong. The prosecution was wrong. The defense was wrong.

NARRATOR: But, Dr. Fell, you can't have a murder case in which everybody is wrong!

DR. FELL: (*Proudly*) In *my* cases,

sir, you can have practically anything.

NARRATOR: Yes. That's true. But . . .

DR. FELL: I want you to imagine yourself in the position of that girl, Helen Barton.

NARRATOR: Well?

DR. FELL: Imagine yourself waking up suddenly, in the middle of the night. You're terrified, but you don't know why. The room is cold and nearly dark. All of a sudden you realize it's a room you've never seen before. There's a queer smell, like old stone and disinfectant. And there's no sound except . . .

(*As the voice fades, we hear the notes of a heavy bell— suggesting a clock in a tower— strike four.*)

(*Helen Barton speaks. She is about twenty-five; she has a pleasant voice.*)

HELEN: (*Dazedly*) I . . . I . . . (*With a start*) What is it? What was that?

(*The first woman who speaks gives the impression of being elderly, stout and motherly: subdued but cheerful. The second woman is more thin and acid. They are Londoners, not quite cockney.*)

FIRST WOMAN: (*Soothingly*) Now lean back in your bed, dearie. It's all right!

SECOND WOMAN: Yes, take it easy, miss.

HELEN: (*Still dazedly*) I . . . I was dreaming.

FIRST WOMAN: You were having a nightmare, dearie. But it's all right now. Nothing's going to hurt you.

SECOND WOMAN: Not yet.

FIRST WOMAN: (*Fiercely*) Be quiet, Hannah!

SECOND WOMAN: (*Sulkily relenting*) All right, all right! Would you like us to turn on all the lights, miss?

HELEN: Please— would you do that? You see, I don't understand this! Where am I? And how did I get here? And who are *you*?

SECOND WOMAN: (*Wearily*) Now don't start that all over again, please!

HELEN: (*Crying out*) Start *what* all over again?

SECOND WOMAN: Saying you've lost your memory, and don't even know what your name is.

HELEN: Are you insane? Of course I know what my name is! I'm Helen Barton.

SECOND WOMAN: Ah!

HELEN: But it's all I do know. Where am I? And why on earth is it so cold?

SECOND WOMAN: Well! That's not unusual, you know, for England in the middle of December.

HELEN: (*Slowly*) Did you say . . . December?

FIRST WOMAN: (*Falsely cheery*)

That's right, dearie. Eighteenth of December.

HELEN: You're fooling me. You're playing a trick on me. (*With growing wildness*) My head feels queer, and I want to start crying, but I won't. It's not December! It's the end of August. I was going up to see Philip. That's it! I was going up to see Philip!

FIRST WOMAN: Philip?

HELEN: Philip Gale. The man I'm going to marry.

SECOND WOMAN: (*Awed*) 'Strewth!

FIRST WOMAN: Be quiet, Hannah! And don't turn on these lights yet!

SECOND WOMAN: (*Alarmed*) She's having us on! She . . .

FIRST WOMAN: Hannah, this child's shaking all over; and, so help me, she *don't* know where she is! (*Cajolingly*) Listen, dearie. I'm going to sit down on the bed beside you. (*a creak*) Now take my hands. Hold 'em. Tight!

HELEN: What's wrong? Why are you looking at me like that?

SECOND WOMAN: This is Maidhurst Prison, miss.

FIRST WOMAN: Steady, dearie!

HELEN: I'm still dreaming! I must be! You can't mean *I'm* in prison?

FIRST WOMAN: Now look, dearie. I'm afraid it's worse than that.

HELEN: Worse than that?

FIRST WOMAN: Look over there. You see where there's a little bit of fire in the grate?

HELEN: Well?

FIRST WOMAN: And paper on the wall, and pictures? And a carpet on the floor . . .

SECOND WOMAN: (*Fiercely*) Why can't you come out straight and tell her? (*flatly*) They're going to hang you in the morning, miss. This is the condemned cell.

(*Strong, harsh music up. As this fades, we hear the voice of Dr. Fell.*)

DR. FELL: "With sudden shock the prison clock
Smote on the shivering air . . ."

(*Five slow notes of a heavy bell.*)

DR. FELL: But I won't quote that any further. I have too vivid a memory of sitting up that night with Colonel Andrews, the Governor of the Prison. Over here you'd call him the Warden. It was in a little office, with the lampshade tilted so that I could see his face. And he said . . .

(*Colonel Andrews's voice suggests a thinnish middle aged man with a military curtness but a fussy and worried manner.*)

ANDREWS: I hate executions. Loathe 'em! Can't even sleep the night before. If you hadn't offered to come here and save my life . . .

DR. FELL: This is a strange place, sir, to talk of saving lives.

ANDREWS: It's no good being sentimental about the thing. That's the law. *I* didn't make it.

DR. FELL: But I gather you're not exactly happy about this case?

ANDREWS: (*Abruptly*) I'm not, and that's a fact. Mind you, there's no doubt whatever about the girl's guilt!

DR. FELL: I am gratified to hear it.

ANDREWS: (*Querulously*) But if only she'd confess! Most of 'em do, you know.

DR. FELL: They confess to you?

ANDREWS: To me or to the hangman. Not often to the chaplain, because they think he'll threaten 'em with the hereafter. But when Kirkwood goes in with the strap to bind their arms, he says to 'em, "I don't like to think I'm doing something that would be on my conscience. So if you'd care to tell me . . ."

DR. FELL: Quite a sensitive fellow, your hangman.

ANDREWS: Look here, I'm serious!

DR. FELL: So am I.

ANDREWS: Sometimes I wish I had any job in the world but mine. If only the girl would confess! If she'd just stop this nonsense about "not remembering."

DR. FELL: Not remembering what?

ANDREWS: Not remembering how she shot Philip Gale! Not remembering anything, even her own name! Total amnesia.

DR. FELL: (*Gravely*) Sir, you frighten me. Do you mean to say that a woman suffering from loss of memory can be tried and sentenced to death?

ANDREWS: No! Not if she really *has* lost her memory.

DR. FELL: Well, then?

ANDREWS: But this defense was a fake.

DR. FELL: You're quite sure of that?

ANDREWS: Naturally! The judge would never have allowed it to come to trial if he hadn't been convinced she was shamming. Even then, she might have got off with a life sentence or even with manslaughter if it hadn't been for the nature of the crime.

DR. FELL: She didn't cut anybody up, I hope?

ANDREWS: No; but it was almost as bad. She shot a man who had raised his hands and begged for mercy. That completely damned her in the eyes of the jury.

DR. FELL: And yet you have doubts.

ANDREWS: (*Angrily*) I tell you, I *haven't* any doubts! And in any case it's none of my business.

DR. FELL: How has she acted since she's been here?

ANDREWS: Oh, a model prisoner. But I wish she'd stop this business of seeming to be in a daze. It's getting on my nerves.

DR. FELL: I rather think the prison itself would get on *my* nerves. I looked into your execution shed once, and I didn't want to look again.

ANDREWS: You get used to it, after a while.

DR. FELL: Helen Barton won't. Tell me about her.

ANDREWS: (*Brooding*) Nice girl, too. I knew her grandfather.

DR. FELL: She lived near here?

ANDREWS: Yes! Born and bred in Maidhurst. She got mixed up with a thoroughgoing swine named Philip Gale. Crazy about him. Wouldn't hear a word against him. Then he threw her over for a woman with money.

DR. FELL: I see.

ANDREWS: He had a bungalow on Whiterose Hill. She went up there one Sunday afternoon.

DR. FELL: Alone?

ANDREWS: Yes. Herbert Gale, Philip's brother, heard them screaming at each other. He ran in to see what was wrong. Philip was trying to chase the girl out. She grabbed a .32 revolver out of a table drawer, and told Philip to put up his hands. That scared him, and he did put up his hands. Then she shot him dead.

DR. FELL: And afterwards?

ANDREWS: Afterwards she "couldn't remember."

DR. FELL: Couldn't remember anything?

ANDREWS: Pretended she didn't even recognize her own family. She said, "Who is Philip Gale?"

DR. FELL: (*Reflectively*) And you hang her tomorrow morning.

ANDREWS: Yes.

DR. FELL: Without ever hearing her side of the case.

ANDREWS: Confound it, man, there's no doubt about the evidence!

DR. FELL: Are you sure?

ANDREWS: She killed Philip Gale. Gale's brother Herbert saw her do it. This hypocrisy about "not remembering" . . .

DR. FELL: Emotional shock could do just that, you know.

ANDREWS: She wasn't so emotionally shocked that it disturbed her aim. She drilled him clean through the heart at fifteen feet. The bullet entered in a dead straight line through coat, waistcoat, shirt, and heart. You could have run a pencil through the holes. (*Angrily*) Now don't sit there puffing out your cheeks and waving a cigar at me! I'm only . . .

DR. FELL: (*Quietly*) Tell me, Colonel Andrews. Aren't you talking to convince yourself?

ANDREWS: No!

DR. FELL: I was thinking of that girl. Suppose she *is* telling the truth. Suppose she *has* lost her memory. (*Andrews protests*) All right! You don't believe that. But suppose it! And then suppose, in some black hour just before the hangman comes, that her memory returns.

ANDREWS: Don't talk rubbish!

DR. FELL: Sir, I have lived long enough to know that mental suffering is the cruellest form of suffering on this earth. Imagine yourself in that position. You come out of a daze, into what you thought was a safe and pleasant world. You don't know where you are. You don't know what's happened. You only know that when the clock strikes eight they are going to take you out and . . .

(*A scream, very high and shrill, heard at a distance. Short pause.*)

ANDREWS: (*Clearing his throat*) Did you hear that?

DR. FELL: Yes.

ANDREWS: Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

DR. FELL: Yes.

ANDREWS: (*Shakily*) It isn't possible . . . ?

DR. FELL: I very much fear it is.

ANDREWS: (*Blankly*) Sometimes, you know, we have to use drugs.

DR. FELL: Drugs?

ANDREWS: Yes. When we take them to the execution shed. It's only a short distance, and we try to get it over in a matter of seconds. But sometimes they can't walk.

(*Sharp rapping on a door.*)

ANDREWS: Yes? What is it?

(*The door opens. A warder, middle-aged and rather hoarse, speaks.*)

WARDER: Beg-pardon, sir. But I thought I'd better get you. Or the doctor. Or the chaplain. Or both.

ANDREWS: What's the matter with you, man? You're as white as a ghost!

WARDER: Can't 'elp that, sir. I've been a warder at this place for a matter of fifteen years; but I never knew anything like *this*.

ANDREWS: (*Noncommittally*) It's the . . . upstairs room, I suppose? Miss Barton?

WARDER: Yessir.

ANDREWS: Hysterical?

WARDER: Yessir. Shesays . . . well, she (*significantly*) *says* she remembers now.

ANDREWS: (*Still noncommittal*) I see.

WARDER: She's carrying on something awful, sir. But that ain't all. She claims she never done it.

DR. FELL: (*Sharply*) What's that?

WARDER: She claims she never killed Mr. Gale at all.

DR. FELL: (*Explosively*) Never killed . . . ?

ANDREWS: Any other disturbances in the building?

WARDER: Well, sir, they're a bit restless in A Wing.

ANDREWS: That's usual.

WARDER: Yessir. And there's a bloke . . . outside the prison, I mean . . . who keeps hanging about in front of the main gate. You can see him by the streetlamp. First he'll take a few little quick steps back and forth. Then he'll run and stick his face against the bars of

the gate. Then he'll go back to pacing again. Fair gave me the creeps, even before this other thing.

DR. FELL: You don't happen to know who he is?

WARDER: It's the other Mr. Gale, sir. Herbert Gale. I hadn't the heart to chase him away.

ANDREWS: All right, Harris. Go ahead. I'll be along in a minute.

WARDER: Yessir.

(*The door closes.*)

DR. FELL: So the girl claims to be innocent! You heard that, eh?

ANDREWS: Yes. I heard it.

DR. FELL: What do you mean to do?

ANDREWS: I'll see the girl, of course. But it won't affect the issue.

DR. FELL: Not even if she does happen to be innocent?

ANDREWS: (*Breaking out*) Fell, in the name of heaven try to understand my position!

DR. FELL: Believe me, I do understand it. A jury convicted this girl of murder. Her appeal was dismissed. The Home Secretary has refused to intervene on behalf of the King. You couldn't do anything, even if you wanted to. You couldn't even appeal to the Home Secretary without new evidence . . .

ANDREWS: Exactly!

DR. FELL: And it's too late for new evidence, because you can't just accept the word of Helen Barton.

ANDREWS: All the same, I'm dreading this interview. It's against regulations, but I wish you'd come along with me.

DR. FELL: (*Roaring*) If there were only *something* . . .

ANDREWS: (*Querulously*) There isn't. Where's that whiskey? I think a little stimulant . . .

DR. FELL: *She* will need the stimulant.

ANDREWS: It's a cold night.

DR. Fell. It will be colder yet, where *she's* going.

(*Strong, harsh music up. This fades into the heavy notes of the prison clock, striking six.*)

HELEN: (*Moaning*) But I didn't do it! I tell you, I didn't do it!

SECOND WOMAN: Steady, miss.

FIRST WOMAN: It's all right, dearie. The Governor and the big stout gentleman believe you didn't do it.

HELEN: Oh, no they don't! You needn't try to fool me! Look at them over there in the corner, whispering!

ANDREWS: (*Under his breath*) Fell, she's lying.

HELEN: I heard that! You said, "Fell, she's lying." But I'm not lying! I'm not!

SECOND WOMAN: Miss, you've got to pull yourself together.

FIRST WOMAN: (*Heartily*) And have a nice breakfast. What would you like for breakfast?

HELEN: (*Bewildered*) Breakfast?

FIRST WOMAN: You can have anything you want for breakfast this morning. Anything at all!

HELEN: Please listen to me! When I first woke up, I didn't even remember Philip was dead. I thought I was still . . . going to marry him. Then it came back to me.

ANDREWS: Yes?

HELEN: I remember standing outside Philip's bungalow, on a hot day with the sun in my eyes. I heard a shot inside the bungalow. I ran into the living room, and found Philip lying on the floor by the couch, with his mouth open and blood on his chest. But that's all I do remember. Something hit me.

ANDREWS: Something *hit* you?

HELEN: On the head. Or that's what it seemed like. Please!

ANDREWS: The doctors found no injury to your head, you know.

HELEN: (*Desperately*) I tell you . . .

DR. FELL: One moment!

(*Dead silence. We hear slow, heavy, lumbering footsteps crossing the floor, and the bump of a cane. Dr. Fell clears his throat.*)

DR. FELL: Miss Barton, can you forgive the intrusion of an old buffer who sincerely wants to help you?

HELEN: (*Controlling herself*) I'm s-sorry, Dr. Fell. I'll try to be sensible.

DR. FELL: (*Surprised*) You know who I am?

HELEN: Everybody knows those eyeglasses and that moustache. But I thought you were always laughing. (*Bitterly*) If you can find anything to laugh at in *this* situation . . .

DR. FELL: Believe me, Miss Barton, I am not laughing. Now tell me. When you arrived at the bungalow, Philip Gale was already dead?

HELEN: (*Fiercely*) Yes!

DR. FELL: You didn't go up there to quarrel with him?

HELEN: No! And why should I have killed him anyway? I only went to tell him I was through. Finished! Fed up with him! I . . . oh, what's the use?

DR. FELL: They haven't told you, then, that there's a witness who claims to have seen you shoot Gale?

HELEN: (*Astounded*) A witness? Who?

DR. FELL: Herbert Gale.

HELEN: (*Not even angry, merely wondering.*) But that's a lie!

DR. FELL: You didn't take a .32 revolver out of the table drawer?

HELEN: This is the first time I've even *heard* of any revolver! Please believe that!

DR. FELL: You didn't order Philip to put up his hands? And then, when he did put up his hands . . .

ANDREWS: (*Interjecting*) . . . high above his head . . .

DR. FELL: You didn't shoot him from a distance of about fifteen feet?

HELEN: No! No! No!

ANDREWS: Your fingerprints were on the revolver. You were still holding it in your hand when Herbert brought a policeman.

DR. FELL: (*Thoughtfully*) Just who is this brother, this Herbert Gale?

HELEN: (*Starting to laugh*) He's the *good* member of the family.

FIRST WOMAN: (*Urgently*) Now steady, dearie!

HELEN: I c-can't help it! Herbert is the good boy where Philip was the bad one. Younger than Philip. Terribly respectable; pillar of the church; never smokes or drinks. Has to work hard, because Philip inherited what money they had. Oh, let me laugh! It's too funny!

ANDREWS: (*Guardedly*) Herbert's word certainly carries weight.

HELEN: It's carried weight against me, hasn't it? Why should he want to get me hanged? Why should he tell such a complete pack of lies?

DR. FELL: Yes. I wonder why.

HELEN: Every second I imagine I'm going to wake up and find myself back in that living-room again. Looking at Philip's body! Just standing and staring at it, and feeling sick! And . . . of all things to think of at a time like that! . . . wondering why he was wearing a waistcoat on such a hot day . . .

(*Slight pause.*)

ANDREWS: (*Sharply*) What's the matter with you, Fell?

FIRST WOMAN: (*Under her breath*) Why is that stout gentlemen rolling his eyes like that?

SECOND WOMAN: Off his rocker, if you ask me.

DR. FELL: (*Explosively*) Archons of Athens! What an idiot I've been! What a turnip! What a dunce!

ANDREWS: (*Scandalized*) Lower your voice!

DR. FELL: The murdered man was wearing a waistcoat! You told me so yourself.

ANDREWS: Well? What if I did?

DR. FELL: (*As though awed*) The murdered man was wearing a waistcoat on a hot day! Grasp that beautiful fact! Keep it in splendour before you! Three hours of sheer nightmare, and all because I never thought of the waistcoat!

FIRST WOMAN: (*Under her breath*) Lummy, Hannah, he really *is* off his chump!

DR. FELL: (*Eagerly*) Let me ask you just one thing. What happened to the court-exhibits in the Gale case?

ANDREWS: As a matter of fact, we've still got 'em. The case was tried at the Maidhurst sessions-house, you know.

DR. FELL: (*Pouncing*) You've still

got 'em?

ANDREWS: Certainly, But . . .

DR. FELL: Sir, let me shake your hand. Let me slap you on the back. Let me, if necessary, set you on my shoulder and carry you out of here in triumph. Let me . . .

ANDREWS: (*Definite cold water*) Just a minute, my friend. Stop a bit!

DR. FELL: (*Suddenly deflated*) I . . . I beg your pardon.

ANDREWS: Have you forgotten where you are?

DR. FELL: No.

ANDREWS: Let's face facts. The prisoner has been told that there's . . . well, no hope.

HELEN: (*Crying out*) Please!

ANDREWS: I'm sorry, but there it is! The cruellest thing you could do now would be to raise hopes that I can't fulfill. Do you understand that?

DR. FELL: I understand it only too well.

ANDREWS: (*Fidgeting*) This can't be pleasant for any of us. There's nothing in the evidence that justifies any change of plan . . .

DR. FELL: Except, of course, that the girl isn't guilty.

ANDREWS: Can you prove that?

DR. FELL: To my own satisfaction, yes.

ANDREWS: That's not good enough.

DR. FELL: Very well, suppose I proved it to you — conclusively, mind! — out of evidence you gave me yourself. What would you do?

ANDREWS: Are you bluffing?

DR. FELL: No. Speak up, man! What would you do?

ANDREWS: That's easy. 'Phone the Home Secretary and ask for a stay of execution.

DR. FELL: Could you get in touch with him at this hour of the morning?

ANDREWS: Easily. There's a private line from my office to his country-house. But I warn you . . .

HELEN: Dr. Fell, is there any hope for me? Is there *any* hope for me?

ANDREWS: I warn you. They won't accept fancy theories. They'll only accept facts.

DR. FELL: I shall be happy, sir, to cram the facts down their throats. One final point, Miss Barton. How tall is the estimable Mr. Herbert Gale?

HELEN: (*Blankly*) How tall?

DR. FELL: Yes! Is he anything like the same height as his brother Philip?

HELEN: They're about the same height. Five feet ten. But I don't see . . .

DR. FELL: If I remember correctly, one of the warders told us that Herbert Gale has been hanging about the front gate all night. I should very much like to speak with him. Colonel Andrews, will you send someone out and ask him to come into your office?

ANDREWS: I can't do that!

DR. FELL: Why not?

ANDREWS: It's against regulations. He'd have to get a special pass.

DR. FELL: Then write him one. Curse it all, can't you get it through your correct military head that an innocent person is going to swing in less than two hours?

HELEN: Dr. Fell, I don't know what you're trying to do. But *can* you do it?

DR. FELL: My dear, I can't tell.

HELEN: But you *are* going to try?

DR. FELL: I am going downstairs now. Maybe, in a very short time, a certain gentlemen will be entering this institution without any need of a pass. But don't hope for anything. Don't hope for anything!

(*Strong, harsh music up. The prison clock strikes seven.*)

DR. FELL: (*Muttering*) Seven o'clock. Seven o'clock. Less than an hour to go. (*His voice rises*) Why doesn't that warder come and bring the exhibit I want? What's delaying him?

ANDREWS: Probably he can't find the stuff.

DR. FELL: But you said you had it here!

ANDREWS: Things like that are apt to get mislaid. It's been a month since the trial. *Must* you have these exhibits?

DR. FELL: In order to prove it to you fully, yes. But if he doesn't come in two seconds more . . .

ANDREWS: I can't stay here much longer myself. The chaplain is with her now, but I'll have to take over before the end.

(*Sharp rapping at the door.*)

ANDREWS: Yes? Come in! (*Door opens.*)

WARDER: (*Breathlessly*) Sorry to a been so long, sir. I could a sworn it was in one place; and, lo and behold, it turned up somewheres else.

DR. FELL: Never mind that. Did you get the exhibits?

WARDER: It's all 'ere, sir, in this suit box. Where shall I put it?

DR. FELL: Put it on Colonel Andrews' desk. Now let's see. Move the lamp over here, will you?

WARDER: And about Mr. Herbert Gale, sir . . .

ANDREWS: Where is he?

WARDER: Out in the 'all, sir. Do you want to see him now?

DR. FELL: Yes, my lad. Very much so. Ask him to come in!

WARDER: (*Calling*) You can come in, sir. This way.

(*Herbert Gale is about 28. He has a light voice, giving the impression of earnestness and sincerity. He is rather nervous.*)

HERBERT: Thank you. (*Door closes*)

ANDREWS: (*Uncomfortably*) Morning, Herbert. Glad to see you. Sit down.

HERBERT: Thank you, Colonel Andrews.

ANDREWS: Let me have your hat and coat. This is Dr. Gideon Fell. (*Both men murmur.*)

HERBERT: The warder said you wanted to see me. I came, of course. But — do you think it was quite the right thing to do?

ANDREWS: Why not?

HERBERT: Well! People might think I was holding a grudge against Helen. Because of Phil, you know.

DR. FELL: And you don't hold any grudge?

HERBERT: (*Earnestly*) Good lord, no! I really don't! I pity that poor girl from the bottom of my heart! I only wish I hadn't had to testify against her. But what else could I do?

DR. FELL: You mean you'd like to help her? Even now?

HERBERT: Of course! If there were anything I could do to — to soothe her last moments on earth . . .

DR. FELL: There *is* something you can do, Mr. Gale.

HERBERT: Well?

DR. FELL: You can come with us to the condemned cell.

HERBERT: Are you joking?

DR. FELL: No.

HERBERT: But wouldn't it be pretty horrible for Helen?

DR. FELL: Yes. Probably. But, as you point out, she has only a very short time to live.

HERBERT: (*Sharply*) Excuse me. What have you got in that suit box?

DR. FELL: In *this* suit box, Mr. Gale? A flattened bullet — the bullet that killed your brother. A .32 revolver. A tweed coat, bloodstained. A tweed waistcoat, also bloodstained.

ANDREWS: Look here, Fell! What do you expect to *prove* with that stuff?

DR. FELL: One moment. *Will* Mr. Herbert Gale go with us to the condemned cell?

HERBERT: Yes! If you think I can do any good there.

DR. FELL: Then, with your permission, I propose to prove that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. Will you walk into my parlor?

MUSIC: (*Out of it the single note of the prison clock.*)

FIRST WOMAN: (*Under her breath*) Seven-thirty! Half an hour to go! (*Aloud*) Easy, dearie! Easy!

(*A heavy door is unbarred, opens, and closes again.*)

HELEN: (*Terrified*) They're not coming already to . . . Herbert Gale!

HERBERT: I'm very sorry for you, Helen. Please believe that.

HELEN: *Th-thank you!*

HERBERT: I shouldn't have intruded at this painful time, believe me. But Dr. Fell and the colonel here made me come to see you.

HELEN: (*Eagerly*) You mean — you've come to confess?

HERBERT: (*Sharply*) Confess? What should I confess?

HELEN: (*Fiercely*) You didn't see me shoot Phil! You *know* you didn't!

HERBERT: I'm sorry, Helen. I pity you, and I bear no malice. But you *did* shoot poor old Phil, after you'd asked him to put up his hands . . .

DR. FELL: (*Quietly*) How high did he put up his hands?

HERBERT: (*Startled*) I beg your pardon?

ANDREWS: Dr. Fell said: how high did he put up his hands?

HERBERT: Really! (*Wearily*) Is there any purpose in going over all this in the last few minutes before the hangman . . .

HELEN: *Please!*

DR. FELL: We can demonstrate still further with a little experiment. I have here a bloodstained tweed coat and a bloodstained waistcoat. You see them Mr. Gale?

HERBERT: I see them, yes.

DR. FELL: Take off your own coat and waistcoat. Put on *this* coat, and *this* waistcoat.

HERBERT: I'll do no such thing!

DR. FELL: (*Quickly*) Why not?

HERBERT: Colonel Andrews, I appeal to you!

ANDREWS: Where's the harm in it?

HELEN: Unless he *has* got something to hide!

HERBERT: I've got nothing to hide! Give me the things! I'll put them on!

DR. FELL: Thank you.

HELEN: I don't know why you're doing this. It's the nightmare again. But if something isn't proved very soon . . . (*Quickly*) What time is it?

FIRST WOMAN: Twenty minutes to eight, miss. Easy, now!

HERBERT: There! Does *that* satisfy you, Dr. Fell? Philip's coat and waistcoat fit me very well.

DR. FELL: So I was told. Would you care to tell us, now, why you killed your brother? (*Pause*) It was the money you inherited, I suppose. When Helen Barton walked into the middle of your crime, you knocked her out with a weapon that left no bruise, and put the revolver in her hand. Then you discovered, as a gift from heaven, that she really had lost her memory. Mr. Herbert Gale could tell any lying story he liked.

HERBERT: Be careful! You can't prove that!

DR. FELL: Would you like to make a small bet I can't prove it?

HERBERT: Yes!

DR. FELL: Very well. — I am threatening you with a gun, Mr. Gale. HOLD UP YOUR HANDS!

HERBERT: No! Oh . . .

HELEN: You'd better do it, Herbert! You'd better do it!

DR. FELL: Hold up your hands! That's it! But higher! Higher! Now look at his coat, everybody! Look at his coat!

HELEN: (*Dazedly*) The coat is . . . it's rising!

DR. FELL: Of course it is. The bullet-hole in the coat . . . you notice? . . . rises with it. But the waistcoat doesn't move.

ANDREWS: (*Explosively*) I think I begin to see . . . !

DR. FELL: The bullet-hole in the coat has risen at least four inches above the corresponding hole in the waistcoat. Yet the bullet, you told me, penetrated in a dead straight line. Therefore Philip Gale could not possibly have had his hands raised when he was shot.

(*Rapping on heavy door, which opens.*)

WARDER: Colonel Andrews, sir!

ANDREWS: Yes, Harris?

WARDER: I thought I'd better tell you, sir, that the hangman's here.

DR. FELL: Herbert Gale told you he saw Miss Barton shoot a man whose hands were raised high in the air. It prevented any possible plea of manslaughter. It condemned that girl to death. Destroy that single lie, and you destroy the whole case.

HELEN: Is it true, Colonel Andrews? *Is* it true?

WARDER: I tell you, sir, the hangman'shere!

ANDREWS: Harris, do you know the private telephone-line in my office?

WARDER: Yes, sir?

ANDREWS: Get me the Home Secretary.

DR. FELL: Fine. And . . . ah . . . oh, warder . . .

WARDER: Yes, Dr. Fell?

DR. FELL: Tell the hangman he'll have to wait. This young lady has most inconsiderately been proved innocent. (*Cheerfully*) But his services will be required just the same. It will be a little later . . . and with a new client.

MUSIC: *Up to curtain.*

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